



Vishwaguru DAKSHI Newsletter

April 2025

Vol. 2

Visual Arts & Indian Epigraphy

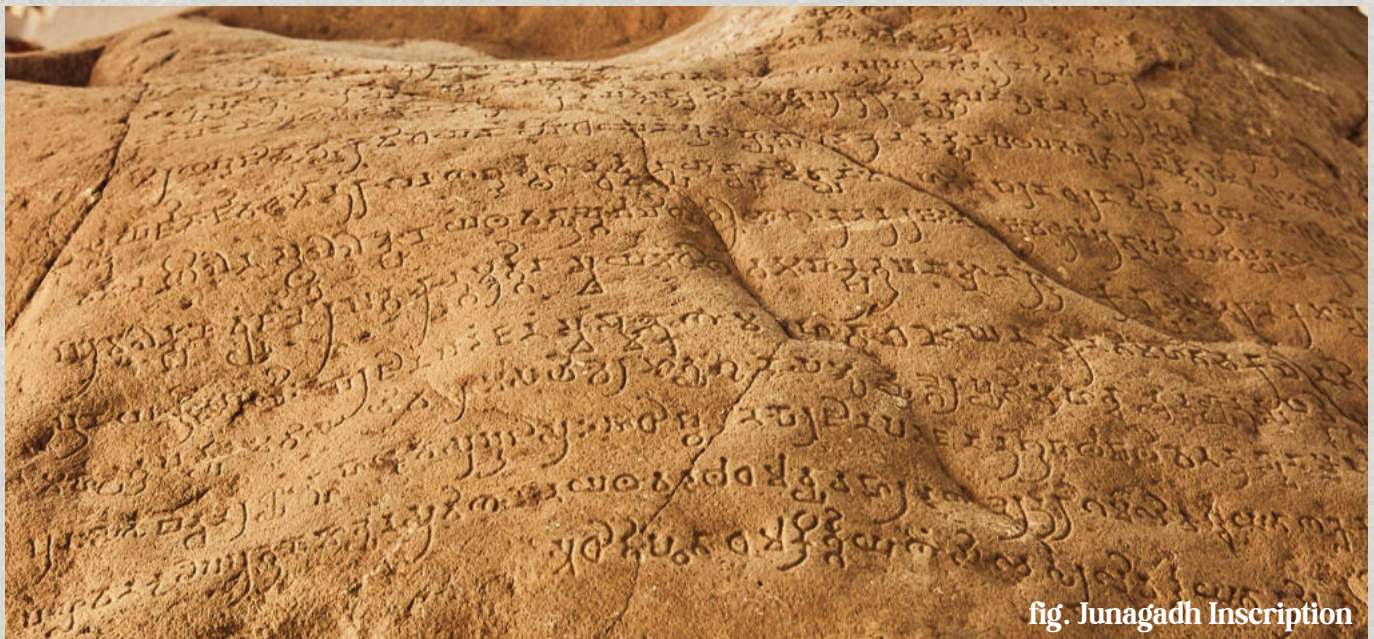


fig. Junagadh Inscription

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**Dedicated to the Epigraphists,
"Thief!" they shout, "Away, you go!"**

- Dr. Indira Malapaka

Indian epigraphy, a discipline encompassing the study of inscriptions on durable materials, constitutes a critical facet of South Asian historical scholarship. These epigraphs, ranging from royal edicts to votive records, provide primary source data that significantly supplements and, at times, challenges the narratives derived from literary traditions. The corpus of Indian inscriptions, spanning from the protohistoric period to the early modern era, offers a diachronic perspective on the evolution of political structures, socio-economic dynamics, and cultural practices within the subcontinent. This archive, however, is not a static repository; it is a dynamic field of study, continually enriched by new discoveries and refined interpretations.

Disclosing the Ancient Knowledge Systems and Heritage of India



DAKSHI's NEWSLETTER

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Vishwaguru

Introduction

The study of Indian epigraphy is predicated upon the decipherment and analysis of diverse scripts, including Brahmi, Kharosthi, and their regional derivatives. These scripts, reflecting the linguistic and cultural heterogeneity of the subcontinent, necessitate a nuanced understanding of paleography, the study of ancient writing systems. The evolution of these scripts, as documented in epigraphs, provides insights into the development of regional languages and the diffusion of cultural influences. Moreover, the materials upon which these inscriptions are inscribed—stone, copper, metal, and terracotta—offer contextual clues about the socio-economic status of the patrons and the intended purpose of the records.

Despite its scholarly value, Indian epigraphy faces numerous challenges. Environmental deterioration, encompassing weathering, chemical degradation, and biological growth, poses a persistent threat to the physical integrity of inscriptions. Human vandalism, manifested in deliberate defacement, theft, and misguided restoration attempts, further exacerbates the problem. Natural calamities, such as earthquakes and floods, can cause irreversible damage to inscribed structures and artifacts. Compounding these physical threats is the issue of inadequate documentation and public awareness, which contributes to the neglect and loss of valuable epigraphical data.

To mitigate these threats, a comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach is imperative. Scientific conservation techniques, including non-destructive cleaning methods and protective coatings, must be employed to preserve the physical integrity of inscriptions. Enhanced security measures, coupled with public education campaigns, are essential to deter vandalism and theft. Digital documentation, utilizing high-resolution imaging and 3D scanning, offers a means of creating archival replicas of inscriptions, ensuring their accessibility for future research. Furthermore, the integration of epigraphical studies into academic curricula and public outreach programs is crucial for cultivating a broader appreciation of India's epigraphical heritage.

The study of Indian epigraphy extends beyond the mere decipherment of ancient texts; it entails a critical engagement with the historical context in which these inscriptions were created. By examining the socio-political milieu, religious affiliations, and economic structures reflected in epigraphs, scholars can reconstruct a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of India's past.

This interdisciplinary approach, drawing upon insights from archaeology, history, linguistics, and art history, is essential for unlocking the full potential of Indian epigraphy as a primary source for historical research. The preservation and interpretation of these invaluable records are not only academic pursuits but also crucial acts of cultural stewardship, ensuring that the voices of the past continue to inform and enrich the present.



DAKSHI's NEWSLETTER

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Vishwaguru

Dear Readers,

We are pleased to introduce the Second volume of DAKSHI's newsletter, a dedicated platform for exploring the vast and rich tapestry of Indian knowledge systems and heritage. This marks the beginning of an exciting new series, where we aim to delve deeply into the historical, cultural, and intellectual legacies that have shaped India and influenced the world at large. The second edition takes a significant step by focusing on ancient India and the importance of Epigraphy, setting the tone for a broader exploration in the future. We are thrilled to introduce the second volume of "Vishwaguru", DAKSHI's Newsletter, dedicated to exploring the fascinating realm of "Visual Arts and Indian Epigraphy".

As we continue on our mission to spread Indian knowledge systems, we believe that epigraphy plays a vital role in understanding our rich cultural heritage. Epigraphy, the study of ancient inscriptions, offers a unique window into India's past, revealing secrets about our history, mythology, and philosophy.

In this volume, our experts delve into the world of Indian epigraphy, exploring various aspects of this ancient science. From the deciphering of ancient scripts to the analysis of inscriptions on temple walls, our authors shed light on the significance of epigraphy in understanding India's cultural narrative.

The second volume of "Vishwaguru" also explores the captivating world of visual arts in India. Our contributors examine the symbolism, mythology, and historical context behind India's stunning works of art, from the intricate carvings of Khajuraho to the vibrant paintings of Rajputana.

At DAKSHI, we believe that Indian knowledge systems have the power to transform our understanding of the world. Through "Vishwaguru", we aim to share this knowledge with a wider audience, inspiring a new generation of thinkers, scholars, and enthusiasts.

Over the coming weeks, we will be sharing articles, interviews, and insights from our experts on visual arts and Indian epigraphy. Stay tuned for a journey that will take you to the heart of India's cultural heritage.

Thank you for joining us on this exciting journey. We look forward to sharing the unfolding volumes and the wealth of knowledge they contain.

- Akshit Kumar Bhaduria
(Director, DAKSHI)

Disclosing the Ancient Knowledge Systems and Heritage of India



DAKSHI's NEWSLETTER

Vol. 2

**Dedicated to the Epigraphists,
"Thief!" they shout, "Away, you go!"
- Dr. Indira Malapaka**

In twilight's grasp where whispers weave,
A keeper of lost tales grieves, Among the ruins, shadows cast,
He seeks to save what's bound to last.

With metal minds and ancient hands,
Our ancestors shaped the sands,
Engraved in silver, bronze, and gold, Their wisdom waits to be retold.

Yet two behold these treasures rare,
One with a heart, the other, a snare, They clutch their finds with greed in sight, Unknowing of the fading light.

"O, gentle ones," the scholar cries,
"These charters hold our ancestors' sighs,
In forges fierce, their stories burn,
While we stand lost, our lessons spurned."

Harsh voices rise, like stones they throw,
"Thief!" they shout, "Away, you go!"
Yet all he seeks is truth unveiled,
To read the hearts the past has sailed.

In furnaces hot, history bends,
As molten dreams meet bitter ends, He journeys far through lands forlorn, To spark the light, a fire reborn.

For every letter, every line,
Is woven with a thread divine, To cherish echoes from the past,
To learn, to grow, and make it last.

So heed the call, O hearts awake,
In history's embrace, we find our stake,
Let not the flames consume the lore, For in the past, our futures soar.



What is Epigraphy

"There is no aspect of the life, culture and activities of the Indians that is not reflected in inscriptions." – D.C. Sircar

The word epigraphy is derived from two Greek words viz., epi meaning on or upon and graphie meaning to write. And hence, epigraphy is the study of writings engraved on stone, metal and other materials like wood, shell etc., known as 'inscriptions' or 'epigraphs'. Though engraving is the chief characteristic of an epigraphy, there are some exceptions where old writings in ink on rocks, boulders etc., are also accepted as epigraphs.

A person who is engaged in the decipherment and interpretation of the epigraphs is called an epigraphist.

Stone Inscriptions

Stone inscriptions, the more prevalent of the two, largely document acts of donation, though they also encompass secular matters. Temple wall inscriptions, in particular, serve as rich historical repositories, offering insights into the reigning monarch's governance, the individuals who funded or constructed the temple, its date of creation, and the circumstances surrounding its establishment.

Metal Plates

Metal inscriptions, on the other hand, predominantly detail land grants bestowed upon learned Brahmins and educational institutions, reflecting the importance of patronage in the dissemination of knowledge. Notably, Asoka's edicts, proclaiming his adherence to dharma (righteousness), constitute a unique category of stone inscriptions.

The term "sasana" generally refers to a royal charter, with "tamra-sasana" specifically denoting a royal decree engraved on copper plate. Royal charters ("raja-sasana") can be further classified based on their purpose:

dana-sasana" records gifts

prasada-sasana" documents acts of
royal favour

jaya-patra" declares the victor in a
dispute

"Yupa-sasana" refers to inscriptions
on sacrificial posts

stambha-sasana" denotes those on pillars,
whether architectural or commemorative

Pratima-sasana" are inscriptions on
images, "kraya-sasana" are sale deeds

vijaya-sasana" are victory edicts
"Viragal" or hero-stones commemorate
heroic deeds



Archaeological Survey of India – Epigraphy Branch

The establishment of the Epigraphy Branch of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) in 1886 in Bangalore was a watershed moment in the organized study of India's historical records. Recognizing the immense value of inscriptions as primary sources, the British administration created a dedicated entity to systematically collect, decipher, and preserve these invaluable documents. Initially focused on collection, the branch's mandate expanded to include the critical tasks of editing and publishing the inscriptions, making them accessible to scholars and the public.

The branch's journey involved geographical shifts, moving from Bangalore to Ootacamund in 1903, and finally settling in Mysore in 1966, where it continues its vital work. Dr. E. Hultzsch, a German Indologist, was appointed the first Government Epigraphist, and his expertise in both Dravidian and Sanskritic scripts laid a strong foundation for future research. He spearheaded the effort to bring scholarly rigor to the study of inscriptions, particularly those from South India, which had previously been largely overlooked. Following Hultzsch, V.

Venkayya and a succession of other eminent scholars, including Sten Know, F.W. Thomas, H. Krishna Sastri, and Hirananda Sastry, built upon his work, further developing the field and contributing significantly to our understanding of India's past. Later, individuals like N.L. Rao, B.Ch. Chhabra, D.C. Sircar, and G.S. Gai continued to contribute greatly to the department. These scholars' collective efforts transformed epigraphy from a nascent field to a sophisticated discipline, providing crucial insights into the political, social, and cultural history of India.





Significance of Epigraphy

"Inscriptions, etched onto durable materials like stone and copper, provide a more reliable and contemporaneous record. This reliability is paramount in understanding the intricate details of India's social, political, economic, and cultural evolution."

Politically

Politically, epigraphy illuminates the rise and fall of dynasties, the expansion and contraction of empires, and the intricacies of royal governance. Inscriptions meticulously record genealogies, military campaigns, and administrative decrees, enabling historians to construct accurate chronologies and trace the trajectories of political power. Royal edicts, such as those of Emperor Asoka, reveal the moral and ethical frameworks that guided rulers, offering insights into their policies and philosophies. Treaties and alliances, inscribed on stone, provide concrete evidence of diplomatic interactions, shedding light on the complex web of political relationships that shaped the Indian subcontinent.

Socially

Socially, inscriptions unveil the layered structure of ancient Indian society. They document the existence of social hierarchies, the prevalence of caste systems, and the roles played by different social groups. Temple inscriptions, for instance, often detail donations made by individuals from various strata of society, reflecting their relative status and influence. Furthermore, these inscriptions reveal the diverse religious practices and beliefs that permeated daily life, from the worship of deities to the performance of rituals. Inscriptions related to land transactions and other economic activities provide glimpses into the occupations and livelihoods of ordinary people, while records of sati and other social customs offer poignant insights into the complexities of social norms and practices, including the position of women.

Economically

Economically, epigraphy provides a wealth of information about land ownership, revenue collection, and trade. Copper-plate grants, for example, detail the transfer of land to Brahmins and religious institutions, revealing patterns of land distribution and the economic importance of religious patronage. Records of donations and commercial transactions offer insights into the prosperity of different economic sectors and the flow of goods and services. Inscriptions that mention guilds and craftspeople shed light on the organization of economic activities and the development of specialized skills, providing valuable information about the economic infrastructure of ancient India.

Culturally

Culturally, epigraphy serves as a vital record of the evolution of languages and scripts. The study of inscriptions allows linguists and historians to trace the development of different regional languages and the spread of writing systems. Temple inscriptions, along with image inscriptions, offer insights into the development of art and architecture, documenting the styles and techniques employed by artisans and sculptors. Moreover, inscriptions reveal the prevalence of different religious and philosophical ideas, from the spread of Buddhism and Jainism to the evolution of Hindu sects. They also provide information about cultural practices, such as the performance of sacrifices, the celebration of festivals, and other social customs, offering a rich tapestry of cultural expression.



Indian Inscriptions Abroad

Southeast Asia: A Crucible of Indianization

The presence of Indian inscriptions beyond the subcontinent's modern borders underscores the extensive cultural, religious, and political reach of ancient India. These inscriptions, scattered across Southeast Asia and Central Asia, serve as tangible links to a past where Indian influence permeated diverse societies. The archipelago of Southeast Asia, comprising modern-day Indonesia, Malaysia, and parts of mainland Southeast Asia, became a major recipient of Indian cultural and religious influences. This process, often referred to as "Indianization," is vividly documented by numerous inscriptions.

The Tarumanagara kingdom (4th-7th centuries CE) in West Java provides some of the earliest evidence of Indian influence. The Ciaruteun inscription, etched on a riverbank, features footprints attributed to Vishnu, signifying the adoption of Hindu iconography. The inscription is in Pallava script, showing clear south Indian influences. Other Javanese inscriptions, such as those found at Tuk Mas, further illustrate the spread of Shaivism and the use of Sanskrit. Later, the Sailendra dynasty of Central Java, known for the magnificent Borobudur temple, produced inscriptions that reflect the flourishing of Mahayana Buddhism.

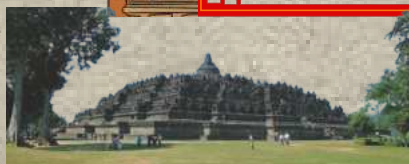
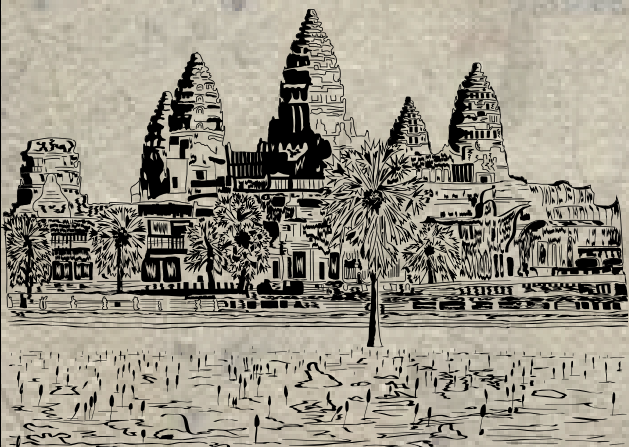
- Java

The Sriwijaya kingdom (7th-13th centuries CE) dominated maritime trade in the region and became a prominent center of Buddhist learning. Inscriptions found in Sumatra, along with accounts from Chinese pilgrims like I-tsing, testify to Sriwijaya's role as a major hub of Buddhist scholarship. The Nalanda copper plate of Devapaladeva, a Pala king of Bengal, records the grant of villages to a monastery built at Nalanda at the request of the Sailendra king of Sriwijaya, this clearly shows the connections and diplomatic ties that existed. The Telaga Batu inscription, with its multiple curses, shows the seriousness with which oaths of loyalty were taken.

- Sumatra

The Kutai kingdom (4th-5th centuries CE) in East Borneo provides some of the earliest evidence of Hindu influence in the region. The Mulavarman inscriptions, carved on yupa (sacrificial posts), document the performance of Vedic rituals and the establishment of a Hindu kingdom. These inscriptions, also in Pallava script, attest to the early presence of Brahmanical culture in Borneo.

- Borneo





Indian Inscriptions Abroad

Central Asia: The Crossroads of Civilizations

Afghanistan, situated at the crossroads of Central Asia, served as a conduit for the transmission of Indian ideas and influences westward.

Asoka's edicts found in Kandahar are of immense historical significance. These inscriptions, written in Greek and Aramaic, alongside Prakrit, reflect Asoka's efforts to propagate his policy of dharma to diverse populations. The bilingual Greek-Aramaic inscription of Kandahar is a particularly important example, showcasing the interaction between Indian and Hellenistic cultures. These edicts are very important, as they show the geographical spread of Asoka's rule, and his policy of Dharma.

- Kandahar

Key Implications

Spread of Indian Scripts and Languages: The presence of inscriptions in Pallava script and Sanskrit across Southeast Asia attests to the diffusion of Indian writing systems and languages.

Dissemination of Religious Ideas: The inscriptions provide evidence of the spread of Hinduism and Buddhism, including the adoption of Indian deities, rituals, and philosophical concepts.

Trade and Maritime Networks: The inscriptions highlight the importance of ancient trade routes and maritime connections that facilitated the exchange of goods and ideas between India and other regions.

Political and Cultural Influence: The inscriptions demonstrate the political and cultural influence of Indian kingdoms and the adoption of Indian political models by local rulers.

Historical Connections: These inscriptions provide clear historical connections between ancient Indian kingdoms, and the kingdoms of Southeast Asia.



Disclosing the Ancient Knowledge Systems and Heritage of India



Writing Materials

Indian epigraphs, the inscribed records of the past, are found on a diverse range of materials, each influencing the durability, style, and preservation of the writing. These materials reflect the availability of resources, the cultural practices of the time, and the intended purpose of the inscription. Here's a detailed look at the primary writing materials:

Stone

Characteristics:

Stone is highly durable, making it an ideal material for long-lasting records. The hardness of the stone influenced the style of writing, often resulting in angular or chiselled letter forms. Rock edicts were often placed in public spaces, ensuring widespread visibility.

Significance:

Stone inscriptions are crucial for understanding political, religious, and social history. They provide evidence of royal decrees, religious donations, and social customs. Temple walls covered in inscriptions are a wealth of information.

Drawbacks:

Some stones can erode over time, and damage the inscriptions.

Copper/Tamrapatra

Characteristics:

Copper plates were commonly used for recording land grants, royal charters, and religious donations. They were often inscribed with detailed information about the donor, the recipient, and the land being granted. Copper's malleability allowed for intricate engraving and detailed records. These plates were often stored in bundles, and sealed.

Significance:

Copper plate grants are essential for understanding agrarian economies and social hierarchies. They provide valuable insights into land ownership, revenue systems, and social structures. They often document the genealogies of kings.

Drawbacks:

Copper is susceptible to corrosion, which can damage the inscriptions. Can be damaged by fire.

Iron

Characteristics:

Iron was used for inscriptions, although less frequently than stone or copper. The Iron Pillar of Delhi is a remarkable example of an iron inscription, demonstrating the advanced metallurgical skills of ancient Indians. Iron is very durable.

Significance:

Iron inscriptions provide evidence of technological advancements and metallurgical expertise. They can also record royal achievements and religious dedications.

Drawbacks:

Iron is susceptible to rust and corrosion, especially in humid climates.

Pottery

Characteristics:

Inscriptions on pottery shards, known as ostraca, are often found at archaeological sites. These inscriptions can include personal names, short messages, or religious symbols. Pottery is very common in archaeological digs.

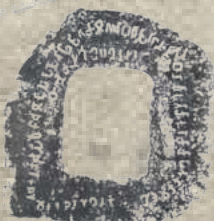
Significance:

Pottery inscriptions provide insights into daily life, trade, and social interactions. They can also reveal information about the spread of writing and literacy.

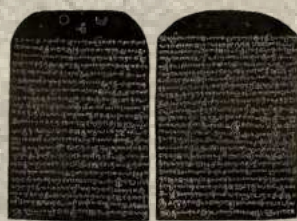
Drawbacks:

Pottery is fragile and easily broken, making it difficult to preserve complete inscriptions. The inscriptions are often very small.

The first stone inscription excavated at Bhattiprolu, Andhra Pradesh believed to be from 3rd century BCE.



Vijayanagara Tamil Copper Plate Inscriptions at the Dharmeshwara Temple, Kondarahalli, Hoskote.



The Iron Pillar Inscription of Delhi in Qutub Minar Complex is Constructed by Chandragupta II.



Tamil inscriptions in Vatteluttu script on Red ware Potteries (6th Century CE), Boluvampatti, Coimbatore District, Tamil Nadu.





Asoka and Indian Epigraphy

"Development of Indian scripts and their many derivatives both in and outside of India can, for the most part, be traced in considerable detail from Asoka's time to the present day."

Asoka's indelible role in Indian epigraphy stems from his revolutionary use of inscribed edicts as a primary tool for governance and public communication. Unlike any ruler before him, Asoka recognized the potential of inscribing

messages on durable materials like rock and stone pillars, transforming them into public pronouncements. This was not merely a matter of recording events; it was a deliberate strategy to disseminate his policies, moral teachings, and administrative orders across the vast expanse of his Mauryan Empire. By doing so, Asoka pioneered the concept of public edicts, setting a precedent that would shape the course of Indian epigraphy for centuries.

A crucial aspect of Asoka's contribution was the standardization and accessibility of his inscriptions. He employed standardized scripts, primarily Brahmi and Kharosthi, and languages such as Prakrit, Greek, and Aramaic, depending on the region. This ensured that his messages could be understood by diverse populations within his empire. Furthermore, he strategically placed his edicts in public spaces, such as along major trade routes, near settlements, and on prominent rock formations. This deliberate placement made his pronouncements accessible to a broad audience, effectively turning his empire into a network of public information.



Asoka's edicts were not simply chronicles of his reign; they were imbued with moral and administrative purpose. They served as vehicles for promoting his policy of dharma, emphasizing ethical conduct, social welfare, and religious tolerance. This focus on using inscriptions to convey moral and administrative messages distinguished Asoka's edicts from earlier forms of writing, which were often limited to recording religious rituals or royal genealogies. Asoka's example inspired subsequent rulers to adopt the practice of inscribing edicts, leading to the development of a rich epigraphical tradition in India. Moreover, his edicts provide invaluable insights into the social, political, and religious conditions of the Mauryan Empire, making them essential sources for reconstructing ancient Indian history. In essence, Asoka transformed inscriptions from a potentially limited practice into a powerful tool for governance, communication, and moral instruction, solidifying his position as a pivotal figure in Indian epigraphy.

Examples

Major Rock Edict XIII is particularly significant as it details the Kalinga War and Asoka's subsequent conversion to Buddhism.

Maski edict, contain Asoka's personal name, confirming his identity as the "Devanampiya Piyadasi" mentioned in the inscriptions.

Rock Edicts

These include specific edicts such as the Queen's Edict, the Rummindei Edict, and the Schism Edict.

The Rummindei Edict, for example, commemorates Asoka's visit to Lumbini, the birthplace of the Buddha, and records the tax exemption granted to the village.

Pillar Edicts

Asoka also had inscriptions carved into caves, such as those in the Barabar Hills. These often relate to his dedication of caves to religious orders.

Asoka's inscriptions provide invaluable insights into the political, social, and religious conditions of the Mauryan Empire.

Cave Edicts



Epigraphical findings Publications

An epigraph is any sort of text, from a single grapheme to a lengthy document (such as a treatise, a work of literature, or a hagiographic inscription).

The systematic study and dissemination of Indian epigraphical findings have been significantly aided by several key publications, each contributing uniquely to our understanding of the country's rich historical tapestry. These publications have served as vital platforms for scholars to present their research, decipher inscriptions, and make these primary sources accessible to a wider audience.

Epigraphia Indica, a cornerstone publication, was established in 1892. It is a journal dedicated to the publication of inscriptions and other epigraphical materials from all over India. It contains scholarly articles, editions of inscriptions, and discussions on various aspects of epigraphy. The journal's importance lies in its comprehensive coverage of diverse inscriptions, spanning different periods and regions. It has played a pivotal role in establishing standards for epigraphical research and has been instrumental in the decipherment and interpretation of numerous significant inscriptions.

South Indian Inscriptions, (SII)

Another crucial series, focuses specifically on the inscriptions found in the southern regions of India. This collection is essential for understanding the history, culture, and administration of the various dynasties that ruled South India. It provides detailed editions of inscriptions, often accompanied by translations and scholarly analyses. These volumes have been invaluable for reconstructing the political, social, and economic history of South India.

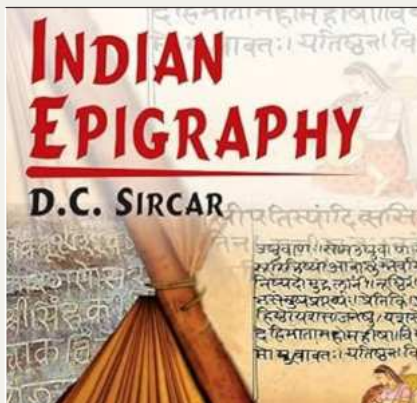
The **Annual Reports on Indian Epigraphy (ARIE)** are a series of reports published by the Archaeological Survey of India. These reports provide a comprehensive overview of the epigraphical work carried out each year, including the discovery, decipherment, and analysis of inscriptions. They serve as a vital resource for tracking the progress of epigraphical research and for identifying new discoveries. The ARIE also provides a systematic record of the inscriptions collected and studied, making it an essential tool for researchers.

Similarly, the **Annual Reports on South Indian Epigraphy (ARSIE)** were published and focused specifically on the southern regions of India. These annual reports were a subset of the ARIE, and provided a focused look into the findings of the epigraphy branch within the southern region.

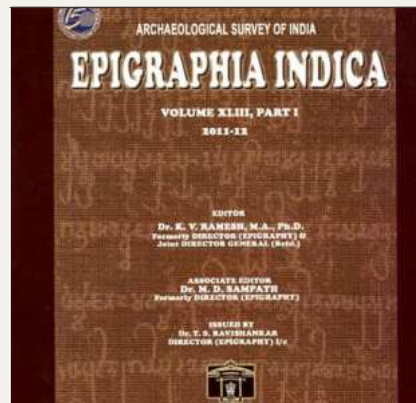
Epigraphia Carnatica is a monumental series dedicated to the inscriptions of Karnataka. It is a comprehensive collection of inscriptions found in the region, providing detailed editions, translations, and scholarly analyses. This series is particularly significant for its coverage of the numerous inscriptions from the Chalukya, Hoysala, and Vijayanagara periods. The immense work done in this series, has greatly helped the understanding of the history of Karnataka.

Apart from these, each Indian state under its Epigraphy Branch publishes the Annual Reports on inscriptions such as Mysore Archaeological Reports. These publications, through their meticulous documentation and scholarly analysis, have been instrumental in preserving and disseminating the rich epigraphical heritage of India, making it accessible to scholars and researchers worldwide.

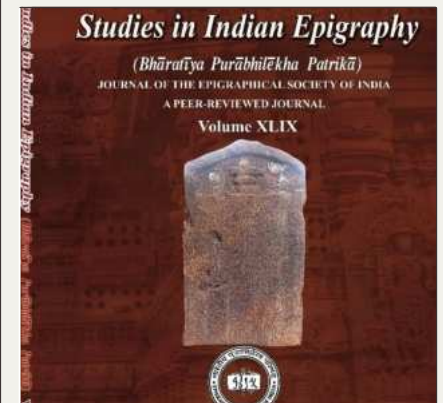
Examples



D.C. Sircar



ASI



Epigraphical Society

Disclosing the Ancient Knowledge Systems and Heritage of India



Epigraphy – the Laboratory for Palaeography

“To other countries, I may go as a tourist, but to India, I come as a pilgrim.”

– Martin Luther King, Jr

o Epigraphs, especially those with datable contexts (like royal edicts or temple inscriptions), provide fixed points in time. This allows palaeographers to establish a chronological sequence of script development. By comparing inscriptions from different periods, styles, and observe the gradual changes in letter forms, styles, and conventions.

o For example, the progression from the early Brahmi script in Asokan edicts to later Brahmi variations can be traced through dated inscriptions.

Chronological Markers

o Epigraphs found in different geographical areas reveal the regional variations in scripts. This helps palaeographers understand how writing systems adapted to local languages, materials, and cultural influences.

o The differences between local Brahmi scripts used in northern and southern India, or the development of regional scripts like Grantha and Vatteluttu, are all documented through epigraphical evidence.

Regional Variations

o The materials used for inscriptions (stone, metal, pottery) influenced the style and form of writing. Palaeographers can study how the act of engraving on different surfaces affected letter shapes and the overall aesthetic of the script.

o The sharp, angular forms of early Brahmi on stone, compared to the more cursive forms on later copper plates, illustrate this influence.

Material Influences

o Epigraphs also document the development of ligatures (joined letters) and abbreviations, which played a significant role in the efficiency and speed of writing. Palaeographers can study how these conventions evolved and became standardized.

o The use of abbreviating royal titles, or commonly used words, is very evident in many inscriptions.

Development of Ligatures and Abbreviations

o Epigraphs provide a rich source of examples for studying the gradual evolution of individual letter forms. Palaeographers can track the changes in letter shapes, strokes, and ligatures over time, leading to a deeper understanding of script development.

o The evolution of the Brahmi vowels and consonants, showing simplification and stylistic changes, is clearly visible in epigraphical records.

Evolution of Letter Forms



Reference:- A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India by Upinder Singh.

Disclosing the Ancient Knowledge Systems and Heritage of India



Ancient Scripts

"India will teach us the tolerance and gentleness of mature mind, understanding spirit and a unifying, pacifying love for all human beings."

- Will Durant

Brahmi

Origin and Development:

- o Brahmi is considered the ancestor of most modern Indian scripts and many scripts used in Southeast Asia.
- o Its origins are debated, but it's believed to have emerged around the 5th-4th century BCE.
- o Asoka's edicts, dating to the 3rd century BCE, provide some of the earliest and most widespread examples of Brahmi.

Characteristics:

- o Brahmi is an alphabetic script, written from left to right.
- o It features distinct letter forms for consonants and vowels, and it uses diacritical marks to indicate vowel sounds.
- o Over time, Brahmi evolved into various regional scripts, leading to the development of different writing systems.

Significance:

- Brahmi's importance lies in its role as the foundation for numerous scripts, including Devanagari, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, and many others.
- o Its decipherment in the 19th century by James Prinsep was a crucial breakthrough in Indian epigraphy.

Brahmi Script

Vowels

a	ā	i	ī	u	ū	e	ai	o	au
𑀅	𑀆	𑀇	𑀈	𑀉	𑀊	𑀋	𑀌	𑀍	𑀎

Consonants

ka	kha	ga	gha	ṅa
𑀓	𑀔	𑀕	𑀖	𑀗
cha	chha	ja	jha	ña
𑀘	𑀙	𑀚	𑀛	𑀜
ṭa	ṭha	ḍa	ḍha	ṇa
𑀝	𑀞	𑀟	𑀠	𑀡
pa	pha	ba	bha	ma
𑀢	𑀣	𑀤	𑀥	𑀦
ya	ra	la	va	
𑀧	𑀨	𑀩	𑀪	
śa	ṣa	sa	ha	
𑀫	𑀬	𑀭	𑀮	

Kharosthi

Origin and Development:

- o Kharosthi was used primarily in the northwestern regions of the Indian subcontinent, influenced by Aramaic scripts.
- o It was prevalent from the 4th century BCE to the 4th century CE.
- o Asoka's edicts in the northwestern regions are also found in Kharosthi.

Characteristics:

- o Kharosthi is written from right to left.
- o It also features distinct letter forms for consonants and vowels.
- o It shows clear influences from Aramaic, reflecting the region's historical connections with Persia and Central Asia.

Significance:

- o Kharosthi is significant for its role in documenting the cultural interactions between India and Central Asia.
- o It is vital in understanding the history of the Gandhara region.

Kharosthi Script

Vowels

𑀅	𑀆	𑀇	𑀈	𑀉	𑀊
a	i	u	e	o	am

Consonants

ka	kha	ga	gha
𑀓	𑀔	𑀕	𑀖
cha	chha	ja	jha
𑀘	𑀙	𑀚	𑀛
ṭa	ṭha	ḍa	ḍha
𑀝	𑀞	𑀟	𑀠
pa	pha	ba	bha
𑀢	𑀣	𑀤	𑀥
ya	ra	la	va
𑀧	𑀨	𑀩	𑀪
śa	ṣa	sa	ha
𑀫	𑀬	𑀭	𑀮



Ancient Scripts

“India will teach us the tolerance and gentleness of mature mind, understanding spirit and a unifying, pacifying love for all human beings.”

- Will Durant

Grantha

Origin and Development:

- o Grantha is a script that evolved from Brahmi, and it was primarily used in South India, particularly in Tamil Nadu.
- o It was used for writing Sanskrit texts, especially religious and philosophical works.
- o It developed from around the 5th or 6th century CE.

Characteristics:

- o Grantha is a highly ornate and elegant script, with rounded letter forms.
- o It is particularly well-suited for writing Sanskrit, with its complex phonetics.
- o It is the ancestor to the modern Tamil script.

Significance:

- o Grantha is significant for its role in preserving and transmitting Sanskrit literature in South India.
- o It is important for understanding the history of South Indian culture and religion.

ക	ഖ	ഗ	ഘ	ങ
k	kh	g	gh	ṅ
ച	ഛ	ജ	ഝ	ഞ
c	ch	j	jh	ṇ
ട	ഠ	ഡ	ഢ	ണ
ṭ	ṭh	ḍ	ḍh	ṇ
ത	ധ	മ	ധ	ന
t	th	d	dh	n
പ	പ	ബ	ബ	മ
p	ph	b	bh	m
യ	ര	ല	വ	ഃ
y	r	l	v	ḥ
ശ	ഷ	സ	ഹ	
ś	ṣ	s	h	

Vatteluttu

Origin and Development:

- o Vatteluttu is another script that evolved from Brahmi and was used in South India, particularly in Kerala and Tamil Nadu.
- o It was used for writing Tamil and Malayalam texts.
- o It was in use from around the 8th to the 14th centuries CE.

Characteristics:

- o Vatteluttu is characterized by its rounded and cursive letter forms.
- o It is particularly well-suited for writing on palm leaves, which were a common writing material in South India.

Significance:

- o Vatteluttu is significant for its role in documenting the early history of Tamil and Malayalam languages.
- o It is vital for understanding the epigraphical history of the southern regions.

lowels and diacritics

அ	ஆ	இ	ஈ	உ	ஊ	஋
a	ā	i	ī	u	ū	e
[a/ʌ]	[æ]	[i]	[iː]	[u/ʊ]	[uː]	[e]
ஐ	ஓ	ஔ				
ai	o	ō				
[ai]	[o]	[oː]				
ஐ	ஓ	ஔ				
ai	o	ō				
[ai]	[o]	[oː]				
ஐ	ஓ	ஔ				
ai	o	ō				
[ai]	[o]	[oː]				

Consonants

க	ங	ச	ஶ	ட	ந	த
ka	ṅa	ca	ṣa	ṭa	ṇa	ta
[k/ɣ/ŋ]	[ŋ]	[t͡s/ɖ/ʃ]	[ʃ]	[t͡ɖ/ɖ]	[ɳ]	[t/ɖ/ʈ]
ப	ம	ய	ர	ல	வ	ழ
pa	ma	ya	ra	la	va	ḷa
[p]	[m]	[j]	[r]	[l]	[v]	[ɭ]
ஃ	ழ					
h	ḷ					



Regional Variations of Brahmi

"India is the One land that all men desire to see, and having seen once, by even a glimpse, would not give that glimpse for all the shows of all the rest of the globe combined."

- Mark Twain

Siddham

- o Derived from the Gupta script, Siddham was primarily used for writing Buddhist texts.
- o It was influential in East Asia, particularly in Japan, where it was used for writing mantras and sutras.
- o It is known for its distinctive angular and calligraphic style.

Gupta Script

- o Evolving during the Gupta period (4th-6th centuries CE), the Gupta script is characterized by its elegant and refined letter forms.
- o It served as a transitional script, bridging the gap between earlier Brahmi and later scripts like Siddham and Sarada.
- o It's notably used in inscriptions and coins of the Gupta era, reflecting the period's cultural and artistic flourishing.

Sarada

- o Sarada developed in the northwestern regions of India, particularly in Kashmir, from around the 8th century CE.
- o It was used for writing Sanskrit texts and is characterized by its angular and distinct letter forms.
- o It is important for the preservation of Kashmiri literature and religious texts.

Devanagari

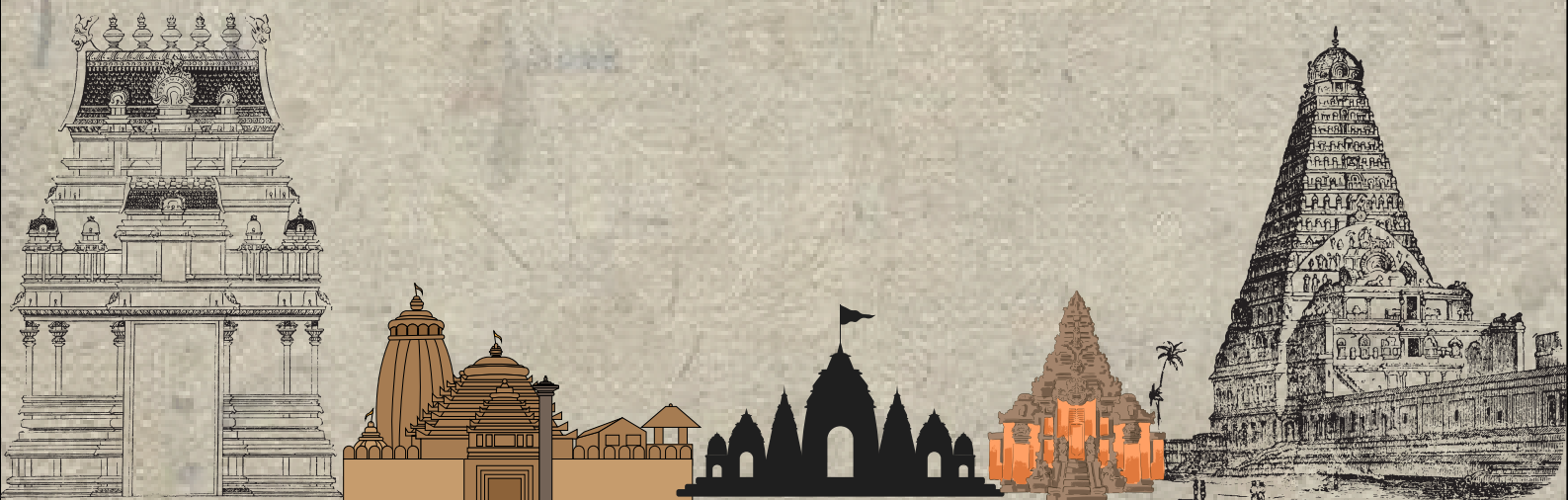
- Devanagari, the most widely used script in modern India, evolved from the Gupta script, with influences from Siddham.
- o It is used for writing Sanskrit, Hindi, Marathi, Nepali, and other languages.
 - o It is characterized by its horizontal headstroke and 'clear,' legible letter forms.



Northern

The Brahmi script, a pivotal development in the history of writing, served as the progenitor for a vast array of scripts across the Indian subcontinent and beyond.

Various regional scripts, such as those used in Nepal and Tibet, also trace their origins to Brahmi, through the Gupta and related scripts.



Disclosing the Ancient Knowledge Systems and Heritage of India



Regional Variations of Brahmi

"The Vedic people were not outsiders; rather, they were indigenous to the region and their culture evolved out of the ancient traditions of the Harappan civilization".

- Prof. B. B. Lal

Pallava Script

- o As mentioned, the Pallava script, emerging during the Pallava dynasty (4th-9th centuries CE), was a crucial link in the evolution of South Indian scripts.
- o It served as a bridge between earlier Brahmi forms and the later regional scripts.
- o It is very important because it spread to south east Asia.

Tamil

- o The modern Tamil script evolved from Brahmi-derived scripts, with influences from Grantha.
- o It is used for writing the Tamil language and is characterized by its distinctive letter forms.

Telugu-Kannada

- o The Telugu-Kannada script, which shares a common origin, also evolved from Brahmi.
- It gradually developed distinct regional variations, leading to the evolution of separate Telugu and Kannada scripts.
- o These scripts are used in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka.

Grantha

- o Grantha, derived from the Pallava script, was primarily used for writing Sanskrit texts in South India.
- o It is characterized by its ornate and rounded letter forms.
- o It is the direct ancestor of the modern Tamil script.



Southeast Asian

The Pallava script, in particular, had a profound influence on the development of scripts in Southeast Asia.

Scripts used in Java, Sumatra, Borneo, and other regions of Southeast Asia trace their origins to Pallava.

This demonstrates the far-reaching cultural influence of ancient India.

Malayalam

- o The Malayalam script derives from the Grantha script.





Endangered/Extinct Inscriptions

India, a land of immense linguistic diversity, has been a cradle for numerous writing systems throughout its history. While some scripts, like Devanagari, have achieved widespread usage and standardization, a significant number face the threat of extinction. These endangered scripts, often deeply rooted in regional cultures and traditions, represent a vital part of India's intangible heritage.

Sarada

The Sarada script holds a significant place in the history of Indian writing systems, particularly in the north-western regions of the subcontinent. Here's a detailed overview:

Origins and Development:

The Sarada script is a Brahmic script that evolved from the Gupta script, a northern derivative of Brahmi.

It flourished primarily between the 8th and 12th centuries CE.

Its use was concentrated in Kashmir and the surrounding areas, including parts of present-day Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, and regions extending into Afghanistan and Central Asia.

It is named after the Hindu goddess Sarada (Saraswati), the goddess of learning.

Characteristics and Usage:

Sarada is an abugida script, meaning each consonant letter inherently carries a vowel sound, which can be modified by diacritical marks.

It was primarily used to write Sanskrit and Kashmiri.

Historically, it was closely associated with the preservation of Sanskrit literature in Kashmir.

While it was more widely used in the past, its usage became increasingly restricted to religious and ceremonial purposes, particularly within the Kashmiri Pandit community.

Historical Significance:

Preservation of Knowledge: The Sarada script played a crucial role in preserving ancient Sanskrit texts, contributing to the transmission of knowledge.

Regional Importance: It was the primary script of Kashmir for a considerable period, reflecting the region's unique cultural identity.

Linguistic Links: The Sarada script serves as a link in the evolution of other scripts, with some scholars tracing connections to later scripts like Takri and Gurmukhi.

Geographical Spread: The presence of Sarada inscriptions in areas beyond Kashmir indicates the script's wider influence in the northwestern regions of the Indian subcontinent and into central Asia.

Modern Status:

Today, the Sarada script is considered endangered.

Efforts are being made to revive and preserve the script, particularly through educational initiatives and digital resources.

There is a growing interest within the Kashmiri Pandit community and among scholars to revitalize this important part of their cultural heritage.

Thus, Sarada script is a valuable historical artifact that provides insights into the linguistic, cultural, and religious history of the northwestern Indian subcontinent.

Sankha

Sankha Lipi, also known as Conch Script or Shell Script, is an intriguing and undeciphered writing system that has captivated scholars for centuries. It's characterized by its unique characters resembling conch shells or stylized spirals, hence the name. Here's what we know about this mysterious script:

Characteristics and Appearance:

Sankha Lipi consists of short, cursive characters that often resemble stylized conch shells, spirals, or geometric patterns.

The script is typically found inscribed on rock surfaces, temple walls, and stone artefacts, primarily in northern and central India.

The inscriptions are often short, suggesting they might represent names, symbols, or short phrases.

The script is often found alongside other, better-known scripts, which adds to its enigmatic nature.

Distribution and Context:

Sankha Lipi inscriptions have been discovered at various archaeological sites, including those in Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and other regions of northern and central India.

They are frequently found in association with Hindu and Buddhist religious sites, suggesting a possible connection to religious or ritualistic practices.

The script's presence alongside Brahmi and other deciphered scripts indicates that it was in use during the early centuries of the Common Era.

The Enigma of Decipherment:

Despite numerous attempts, Sankha Lipi remains undeciphered.

The lack of bilingual inscriptions or a Rosetta Stone-like key has hindered efforts to understand the script's meaning.

Scholars have proposed various theories about the script's purpose and origin, but none have gained widespread acceptance.

Some theories propose that it was a secret script used by a specific religious sect or a code used for specific purposes.

Other theories suggest that it may be a decorative script with symbolic meaning rather than a fully developed writing system.

Significance and Importance:

Sankha Lipi represents a fascinating puzzle in the history of Indian writing systems.

Its undeciphered status highlights the challenges and complexities of archaeological research.

The script's presence on ancient monuments underscores the rich cultural heritage of India and the existence of lost or forgotten writing systems.

It serves as a reminder that there are still many mysteries to be unravelled in the study of ancient Indian history and culture.

It is a good example of the diversity of ancient Indian scripts.

Ongoing Research:

Researchers continue to study Sankha Lipi, hoping to find new clues that could lead to its decipherment.

Advanced imaging techniques and computational analysis are being used to examine the inscriptions and identify patterns.

The ongoing study of Sankha Lipi is a testament to the enduring fascination with ancient scripts and the quest to understand the mysteries of the past.



Endangered/Extinct Inscriptions

The decline of Scripts not only signifies the loss of unique modes of written communication but also jeopardizes the preservation of historical texts, cultural practices, and community identities. The study and revitalization of these endangered scripts are crucial for safeguarding India's rich linguistic tapestry and ensuring that these valuable cultural treasures are not lost to future.

Newari

The Newari script, also known as Nepal Lipi or Nepal Bhasa script, is a significant writing system with a rich history and cultural importance, primarily associated with the Newar people of Nepal. Here's a detailed overview:

Origins and Development:

The Newari script evolved from the Brahmi script, with influences from the Gupta script and other related scripts prevalent in the Indian subcontinent.

It developed over centuries, with its earliest forms appearing around the 10th century CE.

It reached its peak during the Malla dynasty (12th-18th centuries CE), a period of significant cultural and artistic flourishing in the Kathmandu Valley.

Characteristics and Usage:

Newari is an abugida script, where each consonant letter inherently carries a vowel sound, which can be modified by diacritical marks.

It is written from left to right.

It was primarily used to write Nepal Bhasa (Newari), the language of the Newar people.

It was also used to write Sanskrit texts, particularly those related to religious and philosophical works.

The script displays a variety of calligraphic styles, reflecting the skill and artistry of its scribes.

It is a very beautiful and decorative script.

Historical Significance:

Cultural Identity: The Newari script is a vital symbol of Newar cultural identity and heritage.

Preservation of Literature: It played a crucial role in preserving a vast body of Newar literature, including religious texts, historical chronicles, and literary works.

Administrative Records: It was used for writing royal edicts, land grants, and other administrative documents, providing valuable insights into the political and social history of Nepal.

Religious Texts: Many Buddhist and Hindu religious texts were written in Newari script, showcasing the script's importance in religious practices.

Architectural Inscriptions: Many temples and other architectural structures in the Kathmandu Valley feature inscriptions in Newari script, documenting their construction and history.

Modern Status:

The Newari script faced a decline during the 20th century, with the increasing use of Devanagari and other scripts.

However, there has been a resurgence of interest in the Newari script in recent decades, with efforts to revive and promote its use.

Organizations and individuals are working to teach the script, publish books and materials in Newari, and digitize historical texts.

There is a growing recognition of the importance of preserving the Newari script as a vital part of Nepal's cultural heritage.

The script is very important to the preservation of the Newari language. The Newari script stands as a testament to the rich cultural heritage of the Newar people and their contributions to the history of Nepal. Its preservation is essential for safeguarding this valuable aspect of Nepal's cultural identity.

Baikshuki

The Baikshuki script, also known as the Bhaiksuki script or the Arrow Headed script, is a fascinating and historically significant writing system that flourished in ancient India and Nepal. Here's a detailed overview:

Origins and Development:

The Baikshuki script evolved from the Gupta script, a derivative of the Brahmi script.

It emerged around the 8th century CE and remained in use until approximately the 12th century CE.

The script was primarily associated with Buddhist monastic communities, hence its name, which translates to "of the monks" or "of the beggars."

It was used in regions of northern India, particularly in Bihar and Bengal, and also in Nepal.

Characteristics and Usage:

Baikshuki is an abugida script, meaning each consonant letter inherently carries a vowel sound, which can be modified by diacritical marks.

It is written from left to right.

It was primarily used to write Buddhist Sanskrit texts, including sutras, commentaries, and other religious works.

The script exhibits a distinctive calligraphic style, with rounded and flowing letter forms.

It is known for its elegant and ornate appearance, reflecting the importance of religious texts.

Historical Significance:

Buddhist Literature: The Baikshuki script played a crucial role in the preservation and transmission of Buddhist literature, particularly during the Pala dynasty in eastern India.

Monastic Communities: It was closely associated with Buddhist monastic communities, serving as a primary script for religious scholars and scribes.

Regional Importance: It was used in regions that were significant centers of Buddhist learning, contributing to the spread of Buddhist ideas.

Transitional Script: The Baikshuki script is considered a transitional script, bridging the gap between earlier Gupta-derived scripts and later scripts like Proto-Bengali.

Nepalese Connection: The presence of Baikshuki inscriptions in Nepal highlights the script's influence beyond the Indian plains, and its connection to the spread of Buddhism in the Himalayan region.

Modern Status:

The Baikshuki script is considered extinct, as it is no longer in active use.

However, its historical significance is recognized by scholars of Indian and Buddhist studies.

Manuscripts and inscriptions in Baikshuki script are valuable sources for reconstructing the history of Buddhism and the evolution of Indian writing systems.

Digital preservation and scholarly study are helping to keep this script alive in the academic world.

The Baikshuki script stands as a testament to the rich history of Buddhist scholarship and the evolution of writing in ancient India. Its preservation and study contribute to our understanding of the cultural and religious heritage of the region.



Pioneers of Ancient Script Decipherment

"Dating of Indian literature is largely based on relative dating relying on internal evidences with a few anchors."

- I. Mahadevan

James Prinsep (1799–1840):

Prinsep, a British scholar and official in the East India Company, is most famously known for deciphering the Brahmi script in 1837. He meticulously studied the inscriptions on Asoka's edicts, recognizing recurring patterns and symbols. By comparing the inscriptions with coins bearing Greek and Brahmi scripts, he was able to unravel the Brahmi alphabet. His breakthrough allowed scholars to read Asoka's edicts, revealing the emperor's policies and the spread of Buddhism. His work is considered a cornerstone of Indian epigraphy.

Sir Alexander Cunningham (1814–1893):

Cunningham, a British archaeologist and the founder of the Archaeological Survey of India, made significant contributions to the study of ancient Indian scripts. He collected and documented numerous inscriptions, including those in Brahmi and Kharosthi. He furthered the work on the decipherment of Kharosthi. He played a key role in the study of the Gupta script and other later Brahmi derivatives. His systematic approach to archaeological and epigraphical research helped to establish the field in India.

George Bühler (1837–1898):

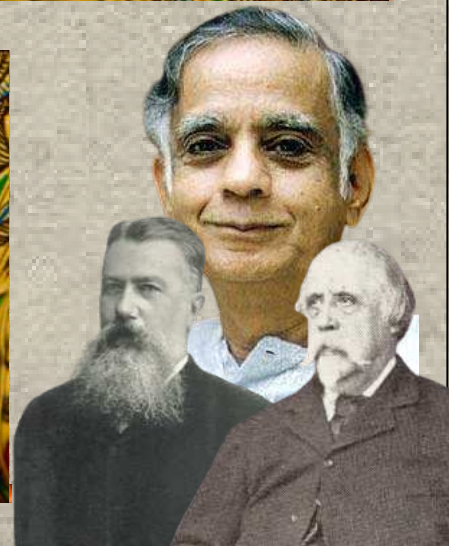
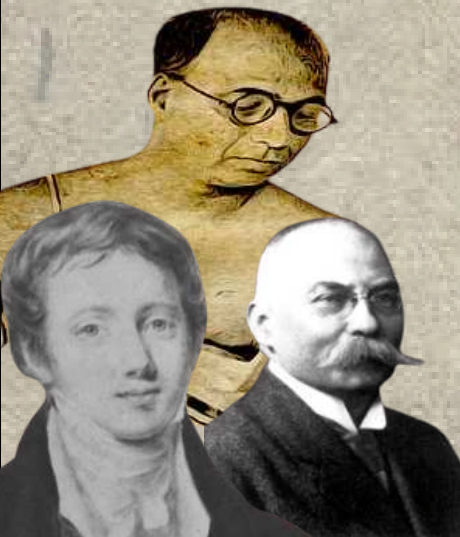
Bühler, a German Indologist, made significant contributions to the study of Brahmi and other Indian scripts. He produced detailed palaeographical studies, analysing the evolution of letter forms and writing styles. He published "Indian Palaeography," a seminal work that remains a valuable resource for scholars. He helped to create a scientific basis for the study of Indian scripts.

Iravatham Mahadevan (1930–2018):

Mahadevan, an Indian epigraphist, made groundbreaking contributions to the study of the Indus script and Tamil Brahmi inscriptions. He conducted extensive research on the Indus script, attempting to decipher its enigmatic symbols. He also made significant contributions to the study of early Tamil inscriptions, particularly those in Tamil Brahmi. His work brought much needed attention to the southern Indian scripts.

E. Hultzsch (1857–1927):

Dr. E. Hultzsch, a German Indologist, was the first Government Epigraphist for India. He laid a very strong foundation for the studies of Indian epigraphy. He was very well versed in both Dravidian and Sanskrit epigraphy. These scholars, among others, dedicated their lives to deciphering and interpreting ancient Indian scripts, unlocking the rich historical and cultural heritage of the subcontinent.





Women in Indian Epigraphy

The presence of women in Indian inscriptions, though often subtle and confined to specific contexts, offers a fascinating window into their diverse roles and varying degrees of agency in ancient Indian society. While patriarchal structures undeniably shaped the content and focus of these records, the instances where women appear reveal a more complex and nuanced picture than purely literary sources might suggest.

Donors and Patrons: Demonstrating Agency and Piety:

Women's roles as donors and patrons are particularly significant, as they showcase their ability to control and allocate resources. Inscriptions frequently record women's donations to religious institutions, such as temples and monasteries. These donations, ranging from land and money to the construction of entire structures, underscore their financial agency and deep-seated religious piety. By contributing to the upkeep and expansion of religious centers, women played an active role in shaping the religious landscape of their communities. Furthermore, their patronage of public works, like the construction of tanks and wells, highlights their concern for community welfare and their involvement in improving public infrastructure. Royal women, particularly queens, often commissioned inscriptions to record their charitable acts or commemorate significant events, further demonstrating their public presence and influence.

Royal Women and Political Influence: Navigating Power Dynamics:

The presence of royal women in inscriptions offers glimpses into their political roles and influence. While direct participation in governance was often limited, inscriptions reveal instances where queens acted as regents during the minority of their sons, suggesting that they could wield significant political power in certain circumstances. The mention of queens alongside kings in land grant inscriptions also indicates their involvement in royal decisions and their potential influence on policy. Although inscriptions may not explicitly detail the extent of their influence, they offer suggestive evidence of the subtle ways in which royal women could shape political events.

Commemoration and Remembrance: Reflecting Social Customs and Beliefs:

Inscriptions related to commemoration and remembrance provide poignant insights into social customs and beliefs surrounding women's lives. Sati stones, with their inscriptions commemorating women who performed sati, offer a somber reflection of the practice and its social implications. While these inscriptions may not offer a direct voice to the women involved, they serve as historical records of a practice that deeply affected women's lives. Memorial inscriptions, which commemorate women who died, often highlight their virtues and contributions, providing glimpses into the values placed on women's roles within their families and communities. Asoka's Queen's Edict, a specific example, demonstrates a Queen's ability to donate, and have this donation recorded officially.

Social and Economic Roles: Beyond the Royal Court:

While inscriptions primarily focus on elite women, they occasionally offer glimpses into the social and economic roles of women from other strata of society. Rare mentions of women's land ownership or involvement in guilds suggest that some women may have enjoyed a degree of economic autonomy. Inscriptions related to religious orders also highlight the presence of women as nuns and devotees, demonstrating their active participation in religious life.

Limitations and Interpretative Challenges:

The patriarchal nature of ancient Indian society inevitably shaped the content and focus of these records, often prioritizing the activities of elite men. Furthermore, the interpretation of inscriptions requires careful consideration of the social and cultural context in which they were created.

Examples



Naneghat Inscription



Kolar Inscription



Kanheri Inscription



Traders/Trade Guilds

Traders and trade guilds played a significant, albeit sometimes subtle, role in Indian epigraphy. Their presence in inscriptions provides valuable insights into the economic activities, social organization, and patronage patterns of ancient India. Here's a breakdown of their role and some examples:

- o Traders and guilds frequently made donations to religious institutions, such as temples and monasteries. These donations are often recorded in inscriptions, showcasing their wealth and piety.
- o They also patronized the construction of public works, such as rest houses, wells, and tanks, contributing to the infrastructure of their communities.

Donations and Patronage

- o Inscriptions sometimes document trade transactions, agreements, and regulations related to guilds.
- o These records provide insights into the organization and functioning of trade networks, including the types of goods traded, the routes used, and the rules governing commerce.

Economic Records

- o The presence of traders and guilds in inscriptions indicates their social status and influence.
- o Their ability to make substantial donations and participate in public works demonstrates their economic power and social standing.

Social Status and Influence

- o Many traders would donate to temples, and have those donations recorded on the temple walls. This is very helpful to historians.

Recording of Donations





Examples of Trade Guild Inscriptions

"What is Art? It is the response of man's creative soul to the call of the Real." - Rabindranath Tagore

Naneghat Cave Inscriptions (Maharashtra)

- o These inscriptions, dating back to the 1st century BCE, mention various trade guilds and their donations.
- o They provide evidence of the flourishing trade networks in the Deccan region and the role of guilds in supporting religious activities.

Sanchi Stupa Inscriptions (Madhya Pradesh)

- o Numerous inscriptions on the railings and gateways of the Sanchi Stupa record donations made by individuals and guilds.
- o These inscriptions reveal the diverse range of donors, including merchants, artisans, and other members of the trading community.

Karle Cave Inscriptions (Maharashtra)

- o Similar to the Sanchi inscriptions, the Karle Cave inscriptions document donations made by traders and guilds.
- o They provide evidence of the economic prosperity of the region and the patronage of Buddhist monastic establishments.

Mathura Inscriptions (Uttar Pradesh)

- o Inscriptions from Mathura mention various guilds, such as those of potters, weavers, and goldsmiths.
- o These inscriptions provide insights into the organization of craft production and trade in the region.

Copper Plate Grants

- o While primarily associated with royal land grants, some copper plates also record donations made by traders and guilds.
- o These records provide evidence of their economic activities and social contributions.

South Indian Temples

- o Many south Indian temple walls contain records of merchants and trade guilds that made donations to the temples. These records are very valuable.
- In essence, traders and trade guilds left their mark on Indian epigraphy through their patronage, economic activities, and social contributions.



Inscriptions by Different Social Groups

"What is Art? It is the response of man's creative soul to the call of the Real."

- Rabindranath Tagore

Pilgrim Inscriptions

- o Pilgrims often inscribed their names, origins, and expressions of devotion on temple walls, cave walls, or other sacred sites.
- o These inscriptions serve as testimonies of their religious journeys and their faith.
- o They can also reveal the popularity of particular pilgrimage sites and the routes taken by devotees.

Artisans and Craftspeople

- o Artisans and craftspeople sometimes inscribed their names or marks on the objects they created, such as pottery, sculptures, or tools.
- o These inscriptions provide evidence of their skills and their contributions to the production of goods.
- o Also sometimes artisans would record their part in the creation of a temple in the temple itself.

Farmers and Agricultural Workers

- o While less common, some inscriptions might relate to agricultural practices, such as land ownership, irrigation, or harvest records.
- o These inscriptions provide insights into the economic activities of rural communities.

Travelling Merchants and Traders

- o Although merchants could be wealthy, there are also records of smaller traveling merchants that would leave small inscriptions at locations that they visited. Some examples are Mandsour Inscription, etc.

Religious Mendicants and Ascetics

- o Religious mendicants and ascetics would sometimes leave small inscriptions in caves, or other locations that they used as shelter.

Common People's Expressions

- o Graffiti and informal inscriptions on public spaces can offer glimpses into the beliefs, concerns, and expressions of identity of ordinary people.
- o These inscriptions might include personal names, short messages, or religious symbols.



Role of Epigraphy in shaping India's future

Indian epigraphy, while rooted in the ancient past, holds significant potential to shape the future of India and foster unity among its diverse population.

1. Fostering a Shared Historical Consciousness:

Connecting to Roots: Epigraphy provides tangible evidence of India's rich and multifaceted history, transcending regional and linguistic boundaries. By studying inscriptions from various periods and regions, Indians can develop a shared understanding of their collective past.

Promoting Inclusivity: Inscriptions showcase the contributions of diverse social groups, including rulers, merchants, artisans, and even ordinary people. This fosters a sense of inclusivity and belonging, reminding Indians that their heritage is a mosaic of diverse experiences.

Countering Divisive Narratives: By providing authentic historical evidence, epigraphy can help counter divisive narratives that seek to exploit historical grievances or promote sectarianism.

2. Strengthening Cultural Identity and Pride:

Preserving Linguistic Heritage: Inscriptions preserve ancient languages and scripts, which are integral to India's cultural identity. By promoting the study of epigraphy, we can revitalize endangered scripts and languages, fostering a sense of pride in India's linguistic diversity.

Promoting Artistic Heritage: The artistic styles and calligraphic traditions found in inscriptions are invaluable aspects of India's cultural heritage. By appreciating these artistic expressions, Indians can develop a deeper appreciation for their cultural roots.

Promoting a sense of continuity: Epigraphy shows the long and continuous history of the Indian subcontinent, and this continuity can help to build a sense of unity.

3. Promoting Education and Research:

Enhancing Historical Understanding: Epigraphy provides primary source material for historical research, enabling scholars to reconstruct India's past with greater accuracy. By promoting epigraphical studies, we can enhance our understanding of India's history and cultural heritage.

Developing Critical Thinking Skills: The decipherment and interpretation of inscriptions require critical thinking, analytical skills, and attention to detail. By engaging with epigraphy, students can develop these valuable skills.

Creating educational resources: Epigraphical evidence can be used to create engaging and informative educational resources, such as museum exhibits, documentaries, and online platforms.





Role of Epigraphy in shaping India's Future

4. Fostering National Unity:

Highlighting Shared Heritage: Epigraphy reveals the interconnectedness of different regions and communities in ancient India. By highlighting these connections, we can foster a sense of shared heritage and national unity.

Promoting Tolerance and Understanding: Asoka's edicts, for example, promote religious tolerance and social harmony. By studying these inscriptions, we can learn valuable lessons about building a peaceful and inclusive society.

Building bridges: By showing the cross-cultural connections of the past, epigraphy can help to build bridges between different cultural groups in modern India.

5. Promoting Tourism and Cultural Exchange:

Attracting Cultural Tourists: Inscriptions are a major attraction for cultural tourists, both domestic and international. By promoting epigraphical tourism, we can generate economic benefits and foster cultural exchange.

Showcasing India's Cultural Wealth: Inscriptions are tangible evidence of India's rich cultural heritage. By showcasing these treasures, we can enhance India's global image and promote cultural diplomacy.

In **conclusion**, by actively engaging with Indian epigraphy, we can unlock the power of the past to shape a more united, informed, and culturally vibrant future for India.





Threats to the Enduring Legacy

Indian epigraphy, a vital window into the subcontinent's past, faces a multitude of threats that jeopardize the preservation of these invaluable historical records. These threats can be broadly categorized, each posing unique challenges to the longevity and accessibility of inscriptions.

1. Environmental Deterioration: The Silent Erosion of History

Weathering and Erosion:

- o Exposure to the elements, including rain, wind, and temperature fluctuations, causes gradual weathering and erosion of inscribed surfaces, particularly stone.
- o This leads to the blurring and eventual obliteration of letterforms, making inscriptions increasingly difficult to decipher.

Chemical Degradation:

- o Atmospheric pollutants, such as acid rain and industrial emissions, can react with the materials of inscriptions, causing chemical degradation.
- o This is particularly problematic for inscriptions on limestone and metal, which are susceptible to corrosion.

Biological Growth:

- o The growth of lichens, moss, and other biological organisms on inscribed surfaces can obscure the text and cause physical damage.
- o These organisms can penetrate the stone, causing cracks and fissures.

2. Human Vandalism: Intentional and Unintentional Damage

Deliberate Defacement:

- o Acts of vandalism, such as graffiti, scratching, and chipping, intentionally damage inscriptions, erasing valuable historical information.
- o This can be driven by a lack of awareness, disrespect for cultural heritage, or malicious intent.

Theft and Illegal Trade:

Inscriptions, especially those on portable objects or valuable materials, are vulnerable to theft for personal gain or sale on the black market.

Misguided Restoration Efforts:

- o Inappropriate cleaning methods or the application of harmful chemicals can cause irreversible damage to inscriptions.
- o Even well-intentioned attempts at restoration can have detrimental consequences if not carried out by trained professionals.

General Neglect:

- o Lack of care, and general up keep of the sites where epigraphs reside, can lead to damage.

3. Natural Calamities: The Unpredictable Force of Destruction

Earthquakes and Seismic Activity:

- o Earthquakes can cause significant damage to inscribed structures, such as temples and pillars, leading to the fracturing or collapse of the artefacts.

Floods and Water Damage:

- o Floods can inundate epigraphical sites, causing water damage and erosion.
- o Prolonged exposure to moisture can lead to the deterioration of inscribed surfaces.

Extreme Weather Events:

- o Severe storms, cyclones, and other extreme weather events can cause physical damage to inscriptions and their surrounding environments.

4. Lack of Documentation and Awareness:

Undocumented Inscriptions:

- o Many inscriptions remain undocumented, making them vulnerable to damage or loss.
- o Without proper documentation, it is impossible to know what has been lost.

Public Apathy:

- o A lack of public awareness about the importance of epigraphy can contribute to neglect and vandalism. If the public does not care, then they will not protect the epigraphs.



Strategies for Survival: Protecting Indian Epigraphy

Combating the threats facing Indian epigraphy requires a multi-pronged approach, combining scientific preservation, public engagement, and technological innovation. Here's a breakdown of strategies to address each category of threats:

1. Combating Environmental Deterioration:

Scientific Conservation and Preservation:

- o Employing trained conservators to clean and treat inscriptions with appropriate, non-damaging methods.
- o Applying protective coatings and sealants to shield inscriptions from weathering and chemical degradation.
- o Implementing environmental monitoring systems to track temperature, humidity, and pollution levels at epigraphical sites.

Controlled Environments:

- o Where feasible, moving portable inscriptions or creating controlled environments (museum displays) to minimize exposure to the elements.

Biological Control:

- o Using environmentally friendly methods to remove and prevent the growth of lichens, moss, and other biological organisms.

2. Combating Human Vandalism:

Enhanced Security:

- o Installing surveillance cameras, alarms, and other security systems at epigraphical sites.
- o Deploying security personnel to patrol and monitor sites.
- o Restricting access to vulnerable inscriptions.

Public Education and Awareness:

- o Conducting educational campaigns to raise awareness about the historical and cultural significance of inscriptions.
- o Organizing workshops and lectures to teach people about the importance of preservation.
- o Creating engaging museum exhibits and online resources.

Community Involvement:

- o Involving local communities in the protection and preservation of epigraphical sites.
- o Establishing volunteer programs to monitor and maintain sites.

Strict Legal Enforcement:

- o Enforcing laws that protect cultural heritage and prosecuting those who engage in vandalism or theft.
- o Strengthening legal frameworks to deter and punish such acts.

3. Mitigating Natural Calamities:

Site Stabilization:

- o Reinforcing structures and foundations to withstand earthquakes and seismic activity.
- o Implementing drainage systems to prevent flooding and water damage.

Disaster Preparedness:

- o Developing emergency response plans to protect inscriptions during natural disasters.
- o Creating backup digital records of inscriptions to ensure their survival.

Environmental Impact Assessments:

- o Conducting environmental impact assessments before undertaking any construction or development projects near epigraphical sites.

4. Addressing Lack of Documentation and Awareness:

Systematic Documentation:

- o Conducting comprehensive surveys to identify and document undocumented inscriptions.
- o Creating detailed photographic and digital records of all inscriptions.
- o Establishing centralized databases to store and manage epigraphical data.

Digital Preservation:

- o Using advanced imaging techniques, such as 3D scanning and high-resolution photography, to create digital replicas of inscriptions.
- o Developing online platforms to make epigraphical data accessible to researchers and the public.

Educational Outreach:

- o Integrating epigraphy into school and university curricula.
- o Creating online resources and mobile apps to educate people about inscriptions.



Inscription Gallery

The study of ideographic inscriptions, that is inscriptions representing an idea or concept, may also be called ideography.

Mandzaur Inscription



Shankha Lipi Inscription.

Hathigumpha Inscription



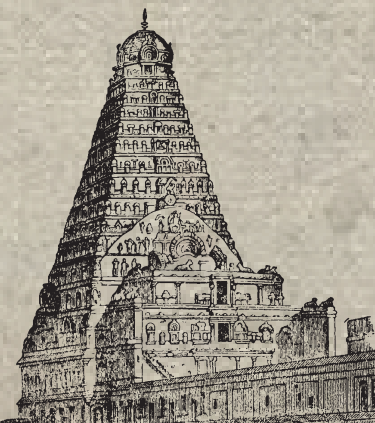
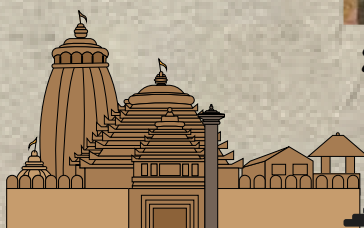
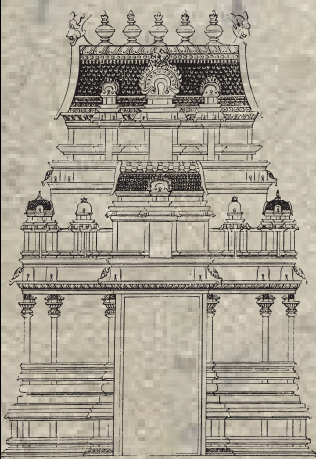
Eran Inscription



Umachal Inscription



Sannathi Inscription



Disclosing the Ancient Knowledge Systems and Heritage of India



"For a millennium and a half, India was a confident exporter of its diverse civilisation."

- William Dalrymple

Book Review

Indian Epigraphy

- Dineshchandra Sircar

D.C. Sircar's *Indian Epigraphy* is a seminal work that comprehensively examines the evolution of inscriptions in the Indian subcontinent. Originally published in 1965 and revised in later editions, the book remains a fundamental text for students and scholars of epigraphy, paleography, and historical linguistics. Sircar, a renowned historian and epigraphist, provides a detailed analysis of inscriptions from various periods, offering insights into their historical, linguistic, and cultural significance.

The book is structured systematically, beginning with an introduction to epigraphy and its importance in historical studies. Sircar discusses the evolution of scripts in India, including Brahmi and Kharosthi, and traces their transformation into regional scripts such as Devanagari, Tamil, Grantha, and others. He meticulously catalogs inscriptions from the Mauryan period to medieval times, highlighting their role in reconstructing India's political, social, and economic history. The book also addresses the techniques of inscriptional study, including dating methods, decipherment, and paleographic analysis.

Sircar's treatment of different inscriptional sources—royal edicts, temple records, land grants, and votive inscriptions—is particularly valuable. He examines major inscriptions such as Ashokan edicts, Gupta inscriptions, Pallava and Chola records, and early medieval copperplate grants. His discussion is supported by a rigorous philological approach, making the book an essential reference for understanding the evolution of Indian scripts and historical documentation.

One of the book's major strengths is its comprehensive scope. Sircar provides not only a catalog of inscriptions but also an analytical framework for understanding their historical implications. His detailed discussions on paleography and the development of scripts are invaluable for deciphering inscriptions. Moreover, his analysis is well-supported by references to primary sources, making the book a scholarly and authoritative text.



"India is the forgotten heart of the ancient world."

- William Dalrymple

Book Review

Indian Epigraphy

- Dineshchandra Sircar

Another strong point is the book's methodological clarity. Sircar explains the principles of epigraphy and paleography in a way that is accessible to both beginners and advanced scholars. His approach combines linguistic analysis with historical interpretation, offering a holistic understanding of the subject. Furthermore, his extensive discussion on the significance of epigraphy in reconstructing Indian history underscores the importance of inscriptions as primary sources.

Despite its merits, Indian Epigraphy has some limitations. One major drawback is its reliance on a traditional chronological framework, which, while useful, does not fully engage with newer interdisciplinary approaches. Since the book was written before the advent of digital epigraphy and modern archaeological methods, some of its discussions on decipherment and dating are now somewhat outdated.

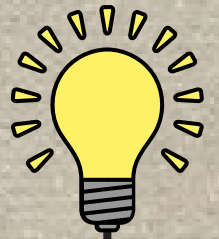
Additionally, Sircar's focus is largely on political and administrative inscriptions, with relatively less emphasis on socio-cultural aspects. Inscriptions related to everyday life, folk traditions, and marginalized communities receive less attention. A more detailed engagement with regional variations in epigraphic practices would have enhanced the book's breadth.

Indian Epigraphy remains a foundational text in the field, offering a thorough and well-researched account of India's inscriptional heritage. While some aspects may require updates in light of new discoveries and methodologies, Sircar's work continues to be indispensable for students of ancient Indian history, linguistics, and epigraphy. Its scholarly rigor and systematic approach ensure its relevance even today.



"Antah Asti Prarambh, The end is also the beginning", life is cyclical, and every ending is the start of something new."

- Traditional



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General Epigraphy & Historical Context:

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2. "Inscriptions of Asoka" by D.C. Sircar: A detailed examination of Asoka's edicts, a cornerstone of Indian epigraphy.
3. "Aspects of Indian History and Civilization" by N.K. Sastri: While not solely epigraphy, it provides vital historical context for understanding inscriptions.
4. "A Corpus of Inscriptions of India" (Various Volumes): A monumental series published by the Archaeological Survey of India, containing editions of numerous inscriptions.
5. "Early Indian Inscriptions: Text and Interpretations" by T.P. Verma: Focuses on the decipherment and interpretation of early inscriptions.
6. "The Art and Science of Indian Epigraphy" by K.V. Ramesh: Discusses the methodology and techniques used in epigraphical studies.
7. "Ancient Indian Inscriptions" by S.R. Goyal: A good general overview of the subject.

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8. "South Indian Inscriptions" (Various Volumes): A series dedicated to inscriptions from South India, essential for understanding the region's history.
9. "Epigraphia Carnatica" (Various Volumes): A comprehensive collection of inscriptions from Karnataka.
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20. "The History and Culture of the Indian People" (Various Volumes): This multi-volume series, published by Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, contains valuable information on epigraphy within its historical narratives.

Credits

Content :- By Dr. Indira Malapaka

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Publication :- DAKSHI



Disclosing the Ancient Knowledge Systems and Heritage of India



About DAKSHI

Motto of Dakshi is Culture of Knowledge or to say "संस्कृति ज्ञान की"।

DAKSHI is a movement that seeks to re-awaken the ancient vaiver knowledge system of India. Through this movement, we strive to bring ancient knowledge to the modern world. This includes the study of ancient texts and practices, engaging in discussion and debate, conducting research, hosting lectures, participating in competitions and workshops, and more. By doing so, the movement hopes to make ancient knowledge more accessible to everyone and to bring it to the forefront of today's society.

Our Vision is very clear that we want to re-establish the Ancient Indian Culture of Knowledge through the Re-Discovery of Ancient Indian knowledge systems via research and development of the Scriptures. Our Vision is to make Dakshi a platform where anyone can come to know about the true essence of culture and knowledge of Traditions, Rituals, Practises with the scientific Temperament.

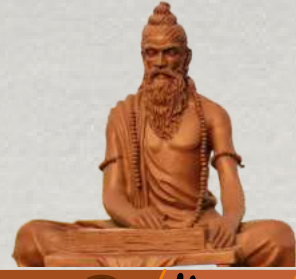
The movement strives to bridge the gap between current and ancient wisdom for a better understanding of the human condition and the world in which we live. And its main aim is to connect cultural antiquity with modernity. We want to make ancient Indian knowledge more reliable or accessible for the present as well as future generations through this movement.

We aim to promote both analytical and critical thinking, as well as their application to our modern environment. As a result, society would better understand its past and be able to determine its future, according to the movement. Our objective is to promote or conserve culture through logic, that is if we follow something we should have the knowledge regarding the same and the Logics in favour of the thing which we follow or spread.

The movement's efforts aim to re-establish the value of ancient wisdom, which has been lost through the years owing to a lack of understanding and respect.

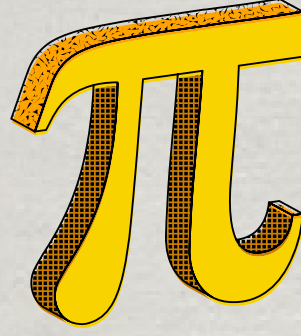


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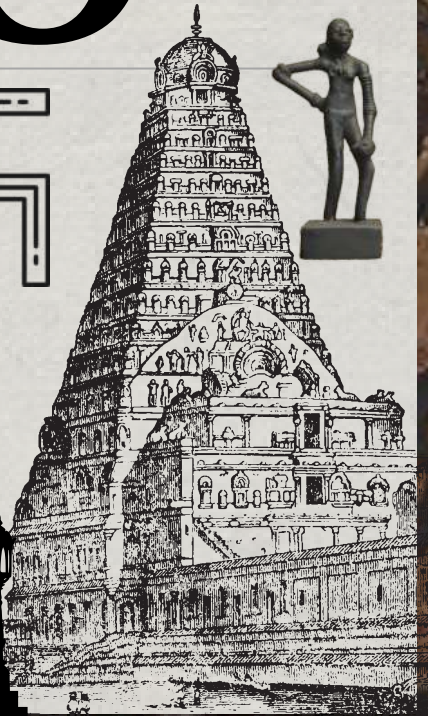
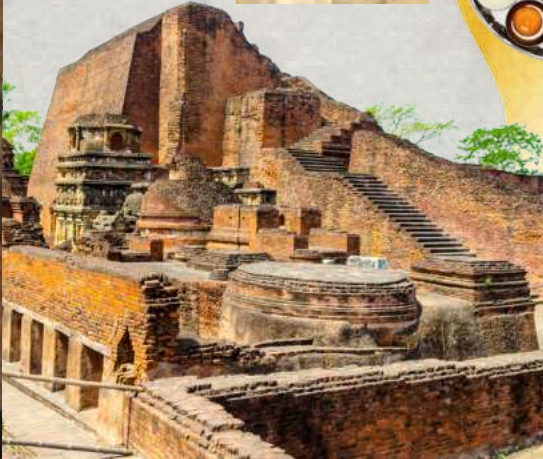
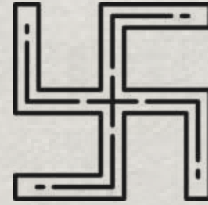


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