

Epigraphy

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Definition

- Study of inscription
- An inscription means an old engraved record.
- “Epigraphy is the study of inscriptions and inscriptions literally means any writing engraved on some object.”
- Immense value for the reconstruction on ancient Indian history for they provide an authentic evidence
- Contemporary political, social, economic, religious and cultural conditions

Definition

- Lithic, metallic, earthen, wooden objects
- Pottery, bricks, shells, Ivory plaques

History Of Indian Epigraphy

- Earliest written record : Indus Valley people
- They new art of writing seen on their seals and pottery
- Still undeciphered
- Earliest written record engraved on stones are Ashokan Inscription in 3rd C. B.C
- They Contain word like Lipi, Libi, Dipi all mentioning Script
- Brahmi and Kharoshti were prevalent in the time of Ashoka
- Sohagaura and Ghosundi are the earliest , even before Ashoka

Types and Features Of Inscriptions

- Broadly classified into two main groups
 1. Inscription issued by a ruling authority or on its behalf. Eg: Inscriptions of Ashoka, King Kharvela, Gautamiputra Satkarni
 2. Inscriptions issued by Private Individuals or private organizations Eg : records of donations (endowments) made in favour of religious establishment Or installation of images for worship

The First Category can again be divided into four types

1. Royal edicts: Edicts of Ashoka
2. Epigraphs regarding endowment grants in favour of learned Brahmans, religious institutions or deserving individuals. Eg: Inscriptions at Kanheri, Kuda
3. Epigraphs commemorating particular achievements of a King in a eulogistic form known as Prasasti. Eg: Eulogy of Samudragupta on Allahabad pillar inscription, King of Satkarni in Nashik cave, Hathigumpha inscription of King Kharvel
4. Miscellaneous inscriptions: issued either by private individuals or private institutions. Eg: record in favor of religious establishment or installation of images

Commercial Inscriptions

- Indus valley seals
- Clay seal inscription found at Bhokardan (Jalna) In Maharashtra, which was personal seal of a female trader named Indra from Thanenagara. In prakrit language and Brahmi Script in 2nd century AD.

It provides very valuable information like,

1. Thane existed in 2nd c AD
2. Commercial contact between Thane and Bhokardan. Flourishing as the trade centers
3. Active participation of Women in commercial activities in Ancient India

Magical Inscriptions

- Found at Indus Valley
- Used at amulets and contained magical formula on them
- But undeciphered
- It continued to be written on metals and birch bark or other materials

Religious and Didactic Inscriptions

- Deals with the religious and moral matters. Eg : Inscriptions of Ashoka. It contained moral codes like
 1. Samyam : mastery over senses
 2. Bhavashuddi : Purity of Thought
 3. Kritajnata : Gratitude
 4. Dridh – Bhakti : Steadfastness of devotion
 5. Daya : Kindness
 6. Dana: Charity
 7. Saucha : Purity
 8. Satya : truthfulness
 9. Shushrusha : Service
 10. Sampriti patti : Support
 11. Apichiti : Reverence

Dedicative and Donative Inscriptions

- Record of the donations or endowments made for religious establishments.
- On the wall of a temple or religious establishment and the pilgrim centers
- Kuda, Kanheri, Karle, Bhaje , Mahad, Temples at Bhubaneswar, Kanchipuram and Aihole
- Majority made by Pilgrims, kings, chiefs or the royal officers, traders and common people
- Women also made endowments to the religious institutions
- Bikkhus and Khikkunus : Kanheri, Kuda

- Utensils, images of worship, cell, benches, water cisterns, caves, chaitya, residential rooms etc
- Money : Karshapana or Dramma
- Cow and land grants to Brahmins

Administrative Inscriptions

- Provided information about administrative system
- Eg: two edicts of Kalinga and edict number VI of Ashoka gives a clear picture of his ideal of Kingship
- Its gives information about provincial administration – Four provinces Taxila, Ujjain, Toshali and Suvarnagiri
- Reference of certain officers like Yuktas, Rajukas, Pradeshikas, Dharma- Mahamatras
- Another Category – Sohagaura copper plate inscription of 3rd century B.C

Eulogistic Inscriptions

- Also called as Prasasti
- Engraved on stone tablets or pillars
- It contains name and genealogy of the issuing rulers, early life of the king, his personal achievement
- Eg: Gautamiputra Satkarni in Nashik caves, Allahabad pillar inscription of Samudragupta, King Kharvela in Hathigumpha inscription
- Mostly composed by the poets like Harisena for Allahabad inscription and Ravi Kirti for Aihole inscription

The epigraphs regarding Royal Grants of Land

- Generally engraved on copper plates called Tamrapatra, Danapatra, Tamrasasana
- Sohagaura copper plate of 3rd C. B. C – earliest copper plate inscription
- Many land grants recorded.

