

## SHODH SAMAGAM

ISSN : 2581-6918 (Online), 2582-1792 (PRINT)



# Study of Prakrit Inscriptions Deotek and Chandala forest Rock-Cut Cave from Vidarbha Region, Maharashtra

Nishant Sunil Zodape, Ph.D. Scholar,  
Department of Ancient Indian History, Culture and Archaeology,  
Visva Bharati, Santiniketan, West Bengal, INDIA

### ORIGINAL ARTICLE



### Corresponding Author

Nishant Sunil Zodape, Ph.D. Scholar,  
Department of Ancient Indian History,  
Culture and Archaeology,  
Visva Bharati, Santiniketan,  
West Bengal, INDIA

shodhsamagam1@gmail.com

Received on : 15/03/2022

Revised on : -----

Accepted on : 22/03/2022

Plagiarism : 09% on 16/03/2022



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Study of Prakrit inscriptions Deotek and Chandala forest rock-cut cave from Vidarbha region, Maharashtra NISHANT SUNIL ZODAPE Ph.D. Scholar, Department of Ancient Indian History, Culture and Archaeology, Visva Bharati, Santiniketan, West Bengal Nishantzodape9@gmail.com Abstract Inscriptions are one of the most reliable tools of ancient history. Inscriptions are often found on rock or copper plates.

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### ABSTRACT

Inscriptions are one of the most reliable tools of ancient history. Inscriptions are often found on rock or copper plates. The oldest inscription in Vidarbha is inscribe by Ashoka's Mahamatras. It is found in Deotek village in Chandrapur. district. It is containing Ashoka's teachings. Excavations at Pauni and Adam yielded many inscriptions from the Shunga, Satavahana period. A inscription of Mahakshatrap Rupiamma has been found at Paunii. Ancient inscriptions have been found in the caves of Chandala, Patur etc. The inscriptions in the Nashik caves light on Buddhism in Vidarbha, which has helped a lot in the study of history, religion and culture of Vidarbha. In this paper details discussion about Deotek and Chandala inscriptions.

### KEY WORDS

Vidarbha, Chandala, Cave, Okiyasa, Putasa, Ashokan Inscriptions.

### INTRODUCTION

Vidarbha is in central part of India. It is historically important from past to present time. In this region archaeological remains related to Buddhism found in large scale. All type of evidences has been unearthed. Excavated sites, stupa sites, coin, epigraphical evidences, sculpture etc. is related to Buddhism. Pauni, Adam, Bhon and Mansar are stupa sites. These are the excavated sites. Deotek, Chandala, Pauni etc. having epigraphical evidences. Mahurzari sealing may be Buddhist evidence. Vihara sites are Bhadravati, Patur, Chandala, etc., Bhadravati rock-cut only having direct evidence of Buddhism other cave

are not direct evidence Buddhism.

Inscription have a unique general significance in the field of archeology. While studying Buddhism in Vidarbha, excavation evidence, ancient coins, inscriptions, copper plates etc. have to be used. Engraving is very important in all these tools. The script, language, personal names, village names, geographical structure, contemporary social, political and cultural conditions are reflected in the ancient Buddhist writings of Vidarbha. Moreover, the information obtained from inscriptions and copper-plates is considered to be the most reliable historical evidence. Evidence before Ashoka's account is not yet available in Vidarbha. The following records give information about Buddhism in Vidarbha.

## **Environment of Vidarbha**

Geographically, Vidarbha lies on the northern part of the Deccan Plateau Unlike the Western Ghats, there are no major hilly areas. The Satpura range lies to the North of Vidarbha region in Madhya Pradesh. Wain ganga is the largest river in Vidarbha with Kanhan and Wardha being the two other big rivers which drain the region.<sup>1</sup> (Joglekar, 2017)

Nagpur and Wardha districts are under the Deccan traps and other districts formation is Archean and Gondwana. The Archean, Dharwars the Cuddappahs and the Vindhyan all are exposed in Chandrapur, Nagpur and Bhandara districts<sup>2</sup> (Dikshit: 1986).

Eastern Maharashtra is therefore virtually a museum of a whole sequence of rocks from the Archean to Cambrian (Dikshit, 1986)

## **Previous Work and Review**

Chandala forest cave inscriptions were discovered in 1971. Dr. S.B. Deo, Dr. Chandrashekar Gupta, Bhageshree Kale, Dr. Pradip Meshram and Reshma Sawant working on it. Firstly, article had been written by Dr. S.B. Deo and Dr. Chandrashekar Gupta in Marathi language. Later on, Chandrashekar Gupta was published another article under the title of Chandala rock inscriptions in Journal on epigraphical society of India. He discussed about meaning of inscriptions and relation between trade, trade route and trader. Bhageshree kale has been published article in Journal of Epigraphical society of India under title of Inscriptions in Chandala forest. She discussed social and economic perspective. Dr. Pradip Meshram writes in his books about these inscriptions. Pradeep Meshram Book name is Vidarbhatil Buddha Dhammacha Itihas in Marathi language. Reshma Sawant in her book Historical Archaeology of Vidarbha make a relation between Pauni Inscription and Chandala inscriptions.

Deotek village is 7 km east of Nagbhid taluka headquarters in Chandrapur district. Chikambari village is nearby. The credit for discovering this inscription goes to Cunningham's assistant Beglar. He had gone to Deotek in the year 1873-74. Cunningham wrote a description of the temple and the stone near the inscription. He also proved his reading by taking an eye-copy of the carved inscription. In the year 1935, V.V. Mirashi visited Deotek and took the stumpages and write on inscription. Mirashi has been kept in the Maurya period with an understanding of Ashoka's Dharmamahatra. Henry Cousins, Rai Bahadur Hiralal, Lud, S. B. Deo, Ajaymitra Shastri gave such scholarly remarks. Dr. Padeep Meshram and Dr. Deeraj Choudhary has been written review with help of recent evidence from Bhivkund and Chandankheda makes it clear that the inscriptions have nothing to do with Emperor Ashoka. (Chaudhary, 2010) (Kambale, 2013, p. 17)

## **Deotek Inscription**

The oldest inscription in Vidarbha is at Deotek near Nagbhid in Chandrapur district. It's inscribed by Ashoka's Dharma Mahamatra and dates back to the 3rd century BC. it contains an old temple in a dilapidated and a large stone slab bearing two epigraphs. Out of two inscriptions, one dates back to the time of Ashoka (Mirashi, New Light on Deotek Inscriptions, in studies in indology I, 1986, pp. 125-134) and the other to the Vakatakas.



*Deotek inscription slab Nagpur Museum (Mirashi, Siddham, 2017)*

The inscription dated to Mauryan period is four-line inscription with characters of the early Brahmi alphabet resembling in many cases those of Girnar edicts of Ashoka. The language is early Prakrit, similar to the used in the Girnar edicts. The object of inscription was to record the command of some lord (Sami) prohibiting the capture and slaughter (evidently of some animals in certain seasons as in Asoka 5<sup>th</sup> pillar edict, or may be throughout the year) and declaring some punishment for those who dared to disobey it. The third line mentions executive officers (amacha= amatyah) whose duty may have been to enforce these orders. The last line contain the date 14, denoting probably the regnal year in which the record was incised.

In some of his inscriptions (e.g., Rupnath Rock inscription). Ashoka orders his officers to get his edicts engraved on stone pillars, rocks and stone slabs throughout the districts in their charge. The Deotek inscription probably is the only instance of its kind. According to V.V. Mirashi (Mirashi, New Light on Deotek Inscriptions, in studies in indology I , 1986)

#### **Text**

1. *Sami Antrepayati Chikan (Ba) Ris - Sa (Pa)*
2. *Hananto bandhato va tas daso - nidha*
3. *Amcha*
4. *Rano Lesho x x x x 10 (+) 4 Badhe*

#### **Chandala forest cave Inscriptions**

Chandala forest is 55 kms. to the South-West of Nagpur. It is approach- able from Pullar. The caves under the present study are situated in the deep forest at present and are on the hillocks, facing east. The cave bearing the inscriptions is in the most dilapidated condition. Its stone walls are lying helter-skelter, braving the vagaries of the nature. Quite a few stones having inscriptions of this cave attract the attention.<sup>3</sup> (Kale, 1994)



*Chandala Cave Present Condition dated September 2020*

#### **Discovery of Chandala cave Inscriptions**

April, 1971 an accidental discovery revealed two rock inscriptions written in early Brahmi characters, in the Chandala forest range situated in the Nagpur District. The inscriptions were first seen by Bhandarkar, an officer of the forest department who informed S.G. Chatte, former teacher in

the neighboring village, Chatte communicated the same to Dr. S.B. Deo, the then Head of the Dept. of Ancient Indian History, Culture. and Archaeology of the Nagpur University. Dr. Deo published a short news in the local newspapers along with the photographs. Notes on the readings and interpretation of the inscriptions were later published by Chandrashekhar Gupta and Dr. Deo in the local journals.<sup>4</sup> (Gupta C. , 1976)<sup>5</sup> (Gupta C. , 1971)<sup>6</sup> (Deo, Mandhaljavadil Lekhyukta Prachin Lene, 1972)

One such inscription is as under:

1. *Va(?)sa Vadalaka putasa*
2. *Apalasangamati Kamma*

**Meaning:** Chandala cave worked by Vadalaka son Apala or with permission of apala.



### Chandala cave Inscription

The type of stones is typical basalt of the Deccan trap. After polishing the stone, the matter was inscribed. Seven- teen alphabets and two anuswaras are adjusted in the space of eleven inches by twenty-eight inches (27 cm x 70 cm) each alphabet is the size of cm 7. All these alphabets are meticulously inscribed and very clear. The script is Brahmi without any ornamentation. It is very simple and attractive. There is even space provided between two alphabets. The paleographical features indicate, according to Dr. S.B. Deo, former director of Deccan College Research Institute, that the inscription belongs to third century B.C.

One more equally important inscription is identified near the said stone wall. Only four alphabets are inscribed here. The reading is as under:

*Okiyasa*

**Meaning:** Name of person (For the making of cave okiya has been given donation.)



### Second Chandala cave Inscription

The alphabets measure 5cm in height and are adjusted in the space of 10" (25 cm). The word okiyasa might be the name of a person. It may be of a later period could be stated from the paleographical features as suggested by okiyasa. These alphabets are also in the Brahmi script without ornamentation. Though they are carved on the similar type of polished stone, they are not artistically inscribed, nor are they in one line. Space between two alphabets is also uneven.<sup>7</sup> (Kale, 1994) Language of Both Inscriptions is Prakrit.

## CONCLUSION

Chandala cave inscriptions is very important for reconstruction of past history of Vidarbha. It is the one of the earliest inscriptions of Nagpur district that inscriptions words like Vandalaka, Putasa, Apala, Okiyasa. Different scholars given different opinion about the meaning of inscriptions that's I explain above.

One word coming is Putasa. Kunghada inscription having Putasa word. That means there was a tradition given father name, now also in Vidarbha region same tradition going on after the name of person given father name, so from second century BCE this tradition continuous now also in Vidarbha region. Scholars given date of this inscriptions from third century BCE to first century BCE, but my opinion is period of this inscriptions are second to third century BCE.

Vidarbha is a very important area about study of Buddhism in this area related Buddhism every type of evidence found in this area for example stupa, Vihara, sculpture, archaeological sites, coins, antiquities etc. Chandada inscriptions are rock-cut cave inscriptions. 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE in that's period Buddhism in his peak all over India having evidence of related to Buddhism. In this period most of caves are Buddhist cave. Maybe Chandala was Hinyana cave. S.B. Deo also writes about Hinyana tradition in this region because Adam stupa, Pauni stupa, Deotek inscriptions, Kunghada rock-cut cave inscription, Pullar inscription and Bhadravati Buddhist rock-cut cave are near from Chandala and Puani inscription having same name Vadalaka. For the meaning and explanation of Inscriptions, I agree with Dr. S.B and Dr. Pradeep Meshram. One more thing is we can say it is Buddhist cave and inscription because Dr. Chandrashekar Gupta write in article Chandala was in trade route. So, most of the Buddhist cave and stupa was in ancient trade route. It is possible to it was a Buddhist cave made for the monk.

Swami's (Ashoka's) command that no one should violence animals. It was inscribed in the 14<sup>th</sup> year of his coronation. Chikamburi is mentioned in the present inscriptions. This place is Chikmara near present day Deotek.

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### Footnotes

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