Performers and Sites of the Ashwamedha Yagya in Medieval India

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Abstract. India has a very rich cultural history. The Ashwamedh Yagya, an important ritual and experiment from Vedic times, aimed to refine consciousness. Since the Vedic era, many Ashwamedha Yagyas have been performed. In light of scriptural texts and archaeological findings, the present study aimed to retrospectively analyze the performers and sites of the Ashwamedha Yagya in medieval India. The study found that 27 kings from 18 dynasties had performed a total of 81 documented Ashwamedha Yagyas from the 1st century BCE to the 18th century CE. Although the study tried to comprehensively identify all instances of Ashwamedha performed in medieval India, there may be more awaiting further study. The study observed that these findings were based on archaeological evidence, including copper plate inscriptions, stone inscriptions, brick and pillar inscriptions, yagya kunds, and coins. Ashwamedha sites were present throughout present-day India. An interdisciplinary approach combining archaeological, inscriptive, scriptural, and sociological findings, along with expertise from ritualistic scholars, could unveil new research directions on the rich history of Ashwamedha Yagya in Indian culture.

Keywords. Ashwamedha (asvamedha) (aśvamedha) (Ashvamedha) (Aswamedha) Yagya, Archeology, Inscription, Medieval dynasty
Introduction

India has a very rich cultural history. The Indian scriptures are replete with examples of many practices that involve the refinement not only of human consciousness but also of the whole ecosystem. The Acharyas and experts address this practice with the help of yagya. The scriptures are full of descriptions of different kinds of yagya for attaining specific purposes.

The ritual of different types of yagyas also involves specific knowledge of the types of herbs used, size, and dimensions of kund and Mandap [1]. Importantly, these are highly spiritual experiments where, as suggested in Vedic literature, divine energy plays a role in the upliftment of human consciousness. The first mantra of Rigveda - 

अ॒िग्नमी ॑ळ े पु॒रोिह॑तं य॒ज्ञस्य॑ दे॒वमृ ॒ȥत्वज॑म् । हो- । तरं रत्नाधात॑मम् ॥

agnim īḻe purohitaṃ yajñasya devam ṛtvijam | hotāraṃ ratnadātāmam || implies that the agni is the purohit (priest) in this sacred spiritual act (yagya) [2].

Ashwamedh Yagya is one such important ritual and experiment of Vedic times, where the purpose is to refine consciousness. Ashwamedha Yagya plays an important role not only in uplifting individual consciousness but also the collective consciousness. In the Shatpath Brahman (13.1.6), it is stated that "Rashtram va Ashwamedha" [3], which implies the real meaning of Ashwamedha Yagya is to administer and manage the country efficiently, which not only involves human resources but also the ecosystem.

In more detail, as per Shatpath Brahman 13/1/6/3,

"राष्ट्रांनि अश्वमेदह राष्ट्र एते व्यावर्त्तम एवं राष्ट्रं वृत्तदा न तद्रभवति राष्ट्रं शुभवति राष्ट्रं भवति। न ज्ञाता अश्वमेद यज्यवह 'यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा यज्यथा 

Ashwamedh Yagya is referred to as the formation of a Rashtra (nation). According to it, the whole Rashtra is Ashvamedha. Here, the nation does not mean the geographical territory of a kingdom but rather the cultural widespread. Hence, in Indian history, when a king conquered nations, the victory was followed by the performance of Ashvamedha Yagya to ensure the cultural coexistence of the entire territory. Here, the horse of Yagya was the symbol of universal harmony and cultural unity [4].

Since the Vedic era, many Ashwamedha Yagyas were performed from time to time serving the same aim as described in Shatpath Brahman 13.1.6. In light of scriptural texts and archaeological findings, the present study aimed to retrospectively analyze the Ashwamedha Yagya sites and performers from the Vedic to the medieval eras.

Performers and Sites of Ashwamedha Yagya in Medieval India

The Vedas describe the use of Ashwamedha yagya. As well as the most remarkable events of Indian history, i.e. the era of Mahabharat and Ramayan, also mentioned its performance in detail. Later, in recent medieval history, archaeological remains of Ashwamedha yagya have been found. Some of the archaeological sites and stone inscriptions observed by the present study are described as follows:

1) King Silavarman, Jagatgram, Dehradun, Uttarakhand

According to the Archaeological review report 1982-83 and Taittiriya Samhita, Khand 7, scriptures describe Syena chitti (a type of Yagya Kund, a fire altar) as an important part of Ashwamedha yagya [5, 6].

Excavation of Jagatgram, District of Dehradun Uttarakhand (30 miles to the northwest of Dehradun, and within a couple of miles from the rock-edict of Asoka at Kalsi) at 1952-53, revealed a sight of Ashwamedha yagya conducted by the king Silavarman. In the preliminary exploration, archaeologists found three sites where King Silavarman performed Ashwamedha Yagya fourth time in the 3rd century A.D. along

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with that they also discovered Syena chitti from the first site bore.

The Sanskrit inscriptions in Brahmi script of the 3rd century A.D. revealed information about the king, the place of chiti and the king’s fourth horse sacrifice. The inscriptions of the second site provided information on the king’s genealogy and his personality. The king performed the Ashwamedha Yagya once every five years for the purification of the nation and people. The third site also showed the relics of another horse sacrifice performed by King Silavarman of Varsaganya dynasty.

Figure 1: Archaeological Ashwamedha site of Jagatgram, Dehradun, site 1 (top) and site 2 (bottom).

Figure 2: Inscription bricks of Ashwamedha Yagya sites in Jagatgram, Dehradun. The left image translates as "This brick is from (belongs to) the Ashwamedh of (performed by) Silavarman, king of Yugasaila and a Yugesvara or lord of lustrum." The right image translates as "This is the altar of the fourth horse-sacrifice performed by the king Silavarman, who was a descendant (gotra) of Vrikshasana and was sixth in descent from the king Pona Vamsa II" [8–11].

The inscriptions on the bricks read as follows: the king Silavarman was post king Kushan and pre king Gupta i.e. between 250 AD to 300 AD. In the excavation of 1962-63, archaeologists found Ashwamedha kund (altars) with an inscription in the third site [7]. In the years 1969-1970, experimental studies were carried out for the preservation of bricks of Ashvamedha site of Kalsi [10].

2) Purola, Uttarkashi, Uttarakhand

The Department of Ancient History, Culture, and Archaeology, Garhwal University, carried out excavations of Syena chitti at Purola. In a mound, locally known as Entakot, they found a brick structure identified as a Syena chitti (Figure 3).

Figure 3: ‘Shyena chitti’ at Purola, Uttarkashi, Uttarakhand. [12]

It measured 24 x 18 m, laid in the east-west direction in the shape of a flying Garuda (Leptoptilos dubius), the head being exactly towards the east, the tail towards the west (Figure 3), and the two outstretched wings to the north and south, thus indicating the bird is almost in a flying position. A square central chamber, measuring 60 x 60 cm, with a depth of 2.60 m, was found in the middle of the altar ‘Syena chitti’. The bricks employed in constructing the bird-like structure were predominantly large-sized, measuring 80 x 50 x 11 cm (typically at the corners) and 50 x 50 x 11 cm and 55 x 40 x 11 cm (utilized on the inner side of the altar).

The structure suffered damage from repeated floods in the river Kamal, resulting in the sweep-
ing away of its left wing and tail section. Evidence of this damage was observed in the foundation wall of the tail, where repairs were undertaken using rubble fillings. The reconstruction of the altar indicated a history of prolonged and continuous use over many centuries [12]. In this site coins of Kuninda dynasty were also found. The coins belong to the Great King Amoghabhuti, of the Kunindas. He belongs to the Sunga-Kushan period of the 2nd century BC-3rd century AD [13].

3) King Sawai Jai Singh, Jaipur, Rajasthan

According to the book written by Shri Krishna Bhatt Kavi Kalanidhi [14], it refers to the performance of Ashwamedh Yagya in Jaipur, Rajasthan.

अभूद्धि ब्रह्मपुरि द्विजानं तदक्षिणामूृसमुद्धिभाजाम्।
गृहे व सम्यग वितात्ध्वशु सुरेश्वराह्वानमजस्रमेव।

Abhuddhibramhapuri dvijanam tadkshinabhumisamuddhivahajam, Ghrusheshu samyag vittadhvreshu sureshvarahnamjashram [14].

It implies that the king Jai Singh had performed the Ashwamedh Yagya and built Brahmpuri colony for Brahmins of Prayag in the north of the area known as Purani Basti. These priests (Brahmins of Prayag) were invited by the king Jai Singh for Ashwamedh Yagya. The king performed this Ashwamedh Yagya in 1734 at Kanak Vrindavan Jaipur Rajasthan [14, 15]. According to Tod, Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan, Sawai Jai Singh of Kachhawaha performed Aswamedh Yagya twice [16].

4) King Satakarni I, Naneghat, Mountain pass in Maharashtra

There are two inscriptions available for Ashwamedh yagya reference related to Satavahan dynasty. First inscription was a stone inscription of Shivghosh, which was on the image of yakshi deity mentioning Ashwamedha yagya conducted by Satavahanas [17]. The second inscription was Naneghat inscription about Satavahanas genealogy and was about information of Ashwamedha yagya performed by Satakarni I. He was the 3rd king of Satavahanas and ruled around 70-60 BC, he performed two Ashwamedha Yagya and revived Vedic Brahmanism in the Deccan [18]. His wife the queen Nayanika wrote this Naneghat inscription, which describes the king as Dakshinadhipati. This inscription was first published by James Burgess in 1883 in an archeological survey report of caves in western India (Figure 4) [19].

In the left wall of the Naneghat inscriptions (Figure 4, top image) had 10 lines; among them line number 2, stated

“......vīrāsa sūraṣa apratihatacakasā
dakhināpāṭhapatino raño simukasātavāhanasā
suhnāya ......”

It implies that the king Satakarni I was known as dakshinadhipati (the king of south).

In the right wall of the Naneghat inscriptions (Figure 4, bottom image) had 8 lines; among them first line stated

“...daṃñgiritaṃsapayutaṃ sapaṭo 1 aso 1
asaratho 1 gāvinaṃ 100 asamedho bitiyo giṭho
dakhināyo dinā aso rupālaṃkāro 1 suvaṃna ....
ni 12 dakhinā dinā kāhāpanā 14,000 gāmo 1 haṭhi
....... dakhinā dinā”

It implies that the king performed ‘two Ashwamedha’ yagya and donations in ample amounts [20, 21] (pp. 188).

Figure 4: Naneghat inscriptions in Brahmi script dated to about the 2nd century BCE; Left wall of Naneghat inscription - 10 lines (top image); Right image - 8 lines of Naneghat inscription (bottom image). [19]
5) Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh

Prayagraj is the most famous site since ancient times. There are a number of references in the Puranas stating that various Gods, Goddesses, and Kings have performed yagya in Prayag. The term Prayag has been given because Lord Brahma had performed the first Prakrati Yagya in this place. In the archaeological studies in 1982-83 in Kaushambi, Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, the remains of a syena chitti were found near the Ashok pillar [22] (pp. 190). According to the scriptures, the ancient name of Prayagraj is Kaushambi and it was the capital of the Puru Dynasty (Pandavas) established by King Nichakshu [23]. However, the Brahma Purana mentioned that in Prayag (currently known as Prayagraj), Lord Rama had performed one hundred Ashwamedha yagyas [25].

It implies that Lord Rama propitiated the gods by performing Paundarika, Ashwamedha, Vajapeya, and other sacrifices (yagya) many times [24].

6) Bharshiva, Kashi, Uttar Pradesh

Kashi (Varanasi) is very famous as a Teerth (pilgrimage place) and one of the most ancient and sacred cities of ancient India which also exists today with the same name. It is also known as Dashashwamedh (Dasha (ten) - Ashwamedha) Teertha. According to Skanda Purana, Kashi king Divodas organized ten Ashwamedha Yagyas [26].

According to tradition, the name Dashashwamedh originates from Brahma’s performance of the ten Ashwamedha Yagyas. Initially, the Dashashwamedh Ghat was referred to as Rudrasaras in Indian scriptures, where Ashwamedha Yagya was conducted and two Shivalings were installed. Subsequently, the place underwent a name change to Dashashwamedh Ghat to honor this tradition. Regarding the renaming of the ghat, archaeologist Jayaswal suggests that in the second century AD, following the Kushanas’ defeat, the kings of Bharshiva from the Naga dynasty conducted ten Ashravamedha Yagyas [26–28] at this section of the Ganges in Kashi to seek the favor of Lord Shiva.

According to the book “Epigraphia Indica vol 1” published in 1892, an inscription has been found in Balaghat, Madhya Pradesh, stating that Bharshiva performed Ashwamedha Yagya in Kashi and initiated their Kingdom [29].

Also, another inscription of the Vakataka dynasty found in the Ajanta cave mentioned that King Bharshiva performed Ashwamedha Yagya ten times (Figure 5) [30]. In the Figure 5, the inscription, line number 9-10, stated that “Dasasvamedhavarbhritisnatanam bharasihvanam maharaja-sri-bhavanagadau”, it implies that the king Bharshiva of Naga dynasty performed 10 Ashwamedha Yagyas and took a bath in the Ganges (Bhagirathi) [30].

7) Pushyamitra Sunga, Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh

Ayodhya is an ancient teerth and is the birthplace of Lord Rama. King Vaivswat Manu Chakravarty has performed Maha-Yagya continuously at Ayodhya, which made the place so...
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powerful that the scriptures described that during his ruling time, there was no suffering or death at this place.

In an archaeological survey, it has been found that the King Pushyamitra Sunga performed two Ashwamedha Yagyas, which were found in the inscriptions written by his descendant Dhanadeva of the kingdom Ayodhya (Kosala). King Pushyamitra Sunga was the first Maharaja in the family who ruled from about 535 CE to 556 CE. King Pushyamitra Sunga built a fortress on a hill at Vatapi (Badami) and celebrated his accession by performing Ashwamedha Yagya [30].

A brick wall with the inscriptions has been noticed according to which King Pushyamitra performed two Ashwamedha Yagyas [30] (Figure 6) [21]. Transcript line 1 written in Brahmi reads as “कोसलाधिपेन द्रिश्यामेध-याजिने: सेनापतेः पुष्यामत्रस्य शाकु-पुत्रेण धान...” [21] (pp. 96), it implies that two Ashwamedha Yagyas were performed by King Pushyamitra Sunga.

Figure 6: Ayodhya inscription written by Dhanadeva, the descendant of King Pushyamitra Sunga [21] (pp. 96).

8) King Mahadevvarman II, Kongoda (Present day Ganjam, Khorda and Puri districts), Orissa

The three copper plates containing inscriptions of the king Ayasobhita II Madhyamaraja of Sailodbhavas dynasty, who were ruling at the place Kongoda (Ganjam, Khorda, and Puri districts in the Odisha state), in which verse 12 mentioned achievements of King Sainyabhitā Madhavavarman II stating him as the one who performed Ashwamedha Yagya. Kongoda was the capital of Sailodbhavas dynasty, it was the part of Kalinga on the bank of Salima river [32] (pp. 29).

Plate number 2 had two sides, from which the first side’s line number 27 (Figure 7) transcript stated,

“यम=वभिमताकिर्तिः रत्रि -मापाजीर= अजस्राम (स्राम) / यज्ञाइस=तार= आस्वामेधाप्रभृतिभिर= अमारा”

It implies that Ashwamedha Yagya was performed [32] (pp. 36).

Figure 7: Copper plate (Plate number - two side first) of the king Ayasobhita II Madhyamaraja of Sailodbhavas dynasty stating the performance of Ashwamedha Yagya [32] (pp. 36).

9) Pulkesin I Vatapi (Present day - Badami), Bagalkot district, Karnataka

Chalukyas Pulkesin I was the founder of the Chalukyas dynasty and ruled from 543-566 AD. His capital was Vatapi (present-day - Badami in Bagalkot district, Karnataka). He ruled over parts of the present-day states of Karnataka, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, and Telangana. To prove his sovereign status, Pulakesin I founded the city of Vatapi and performed the Ashwamedha sacrifice. King Pulkesin I is also known as King Vallabheshvara. The 18 inscriptions of King Vallabheshvara were found. They stated that King Pulkesin I performed the Ashwamedha Yagya at Vatapi [33]. Godhchi plates of Katti Asara also mentioned the same [33] (pp. 60).

Inscriptions on Godhchi plates of Katti Asara[33]:

1. Svasti [*] Svāmi-Mahāsēna-Matrigan-ānuddhyāt-abhiśiktānām Mānavya-sa-
2. gṛtṝṅāṁ Hāritī-puṭrāṁ Ān Chalukyānāṁ Agnishtōm-Agnichayana-
3. Vajapeya-Bahusvarṇa-Paundarik-Asvamē[ḍhā] vabhṛtha-snāna-pa-

4. vitrīkṛita-śarīrasya Ranavikrama-

Dharmma-mahārājasya

5. priya-tanayah Katti-arasa-nāmadheyaḥ sarvva-śāstr-ārtta[rtha]-

Badami inscriptions of Challukya Vallabhe-

varman states (Figure 8) [34] (pp. 9):

1. Svasti [*] Saka-varshēshu chatuś-satēshu pañcha-shashti-yutēshu

2. Asvamedh-adi-yajñānām yajvā śrauta-

vidhānatah [[**]

3. Hiranyagarbha-sambhūtas Chalikyō Vallab-

hēśvaraḥ [||1||]

4. Dharādharendra-Vātāpim-ajēyam-bhūtaye bhuvah [||]

5. adhastad= uparishtach= cha durggam= ētad= achikarat [||2||[*]

It translates to “(Line 1) Hail! in the Saka years four hundred and sixty-five, (Lines 2-5) the Chalikya (king), Vallabhēśvara, performer of the Asvamēdha and other sacrifices according to the śrauta rites (and one), born of Hiranyagarbha made the best hill of Vātāpi (or Vātāpi in the best hill) into a fortress unconquerable from the top as well as from the bottom, for the prosperity of the earth.” [34] (pp. 9).

10) Southern India (Pallavas dynasty)

Four kings of the Pallavas dynasty are known to have performed the Ashwamedha yagya: they were King Sivakandavarman, King Kumarvisnu, King Simhavarman I, and King Nandivarman II.

1. King Sivakandavarman

The Pallava King Sivakandavarman of Kanchi issued a grant after performing the Ashwamedha yagya. According to the book "Epigraphica India" Vol. 1 published in 1892, on page 5, a copper plate grant of King Sivakandavarman (Hirahadagalli plates) states that he performed the Ashwamedha yagya [21] (pp. 437).

Figure 8: Badami inscriptions of King Pulakesin I, also known as King Vallabheshvara [36] (pp. 9).

Figure 9: The copper plate of the Pallava King Sivakandavarman [33] (pp. 5).

Transcript of the copper plate I, first page, second side [21] (pp. 437), [29, 33] (Figure 9), stated

1. कांचिपुराणा अगिन्द्रोमय व जयेच समेधयो जी धममहावि-

2. राजाविवेलो भारदावो पल्लवाण सिवखंदवमो

3. अम्ह विषये सज्ज सज्ज राजकुमार-सेनापति

1. Kanchipurav agitthomavAjapeyassamedhayaji
dhammahahd

2. rajadhiraço Bharaddayo Pallavana

Sivakhamadvamo

3. amham visayesavattharajakumārasenāpati.

It translates to, “Success! From Kamchhipura—the righteous supreme king of great kings of the Pallavas Sivakhamdvavama (Sivakandavarman), a Bharaddaya” (Bharad-

vaja) an offerer of Agniṣṭoma, Vajapeya and Āśvamedha (sacrifices) issues the following or-

ders (Figure 9)” [29] (pp. 7).
2. King Kumarvishnu

King Kumarvishnu performed the Ashwamedha yagya in the 4th century AD. The description of his Ashwamedha yagya (Figure 10) is found in the Omgodu grant. King Kumarvishnu was the first King of the Pallavas as mentioned in the plates issued by Vijay Sakandvarman [35] (pp. 248).

Transcript of the copper plate I, first side, stated,

1. **Svasti** vijaya- Tambrāpa-sthānāt
   Bhāradvāja- sagotrasya Pallavānām =
   Aśva-

2. **mēdha-yājinah** mahārājasya śri-
   Kumāravishnōh prapautrasy-otsā-

3. ha-prabhu-mantra-sakti-sampannasya svā-
   viry-adhigata-rājyasya mahārājasya

Figure 10: The copper plate of the Omgodu copperplate grant of Vijayskandvarman II mentioning King Kumarvishnu performing the Ashwamedha yagya [35] (pp. 249).

3. King Simhavarman

According to the archaeological study of Sivanvayal Pillar’s inscriptions of Chingleput District of Tamil Nadu, the Pallava King Simhavarman performed the Ashwamedha yagya [34] (pp. 60). King Simhavarman was the grandson of King Skandavarman I. Sivanvayal is a village situated 9 miles northeast of Chingleput district of Tamil Nadu. The language of the inscriptions on the pillar is Sanskrit, and paleography studies suggest that it belongs to the 7th century AD. According to the inscriptions on the pillar, Simhavarman performed ten Ashwamedha yagya (**daśāśvamedha**) (second side, second line).

Transcript of the copper plate, second side [34] (pp. 62), stated,

4. King Nandivarman II

According to the archaeological study of Udayendiram plates of Pallava King Nandivarman II published in India Antiquary Vol. III, the Pallava King Nandivarman II in the 8th century A.D. performed the Ashwamedha yagya [33] (pp. 15).

11) King Pravarsena I, Vidarbha (Present day Amaravati-Nagpur, Maharashtra), King Vakatakas (Pravarsena I)

In the Vakatas dynasty, King Pravarsena I performed the four Ashwamedha yagya (**chatur aśvamedha yajina**); according to the archaeological survey report of western India in 1875 by J. Burgess, a copper plate has been found [40] (pp. 112).

Transcript of the copper plate I, stated,

1. **Om Om svasti Pravarapurūd aggishṭom āp-
   toryamokhyashodaśy atrītira-

2. vajapeya brihaspaisavasadyaskrachatur-
   aśvamedhayajinah

3. Vishnu vriddhasagotrasya samrā
   [jo] Vakaṭakānām mahārāja-Srī-
   Pravarasenasya

4. sūnoh sūnoh atyantasvamimahabhairavabh-
   haktasya ansa/arhsa/bharasannivesi

5. taśivalingodvahanaśivasuparitushsamutpditarājava[m]/ś
Translation: “The illustrious Pravarasena, the great king of the Vakațakas, a universal ruler, who belonged to the Vishnuruddha gotra (dynasty), and offered (yagya), an Agnishtoma sacrifice, an Apter-yama, an Ukthya, a Brihaspatisava, a Sadyaskrn, and four Ashwamedha yagya; at the request of Prince Kondaraja, the destroyer of his foes, the village called Charmmanka, in the kingdom of Bhojakata, on the bank of the river Madhu, (and containing) eight thousand (8000) bhamis, measured by the royal measuring-rod, has been given to one thousand Brahmaņas belonging to various families and schools” [36] (pp. 120).

12) Madhava Varman I, Vishnukundis Kingdom (Present day Andhra Pradesh)

In the 6th century, the Vishnukundis King of Guntur, near Krishna Godavari region, Madhava Varman I stated in his own epigraphs that he conducted the Ashwamedha yagya. It is also confirmed by the epigraphs of his successors [37] (p. 280).

13) Rajadhiraj Chola (Eastern Chalukya and Kalinga)

King Rajadhiraj Chola also performed the Ashwamedha yagya in 1044 AD [38] (p. 180).

14) King Vashisthiputra Chamtamula, Andhra Pradesh

King Vashisthiputra Chamtamula performed the Ashwamedha yagya in the 3rd century BCE. He ruled in Vijaypuri (Nagaarjunikonda valley of Guntur district of Andhra Pradesh). He belonged to the Iksvaku dynasty. In the inscriptions of his sons and grandson, it was mentioned that he performed the Ashwamedha yagya (Figure 11) [21] (pp. 222, 227, 229). These inscriptions were discovered in 1882; they were 5 pillars of King Madhariputa Shri VeerPurushdata of the Iksvaku dynasty. The pillars were found in Amravati, Maharashtra, and the word “Ayeka khamba” was mentioned on these epigraphs. These pillars were installed by King Madhariputa Shri VeerPurushdata; King Vashishtputa Chamtamula was his father.

Inscriptions of the pillar [21] (pp. 222),

1. सधं [॥*] नमो भगवतो देवराज-सकतस संम-संम- संबुधस धातुवर-
2. परिगहितस महाचे्तये महारजस विरूखपति- महासेन-परिगहितस
3. अगिहोतागिहोगिटोम वाजपेयामेघ-वाजिस हिरणकोटि-गोसत-
4. सहस-हलसतसहस-पदायिस सदयेसु अपतिहत-संकपस
5. वासिती-पुतस इखाकुस सिरि-चातमूलस सोदराय भगिनिय हम-
6. सिरिणिकाय बालिका रंघो सिरि-विपुरिसदतस भया महादेवि बपिसिरिणकास

Inscriptions in English [40] (pp. 55),

1. [Si]dham namo bhagavato teloka-dhamma-dhura-vahasa mahārāja [sa Virū-]
2. [ps]khspati-Mahāsena-parigahitasa Agihot-Agithoma [Vājape-]
3. y-Asamedha-y [alyi(ji)sa hiramṇa-kotī-go-satasaha[sa-hala-sata-]
4. sahasa-padāi(yi)sa savathesu apatibata-samka[posa].
5. [Vä]sethiputasas Ikñakunam Sir-Chātamūlasa sun hālya [mahārāja-]
6. sa Madha[ri]putasa Ikñakunam Sir-Virapurisadatasa bhavaya ma-
Figure 11: King Vashisthiputra Chamtamula’s inscription of ‘detached pillar inscription G’ found in Nagaarjunikonda Valley, Guntur district of Andhra Pradesh mentioning the performance of the Ashwamedha yagya [40].

15) King Gajayana Sarvatata, Chittodgadh region of Rajasthan

Gajayana Sarvatata (1st century B.C.) of the Chittodgadh region of Rajasthan from the Kanva dynasty is mentioned as the performer of an Ashwamedha yagya in his ‘Ghosundi and Hathibada’ inscriptions [39] (pp. 175). These inscriptions are in Brahmi language circa the 2nd half of the 1st century BC. The Hathibada and Ghosundi inscriptions were found near Nagari village 13 km and Ghosundi village 4.8 km from Chittorgarh, respectively. The classical name of Ghosundi is Madhyamika [39] (pp. 27). The inscription mentioned that the king had performed the Ashwamedha yagya (Figure 12) [39] (pp. 27). Transcript of the brick inscription [21] (pp. 91-92) states,

1. (कारिते अर्था राजा भगवं) (ते) न“ गाजयनेन पाराशरी-पुजेण स-

2. (वंततेन अश्ववाता-यान) जिनाँ भगवं (व्र*) भ्यां संत्वक्षण-वासुदेवाभ्यां

3. (अनिहताभ्यां सतब्रश्व) भ्यां पूजा-शिलाप्राकारो नारायण-वाट्का

These inscriptions are very important since they are written in the mixed language of Sanskrit and Prakrit. It implies that the King of Gaya family, son of Parashari (woman of Parashar gotra) (पाराशरी-पुजेण - first line of the inscriptions) performed the Ashwamedha yagya (second line of the inscription). The purpose of this stone is to worship Lord Vishnu (Vasudeva) [21] (pp. 92).

Figure 12: ‘Ghosundi and Hathibada’ inscription of the Chittodgadh region of Rajasthan mentioning the performance of an Ashwamedha yagya by the king Gajayana Sarvatata [39] (pp. 27).

16) The King Devimitra (Musanagar brick inscription), village Musanagar, Kanpur District, Uttar Pradesh

The Musanagar brick inscription is found on a mound near the village Musanagar of Kanpur District. Locals believe that this place was ruled by King Bali in ancient times.

The Musanagar brick inscription (Figure 13) states,

“... be ke Aśvavātāyaniputasa Devamitasa aśvamedhah(dhaḥ)”.

It translates to “The Ashwamedha yagya of Devimita, son of Aśvavātāyanī, (performed at) beka...” [41] (pp. 118).

The dimension of the brick was 19 x 19 x 4 inches (length x width x height). The inscriptions were written on the marrow side [41] (pp. 118). The site of the Ashwamedha yagya was not clearly visible in the inscription.

According to the archaeological study, the King Devimitra (1st century BC) was the king of Ayodhya (the conclusion was made on the basis of studies of coins found and son of Asvavatayani (mother) [46] (pp. 4). It is noteworthy that in medieval times, people were known through the name of their mother’s gotra. This was also observed in the case of Pushyamitra Sunga [30].

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Figure 13: Musanagar brick inscription of the village Musanagar, Kanpur District, Uttar Pradesh stating Ashwamedh was performed by the king Devimitra [45] (pp 118).

17) King Vijay Devavarman, Vengipura (Present day Andhra Pradesh)

King Devavarman of the Salankayanas dynasty, in the 4th century A.D., performed the Ashvamedha yagya (inscription line number 5) (Figure 14) [43] (pp. 56) that the king Devavarman performed the Ashwamedh yagya. According to the three copper plates found which were written in Prakrit Proso and Sanskrit language. The king issued these plates from place Vengipura (Present-day Andhra Pradesh) and addressed them to the villagers of Elura [43] (pp. 56) [45] (pp. 45).

Line number five of the first and second plate inscription states,

1. Om [1], Siri-vijaya-Vengipura [*] Bhagavato
2. Chittarathasami-pādānna-
3. jjhatassa bappabhattāraka-padabhattassa
4. (Second plate first side)
5. paramamha Svasti bhūyādāh vai Aryanmitra-Surī-
6. Bhaśārakānāmi-ghaś-āsvamerdha(dhah)
7. Sri-Vijaya-Devavarmanasya
8. Vikrama-deva-varshasya chátra-samvat [=Shaka-Samvat]

9. kārttika-suddha panchamya-samuṣ

Figure 14: A copper plate of the King Devavarman of Vengipura, Andhra Pradesh mentioning the performance of the Ashwamedha yagya [45] (pp. 45).

18) King Dahrasena Traikutaka, Konkan, (Present day Maharashtra)

King Dahrasena of the Traikutaka dynasty had performed the Ashwamedha yagya, which was found in the 'Pardi plates inscriptions' of 455 AD (Figure 15) [44] (pp. 51), [45] (pp. 177). The plates were two in number, with a weight of 31 tolas. The plates contain information about Maharaj Dahrasena of the Traikutaka family. The second line of the first plate states that the king performed the Ashwamedha yagya.

Figure 15: Inscription on the plates stating that King Dahrasena Traikutaka performed the Ashwamedha yagya [43]

The inscription on the first plate [43] states:

2. *vat-pāda-karmakaro-śvamēdh-āhartta*
santakan-Anta-SATV Vān ev āsmat-

3. *rmmandali-vishaya-visinas-samajnāpayati*
Nanna (una)svimina yathā Kāpura-
vāstaunya-brahmaṇa-

4. *atraiva vishay-antaryagata-Kaniyas-
Tadakāsērikā grāmo mi /tapi/tor= āt-
manas=ale punya-"

It translates to "Hail! From the camp of vi-
atory pitched at Āmrakā, the glorious Mahārāja
Dahrasēna, (who belongs to the family) of
the Traikūtakas, who meditates on the feet of
mother and father, who is a servant of the feet
of Bhagavat (Vishnu), (and) who has performed
an ‘Ashwamedha yagya, addresses (the follow-
ing) order to all Our subjects living in the Antar
mandali district (vishaya)” [43].

19) **King Krisnavarman I, Karnataka**

According to the Birur and Devagiri plates,
issued by the son of King Krisnavarman from
the Kadamba dynasty, issued in the 5th century
AD, King Krisnavarman I performed the Ash-
wamedha yagya [45] (pp. 280) [46] (pp. 301-
319).

20) **King Mayuravarman, Talagunda**

(present-day Shimoga district)

According to the Talagunda inscriptions,
Mayurvarman is the founder of the Kadamba dy-
nasty and performed the Ashwamedha yagya in
the 4th century AD [44] (pp. 240).

21) **Varman dynasty, Assam**

Ashwamedh yagas were performed by the
Varman dynasty, as mentioned in the seal
of King Bhaskaravarman. The seal of King
Bhaskaravarman stated that King Sthiravarman
(c. 566-590 AD) and King Narayanavarman (c.
496-518 AD) performed the Ashwamedha yagya
[47] (pp. 143), while the inscription of King
Bhaskaravarman (Figure 16) (inscription below)
stated that King Bhūtivarmmadēva also per-
formed the Ashwamedha yagya [33] (pp. 23).

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**Discussion and Conclusion**

The Ashwamedh Yagya is the king among all
Yagya. The journey of Indian culture with the
Ashwamedh Yagya dates back to Vedic times.
Scriptural documentations of the Ashwamedh
Yagya are also well-documented post-Vedic era
in the epic texts of the Ramayana and later
Mahabharata era. Surprisingly, the efforts con-
tinued by well-known kings and scholars of the
time. The performance of Pushyamitra Sunga
was carried out under the priesthood of Ma-
harshi Patanjali [30], the great sage who wrote
the Patanjali Yoga Sutras, indicating the impor-
tance of the Ashwamedh Yagya even in medieval
times. Besides, all the kings who were perform-
ers of the Ashwamedh Yagya in the medieval era
continued the journey of the yagya (Table 1).

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[311x572]Figure 16: Badaganga inscriptions of King
Bhaskaravarman mentioning that Bhūtivarman
performed the Ashwamedha yagya [33] (pp.
188).

The inscription of King Bhaskaravarman
states:

*Svasti Sri-paramadaivata-paramabhāgavata-
mahārāja-dhiraj-āśvamēdhayājin[am]
Śrī-
Bhūtivarmma[dēva]-padānām [Sam] 200 30 4 mā
vishayāmātya-[Āryya]gunasya 4 idam āśramam
[33] (pp. 23).

It translates to: “Peace! The (month of)
Māgha; the year 200 and 30 and 4 of the illus-
trious Madhirājā Bhūtivarmmadēva, the devout
worshiper of the Devas, the devout worshiper of
the Lord (Vishnu), the performer of the Ash-
wamedha yagya. This is the religious retreat of
Āryaguna, Minister for State.”

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Table 1: Performers and Sites of the Ashwamedha Yagya in Medieval India. Ashwamedh* - Ashwamedh Yagya
Table 1 shows that the study has identified 27 kings from 18 dynasties who had performed a total of 81 documented Ashwamedh yagyas from the 1st century BCE to the 18th century CE. Although the study tried to comprehensively identify all instances of the Ashwamedh performed in medieval India, there may be more awaiting further study. The study observed that these findings were based on archaeological evidence, including copper plate inscriptions, stone inscriptions, brick and pillar inscriptions, yagya kunds, and coins.

Ashwamedh sites were found to be present all over present-day India, from north to south India. An interdisciplinary approach, with more archaeological and inscriptive evidence along with scriptural and sociological findings from ritualistic experts with a deeper understanding of the Ashwamedha yagya ritual, may decode and provide novel future research directions on the rich history of the Ashwamedh Yagya in Indian culture.

Compliance with ethical standards Not required.
Conflict of interest The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest. Financial support and sponsorship None

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