

Chapter 7

Stone Inscriptions of Srinagar: A Digital Panorama

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ABSTRACT

Traditional monuments are repositories of various types of inscriptions including both epigraphs and epitaphs and are a means for gaining knowledge about historical facts and events. Inscriptions have associated historical and intellectual value, and therefore, need to be identified and digitized in order to preserve these intellectual assets and make their knowledge content accessible at a global level. This chapter is an attempt towards identification, documentation, and creation of a digital collection of stone inscriptions available in various monumental structures at Srinagar. The work mainly involves identification of historical monuments in Srinagar with a rich inscription collection. These inscriptions constitute an important addition to the corpus of known historical texts from different historical time periods. The study analyses their content and attempts to provide associated metadata and related information about each identified inscription by collecting data through reading the inscriptions, discussions and consultations with concierge and local people, and by consulting other secondary sources pertaining to such inscriptions. High definition digital cameras were used to capture images. Greenstone Digital Library Software was used for managing the digital collection for preserving and disseminating the historical facts available in the form of inscriptions which forms a means for bridging the void between known and unknown facts about our social, historical, and cultural aspects.

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INTRODUCTION

Ancient Monuments, especially Mosques, Tombs, Mausoleums, Graveyards, Shrines, or whatever, are important components of our heritage. They contain important records of high historical value. Most of such records are engraved on stones in the form of inscriptions. Inscription can be defined as anything written on the material by the creator or the activity of inscribing especially carving or engraving letter's or word's. Inscriptions are of various types. The common types are epigraphs (an engraved inscription) and epitaph's (an inscription on tombstone or monuments in memory of a person buried there) (Ahmad, 2005). The importance of the inscriptions lies in the fact that they generally offer information about personages and events of history, about which nothing or very little is known from any other source. Apart from being vital political documents, inscriptions are endowed with great cultural significance. Perhaps there is no aspect of life which is not touched upon in inscriptions. They are also endowed with high literary value and are far-flung in time and space. It is noteworthy that some inscriptions in south India reflect the ethos and mores of the period under which they were written. An inscription from Heragu in Hassan district, Karnataka, belonging to the Hoysala dynasty (1217 A.D.) gives the names of some members of a Kashmiri family which had migrated to that village in Karnataka from Bhadrahu in Gula-vishaya, a sub-division of Krama-rajya in Kasmira-rashtra. It is interesting to note that this migrant Kashmiri family contracted marriage alliances with the local families (Importance of Epigraphy, 2011).

EPIGRAPHY AS A SOURCE OF HISTORY

India is enormously rich in epigraphical wealth. It is estimated that so far more than one lakh inscriptions have been discovered from the length and breadth of the country through the collective efforts of various agencies like Archaeological Survey of India, State Departments of Archaeology and various research institutions. However, still a large number of inscriptions are to be discovered. It is only from a patient and painstaking study of a large number of connected inscriptions that a reconstruction of not only the political and dynastic history, but also the social, religious, administrative, and economic history of a particular period or reign or region could be undertaken.

SCRIPTS USED IN NORTHERN INDIA

In north India, the Brahmi script was used over a vast area. Besides Brahmi, Asokan inscriptions are also found using Kharoshthi, Aramaic, and Greek scripts. The Gupta script is considered to be the successor of the Kushana script in north India. From the 6th to about 10th century A.D., the inscriptions in north India were written in a script which was called by different names like Siddhamatrika and Kutila. From the 8th century A.D., the Siddhamatrika script developed into Sarada script in Kashmir and Punjab, into Proto-Bengali or Gaudi in Bengal and Orissa and into Nagari in other parts of north India. Nagari script was used widely in northern India from the 10th century onwards.

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