

# REFLECTION OF MUSIC & DANCE IN ANCIENT INDIAN INSCRIPTION



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## ABSTRACT

The word 'inscription' is derived from the Latin word 'Inscripto' which means something that is inscribed or engraved. It was engraved on clay (terracotta), stone pillars, copper plates, walls of temples, caves, and on the surface of much other metal and also even palm leaves. Very often we've seen it on coins and seals. It consists of important texts or symbols that reveal crucial information and evidence of ancient kings and their empires. Music is the soul of Indian culture. Indian music has an affluent tradition with its root in Vedic time. It is said that Indian music owes its origin to the Sāma Veda. The Vedic hymns were chanted with a particular pitch and accent which are used in religious work. Dance in India also has a rich and vital tradition since the beginning of our civilization. Dances of Indi were to give symbolic expressions which are also enlightened to religious ideas.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Inscriptions are an important archaeological resource. It helps us to know not only the ancient history but it gives a clear view of the religious, sociological, and political environment, economical system, and even cultural atmosphere of that particular era, which has been mentioned in the specific inscription. Dr. R.C. Majumder says, "The inscriptions, being contemporary records of a reliable character, have helped us most. They have furnished us with the name of kings. Sometimes together with their dates and other necessary particulars and have recorded many important events of history". In the early period, many inscriptions are engraved on any hard surface like hard stone, wood, etc. For example, "the Aśokan rock Inscription" firstly engraved on rough stone, later the stone cut in rectangular shape and polished then the inscriptions were engraved, namely called 'Praśasti' (or 'Eulogy' in English). In the primitive stage of the Christian era, there was started to engrave on copperplate. Even



in the southern part of our country the procedure of engraving persisted too enormously for a long time. That's why a large volume of inscriptions recorded on the temple's wall in the southern part of India. Sometimes we've noticed that inscriptions may contain only one word or one single sentence that indicated an individual name. Also, it may record the images of deities, who were worshiped at that Specific time. Mainly the engraver wants to save that record permanently. The earliest inscription in India (South Asia), was the Indus script also known as the Harappan inscription which was found in Harappan and Mahenjodaro civilization. The writing structure of the Indus script is intensively 'pictographic' that means the purpose and perceptions were articulate in the form of pictures. So, we can say this was symbolic language. Another feature of this script was that the scripts were engraved from right side to left. But we have to remember that the language and the scripts are two different things but they associate with quite individually of each other. The language which was written using this script was 'proto - Sanskrit'. Many scholars have argued there was hidden relation between the 'proto - Sanskrit' and 'Iranian Avestan' language. Some scholars suggested that this script belonged to the 'Dravidian' language family<sup>1</sup>. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Alexander Cunningham described that there was a connection between Indus script and Brāhmī script. The ancient Indian inscriptions were composed exclusively in the 'Prākṛt' language in the very early stage to the first century A.D. We can say 'Prākṛt' is a local variant of the Sanskrit language. Mainly the western and southern variant of 'Prākṛt' was called 'Mahārāṣṭrī 'Prākṛt'. 'Śaurasenī 'Prākṛt' was mainly used in the northern part of India and the eastern variant was called 'Māgadhī 'Prākṛt'. Many scholars have agreed that 'Śaurasenī 'Prākṛt' is closely related to classical Sanskrit literature. But the script which was found as first written evidence in ancient India that was 'Brāhmī'. It was found in 'Edicts of Asoka' in 250 - 232 BCE. Along with Brāhmī, another script was found in 4<sup>th</sup> century to 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE that was 'Kharoṣṭhī'.<sup>2</sup> Apart from the Indo -Aryan epigraphy, the Dravidian epigraphy represents a vast study - field. Mostly it was found in the southern part of India. Tamil- Brāhmī was one of the oldest scripts in Dravidian language which was used between 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE and 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. 'Samanam' inscriptions written in Tamil- Brahmi script. As per an archaeological survey of India ancient Sanskrit inscriptions (Epigraphically Hybrid Sanskrit) were found between the 1<sup>st</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D.

<sup>1</sup>. "Most likely belonged to the Dravidian family" -cf. "The Quest for the Origins of Vedic Culture: The Indo-Aryan Migration Debate"; Edwin Bryant, Oxford, 2003.

<sup>2</sup> "The Brāhmīscript appeared in the third century B.C. as a fully developed pan - Indian national script (sometimes used as a second script even within the proper territory of 'Kharoṣṭhī' in the north west) and continued to play this role throughout history, becoming the parent of all of the modern Indic scripts both within India and beyond." - 'Indian Epigraphy; A Guide To The Study of Inscriptions In Sanskrit, Prakrit, And The Other Indo- Aryan Language'; Richard Salomon, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1998.

## 2. SEVERAL SHREDS OF EVIDENCE OF MUSIC AND DANCE REVELS IN ANCIENT INSCRIPTION

Most of the early evidence was still restricted to all ancient empires, the inscriptions can ease the discussion not only on ancient social circumstances also on the cultural state of affairs of the early age. We can acquire lots of concepts about cultural practices like playing music, singing, and dancing of ancient kingdom from inscriptions. India has its rich cultural framework from the earliest time of human civilization. In 1926 a bronze statuette of 'dancing girl' was found in the ancient Mahenjodaro site and historians agreed it was created around 2500 B.C., approximately over 4500 years ago. But there were no written inscriptions, only images or symbols can be used. For the inconvenience of the discussion, inscriptions are divided into two parts. This division is territorial - northern and southern. In the ancient era Maurya empire (322B.C. – 185B.C.) was the earliest. After Ashoka's coronation (268 B.C.) and the decline of the Mauryan dynasty, in Kalinga there was another empire was formed that was Mahameghavahana dynasty. It was also a prosperous kingdom. Kharbela (193B.C.- 170B.C.) was the greatest king of this dynasty. From the 'Hāthigumphā Cave Inscriptions' we can get detail about Kharbela and his empire. The 'Hāthigumphā Cave Inscriptions' was found in Udaygiri hills, near Bhubaneswar, Puri district, Odissa. It was written in Prākṛt (resembling Pāli) and the script was Brāhmī. These inscriptions proved that a rich cultural environment has existed in the Mahameghavahana dynasty<sup>3</sup>. The 'Junāgadḥ Rock inscription'<sup>4</sup> also demonstrated the state of wealthy culture of Rudradaman I (130 A.D. to 150 A.D.) the king of the western Kṣhatrapa dynasty. It was also known as Girnar Rock Inscriptions. In ancient India, the Gupta period (320 A.D. – 550A.D.) was known as the Golden age of India, because in that era India reached the highest peak of achievements in the field of art, culture, literature, mathematics, science, astronomy, and also the field of technology. In the 'Allāhbād Stone pillar inscriptions' of Samudragupta (330 A.D.- 75A.D.) the word 'gāndharvaliṅgītaivriḍita'<sup>5</sup> was mentioned. That means in this singing and dancing was very normal and important practice for all. The 'Eraṇ Stone Pillar inscriptions' (330 A.D. – 76A. D.) of Samudragupta, that also showed that the usage of the metre. The 1<sup>st</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> verse of this inscription was written in metre 'Vasantatilakaṅ'. So utilization of metres was another thing that made the cultural background very strong. There was an inscription of Samudragupta, it was on the gold coin, which was reflected a picture of the king played veena which lied on his knees. That is another picture of playing music.

In the 'Nāsik Cave Inscription'(130 A.D. – 159A.D.) of Vāsiṣṭhiputra Puṅgumāvi, mentioned the word 'chāraṇa'<sup>6</sup> that 'means the singer from heaven'. Another Southern inscription of music and musical instrument is 'Kuḍumiyamālāi Inscriptions'

<sup>3</sup> . Select Inscription, vol. 1- page no. 213.

<sup>4</sup> . ibid. – page no. 172.

<sup>5</sup> . ibid. – page no. 259.

<sup>6</sup> . Select Inscription, vol.-1 –page no. 199

which was the oldest inscription of music. These inscriptions revealed about Pallava king Mahendra Varma (6<sup>th</sup> century A.D.) was well versed in playing the veena. 'Māndasor Stone Inscriptions'(436 A.D.- 473 A.D.) of Kumargupta, also mentioned the word 'Kinnar'<sup>7</sup>.

### 3. CONCLUSION

So Inscription is a piece of important evidence which helps us not only to know about the king but also give all accurate information (even date) of the kingdom. Some inscriptions conduct monarchical orders regarding administration, some are conveyed religious environments. The famous and vast inscription of the king Ashoka, the Hatigumpha inscription of kharbela, the Allahabad pillars of inscription Samudragupta, and much other rock and pillar inscription consists of social, political, and religious matter. 'Junagarh rock inscription' also demonstrated the state of wealthy culture of king Rudradaman. Many inscriptions of Samudra Gupta and other Gupta kings can be shown that in this era India reached the highest peak of achievement in the cultural field.

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<sup>7</sup>. *ibid* - page no. 290.