

Performers and Sites of the Ashwamedha Yagya in Medieval India

Ekta Chandel¹

¹Visiting Scientist, Yagyavalkya Center for Yagya Research, Dev Sanskriti Vishwavidyalaya, Haridwar, India

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, inscriptional, 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

*CORRESPONDENCE Visiting Scientist, Yagyavalkya Center for Yagya Research, Dev Sanskriti Vishwavidyalaya, Haridwar, India
Email
ektachandel18@gmail.com

PUBLISHED BY
Dev Sanskriti Vishwavidyalaya Gayatrikunj-Shantikunj Haridwar, India

OPEN ACCESS
Copyright (c) 2024 Ekta Chandel
Licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License



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 - "अग्निमीळे पुरोहितं यज्ञस्य देवमृत्विजम् । होतारं रत्नधातमम् ॥" "agnim ile purohitam yajñasya devam ṛtvijam | hotāraṃ ratnadhātamaṃ ||" 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,

"rāṣṭraṃ vā aśvamedhaḥ rāṣṭra ete vyāyacante ye'śvaṃ rakṣanti teṣāṃ ya udṛcaṃ gacanti rāṣṭreṇaiva te rāṣṭraṃ bhavantyatha ye nodṛcaṃ gacanti rāṣṭrātte vyavacidyante tasmā-drāṣṭryaśvamedhena yajeta parā vā eṣa sicyate yo'balo'śvamedhena yajate yadyamitrā aśvaṃ vinderanyajño'sya vicidyeta pāpīyāntsyācatam kavacino rakṣanti yajñasya samṭatyā avyavacedāya na pāpīyānbhavatyathānyamānīya prokṣeyuḥ saiva tatra prāyaścittiḥ" [3].

Ashwamedha is referred to as the formation of a Rashtra (nation). According to it, the whole Rashtra is Ashwamedha. 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 Ashwamedha Yagya to ensure the cultural co-existence 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

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.

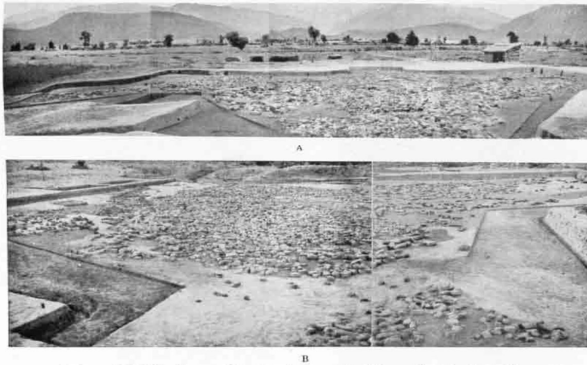


Figure 1: Archaeological Ashwamedha site of Jagatgram, Dehradun, site 1 (top) and site 2 (bottom).

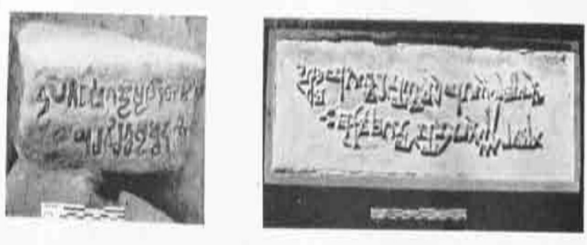


Figure 2: Inscription bricks of Ashwamedha Yagya sites in Jagatgram, Dehradun. The left image translates as "This brick is from (belongs to) the Ashwamedh of (performed by) Silavarman, king of Yugasaila and a Yugesvara or lord of lustrum." The right image translates as "This is the altar of the fourth 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 Ashwamedha 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 Amoghahuti, 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.

अभूदधिब्रह्मपुरि द्विजानां तदक्षिणाभूरिसमृद्धिभाजाम् ।
गृहेषु सम्यग् वितताध्वरेषु सुरेश्वराह्वानमजस्रमेव ॥

Abhuddhibramhapuri dvijanam tadkshinabhurissamruddhibhajam, Ghruheshu samyag vitadhvreshu sureshvarahnamjastramev [14].

It implies that the king Jai Singh had performed the Ashwamedha 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 Ashwamedha Yagya. The king performed this Ashwamedha Yagya in 1734 at Kanak Vrindavan Jaipur Rajasthan [14, 15]. According to Tod, Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan, Sawai Jai Singh of Kachhawaha performed Aswamedha Yagya twice [16].

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

There are two inscriptions available for Ashwamedh yagya reference related to Satvahan dynasty. First inscription was a stone inscription of Shivghosh, which was on the image of yakshi deity mentioning Ashwamedha yagya conducted by Satavahana [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 Dakshinapathapati. 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

“.....vīrasa sūrasa apratihatacakasa
dakhināpaṭhapatino raño simukasātavāhanasa
sunhāya”,

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

“..dhamñagiritamṣapayutamṣapaṭo 1 aso 1
asaratho 1 gāvīnamṣ 100 **asamedho bitīyo** yīṭho
dakhināyo dinā aso rupālamkāro 1 suvaṣṇa
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].

पौण्डरीका श्वमेधाभ्यान् वाजपेयेन चासकृत् |
अन्यैश्च विविधैर्यज्ञैरयजत्पार्थिवर्षभः | |
राज्यन् दशसहस्राणि प्राप्य वर्षाणि राघवः |
शताश्वमेधानाजह्ने सदश्वान्भूरिदक्षिणान् | |

*paundrikaashvmedhaabhyaan vaajpeyen
kaaskrit/
anyaishk vividhairjnyairyjtparthivrsbhah//
raajyn dshshsraani praapy vrsaani raaghvah/
shtaashvmedhaanaajhre sdshvaanbhuridksi-
naan//*

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 Ashvamedha Yagya ten times (Figure 5) [30]. In the Figure 5, the inscription, line number 9-10, stated that "Dasasvamedhavarbhrithasnatanam bharasi- vanam 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].

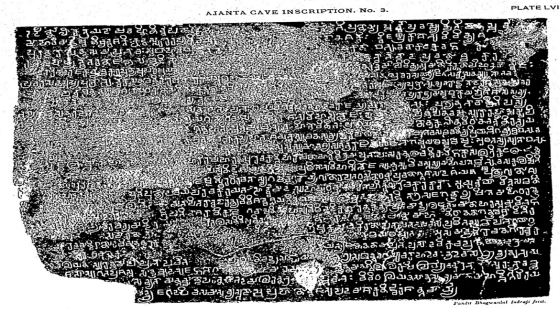


Figure 5: The Inscription of Vakataka dynasty found in Ajanta cave, mentioning King Bharshiva performed Ashvamedha Yagya ten times. [30]

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

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 द्विरश्वमेध-याजिनः सेनापतेः पुष्यमित्रस्य षष्टेन कौशिकी-पुत्रेण धन....” [21] (pp. 96), it implies that two Ashwamedha Yagyas were performed by King Pushyamitra Sunga.

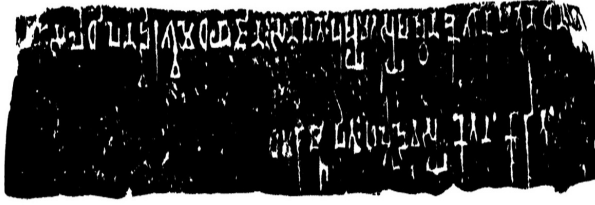


Figure 6: Ayodhya inscription written by Dhanadeva, the descendant of King Pushyamitra Sunga [21] (pp. 96).

8) King Mahadevvarman II, Kongoda (Present day Ganjam, Khordha 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, Khordha, and Puri districts in the Odisha state), in which verse 12 mentioned achievements of King Sainyabhita Madhavavarman II stating him as the one who performed Ashwamedha Yagya. Kongoda was the capital of Sailodbhavas dynasty, and 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,

“yam=abhimatā kīrttri (rtti) -mā(pā)lair=ajasram (sram) | yajñais=tair= **asvamēdha-prabhritibhir= amara**”

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

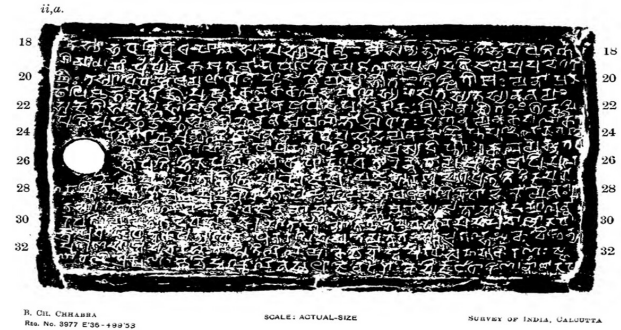


Figure 7: Copper plate (Plate number - two side first) of the king Ayasobhita II Madhyamaraja of Sailodbhavas dynasty stating the performance of Ashwamedha Yagya [32] (pp. 36).

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 Aswamedha 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-Matrigaṇ-ānuddhyāt-abhiṣiktānām Mānavya-sa-
2. gōtrāṇām Hārīti-putrāṇśin Chalukyānām Agniṣtōm-Agnichayana-

3. *Vajapēya-Bahusvarṇṇa-Paundarik-Asvamē[dhā] vabhritha-snāna-pa-*
4. *vitrikṛita-śarirasya Ranavikrama-Dharmma-mahārājasya*
5. *priya-tanayah Katti-arasa-nāmadheyah sarvva-śāstr-ārtta(rtha)-*

Badami inscriptions of Challukya Vallabhevarman states (Figure 8) [34] (pp. 9):

1. *Svasti [*] Saka-varshēshu chatuś-śatēshu pañcha-shashti-yutēshu*
2. *Asvamedh-adi-yajñānām yajvā śrauta-vidhānatah [[*]*
3. *Hiranyagarbha-sambhūtas Chalikyō Vallabhēśvaraḥ [[1]]]*
4. *Dharādharendra-Vātāpim-ajēyam-bhūtayē bhuvah [[]*
5. *adhastad= uparishtach= cha durggam= etad= achikarat [[]2]]**

It translates to “(Line 1) Hail! in the Saka years four hundred and sixty-five, (Lines 2-5) the Chalikyā (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).

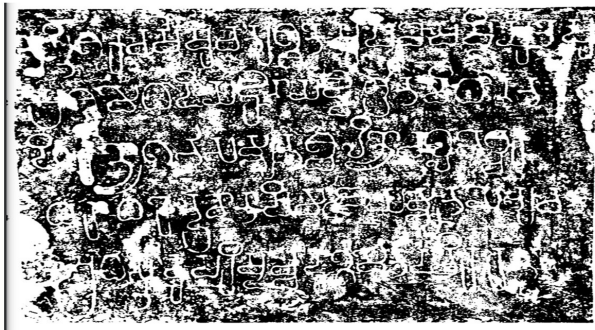


Figure 8: Badami inscriptions of King Pulakesin I, also known as King Vallabheshvara [36] (pp. 9).

10) Southern India (Pallavas dynasty)

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

1. King Sivaskandvarman

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

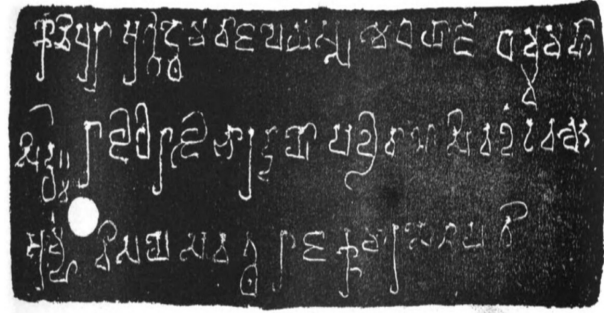


Figure 9: The copper plate of the Pallava King Sivaskandvarman [33] (pp. 5).

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

1. कांचिपुरा अग्निद्रोम वा जपेय **स्समेधया** जी धम्ममहा-
2. राजाधिराजो भारद्वायो पल्लवाण सिवखंदवमो
3. अहं विसये सवत्थ राजकुमार-सेनापति

1. *Kanchipura aggitthomavAjapeyassamedhayaji dhammamahd*
2. *rajadhirajo Bharaddayo Pallavana Sivakhamdavamo*
3. *amham visayasavattharajakumārasenāpati.*

It translates to, “Success! From Kamchipura-the righteous supreme king of great kings of the Pallavas Sivakhamdavama (Sivaskandavarman), a Bharaddaya” (Bharsdvāja) an offerer of Agnishtoma, Vajapeya and Asvamedha (sacrifices) issues the following orders (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-yājīnah mahārājasya śri-
Kumāravishnōh prapautrasya-otsā-*
3. *ha-prabhu-mantra-sakti-sampannasya sva-
virya-adhigata-rājasya mahārājasya*

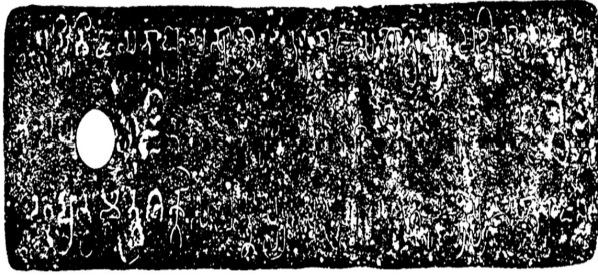


Figure 10: The copper plate of the Omgodu copperplate grant of Vijayskandvarman II mentioning King Kumarvishnu performing the Ashwamedha yagya [35] (pp. 249).

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,

1. *vi jayasy=āyam=eva maha[ha] sainya-*
2. *dvipā daśāśvamedha-babusuvarnna-*
3. *kratu-yāji Dēva[h] Sri-Simha-*
4. *varmmā pratāpa iva mūrttim[ān*]*
5.
6.vana-manda-

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 Pravarapurād agnishṭom āp-
toryyamokthyashodaśy atirātira-*
2. *vajapeya brihaspatisavasadyaskrachatur
aśvamedhayajīnah*
3. *Vishnu vridhdhasagotrasya samrā
[jo] Vakaṭakānam mahārāja-Sri-
Pravarasenasya*
4. *sūnoh sūnoh atyantavimamahabhairavab-
haktasya ansa[arhsa]bharasannivesi.*
5. *taśivalīngodvahanāśivasuparitusṭasamutpāḍitarāja[m]ś*

Translation: “The illustrious Pravarasena, the great king of the Vakatakas, a universal ruler, who belonged to the Vishnuvridha gotra (dynasty), and offered (yagya), an Agnishtoma sacrifice, an Aptor-yama, an Ukthya, a Shodasin, an Ātirūtra, a Vajapeya, 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 Brahmanas 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 Vashistputa Chamtamula was his father.

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

1. सिंधं [॥*] नमो भगवतो देवराज-सकतस संम-संम-संबुधस धातुवर-
2. परिगहितस महाचेतिये महारजस विरूपखपति-महासेन-परिगहितस
3. अगिहोतागिठोगिठोम' वाजपेयासमेध-याजिस हिरणकोटि-गोसत-
4. सहस-हलसतसहस-पदायिस सवयेसु अपतिहत-संकपस
5. वासिठी-पुतस इखाकुस सिरि-चातमूलस सोदराय भगिनिय हम-
6. सिरिणिकाय बालिका रंथो सिरि-विरपुरिसदतस भया महादेवि बपिसिरिणिका

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

1. [Si]dham namo bhagavato teloka-dhamma-dhura-vahasa mahārāja [sa Virū-]
2. [ps]khsapati-Mahāsena-parigahitasa Agihot-Agithoma [Vājape-]
3. y-Asamedha-y [alyi(ji)sa hiramṇa-kotigo-satasaha[sa-hala-sata-]
4. sahasa-padāi(yi)sa savathesu apatibatasamka[posa].
5. [Vā]sethiputasa Ikhākunam Sir-Chātamūlasa sun hālyā [mahārāja-]
6. sa Madha[ri]putasa Ikhākunam Sir-Virapurisadatasa bhavaya ma-

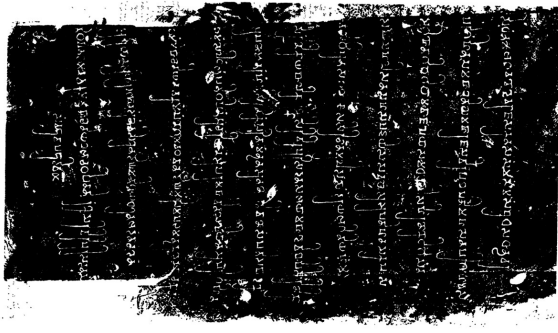


Figure 11: King Vashisthiputra Chamtamula's inscription of 'detached pillar inscription G' found in Nagaarjunikonda Valley, Guntur district of Andhra Pradesh mentioning the performance of the Ashwamedha yagya [40].

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. (कारितो अयं राज्ञा भागव*) (ते) न" गाजायनेन पाराशरी-पुत्रेण स-
2. (र्वतातेन अश्वमेध-या*) जिना' भगव (व्*) भ्यां संकर्षण-वासुदेवाभ्यां
3. (अनिहताभ्यां सर्वेश्वर) भ्यां पूजा-शिला-प्राकारो नारायण-वाटका

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-पुत्रेण - 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).

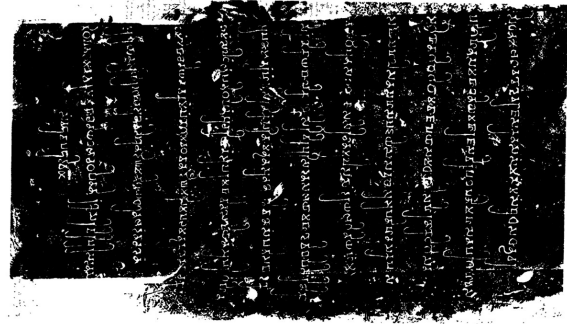


Figure 12: 'Ghosundi and Hathibada' inscription of the Chittodgadh region of Rajasthan mentioning the performance of an Ashwamedha yagya by the king Gajayana Sarvatata [39] (pp. 27).

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

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

The Musanager brick inscription (Figure 13) states,

"... be ke Āśvavātāyaniputasa Devamitasa aśvamerdha(dhaḥ)".

It translates to "The Ashwamedha yagya of Devimitra, son of Āśvavātāyanī, (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].

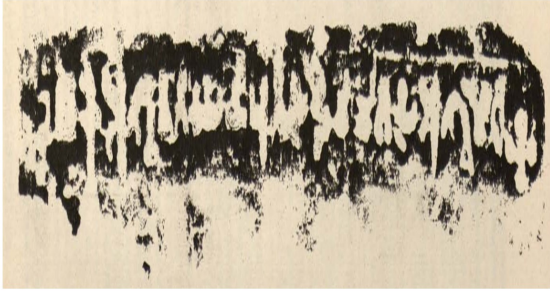


Figure 13: Musanagar brick inscription of the village Musanagar, Kanpur District, Uttar Pradesh stating Ashwamedh was performed by the king Devimitra [45] (pp 118).

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-pādânn-*
3. *jjhatassa bappabhattâraka-padabhattassa*
4. *(Second plate first side)*
5. *paramamha Svastir bhūyādh vai Aryamitra-Suri-*
6. *Bhâîśârakânâmi-ghaś-aśvamerdha (dhaḥ)*
7. *Sri-Vijaya-Devavarmanasya*
8. *Vikrama-deva-varshasya chātra-samvat [=Shaka-Samvat]*

9. *kārttika-suddha panchamya-samuḥ*

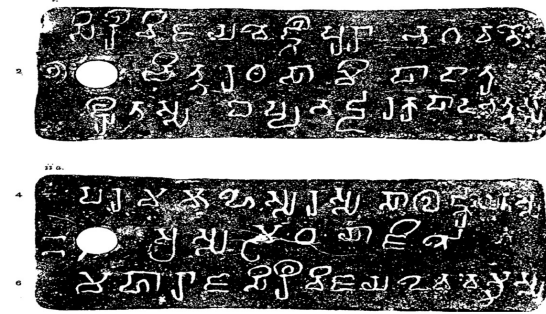


Figure 14: A copper plate of the King Devavarman of Vengipura, Andhra Pradesh mentioning the performance of the Ashwamedha yagya [45] (pp. 45).

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.

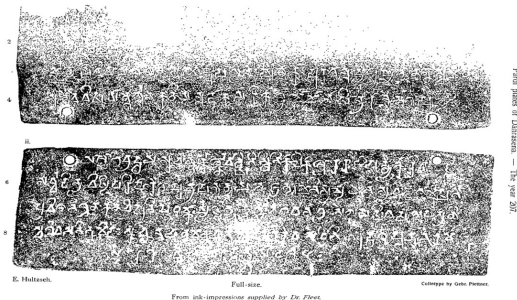


Figure 15: Inscription on the plates stating that King Dahrasena Traikutaka performed the Ashwamedh yagya [43]

The inscription on the first plate [43] states:

1. *Kadamba Svasti [II] Vijaya-skandhāvārād-Āmrakā vāsakat-Traikku(kū)ṭakānām mātāpitri-pad- anuddhyāto Bhaga-éri-mahārāja-Dahrasēnsh*

2. *vat-pāda-karmmakaro-śvamēdh-āhartta santakan-Anta-SATV Vān ev üsmat-*
3. *rmmandali-vishaya-visinas-samājñāpayati Nanna (una)svimīna yathā Kāpura-vāstavya-brahmaṇa-*
4. *atraiva vishay-antarggata-Kaniyas-Tadākāsérīkā grāmo mi [t]api[t]ror= āt-manas=ale punya-*”

It translates to "Hail! From the camp of victory 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 following) 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 Ashwamedha 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 dynasty and performed the Ashwamedha yagya in the 4th century AD [44] (pp. 240).

21) Varman dynasty, Assam

Ashwamedh yagyas 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 Narayanvarman (c. 496-518 AD) performed the Ashwamedha yagya [47] (pp. 143), while the inscription of King Bhaskaravarman (Figure 16) (inscription below) stated that King Bhūtivarmanmadēva also performed the Ashwamedha yagya [33] (pp. 23).

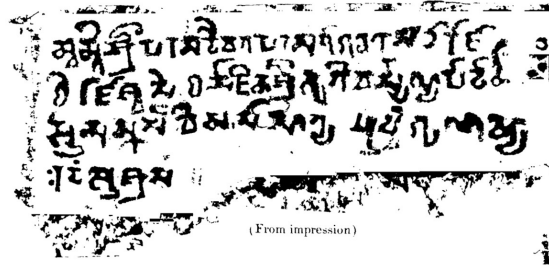


Figure 16: Badaganga inscriptions of King Bhaskaravarman mentioning that Bhutivarman performed the Ashwamedha yagya [33] (pp. 188).

The inscription of King Bhaskaravarman states:

Svasti Sri-paramadaivata-paramabhāgavata-mahārāja-dhiraj-āśvamēdhayājīn[am] Śrī-Bhūtivarmanma[dēva]-pādānām [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 illustrious Madhirājā Bhūtivarmanmadēva, the devout worshiper of the Devas, the devout worshiper of the Lord (Vishnu), the performer of the Ashwamedha yagya. This is the religious retreat of Āryyaguna, Minister for State."

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 continued by well-known kings and scholars of the time. The performance of Pushyamitra Sunga was carried out under the priesthood of Maharshi Patanjali [30], the great sage who wrote the Patanjali Yoga Sutras, indicating the importance of the Ashwamedh Yagya even in medieval times. Besides, all the kings who were performers of the Ashwamedh Yagya in the medieval era continued the journey of the yagya (Table 1).

Sequence number in the present paper	Name of the king	Dynasty	Timeline Century (CE/BCE)	Known Ashwamedh* performed [Reference]	Place of Archeological Evidence / Territory of Rule
1	Silavarman	Varsaganya	3rd century CE	4 [5]	Jagatgram, Northern Indian
3	Sawai Jai Singh	Kachhawaha	18th century CE	2 [16]	Kanakvan, Jaipur, Northern Indian
4	Satakarni I	Satavahana	1st century BCE	2 [20]	(Naneghat) Maharashtra region
6	Bharsiva	Naga	2nd-3rd century CE	10 [30]	(Varanasi), North India
7	Pushyamitra	Sunga	6th century CE	2 [21, 30]	(Ayodhya), North India
8	Madhavavarman II	Sailodbhavas	7th century CE	1 [32]	(Kongoda, Orissa), Eastern India
9	Pulakesin I	Challukya	6th century CE	1 [33]	Central-South India.
10.1	Sivaskandvarman	Pallava	1st century CE	1 [21, 34]	Kanchipuram, South India
10.2	Kumar Vishnu	"	1st century CE	1 [35]	South India
10.3	Simhavarman	"	7th century CE	10 [34]	South India
10.4	Nandivarman II	"	8th century CE	1 [33]	South India
11	Pravarsena I	Vakataka	3rd-4th century CE	4 [36]	Vidarbha (Amaravati-Nagpur, Maharashtra), North-central India
12	Madhava Varman I	Vishnukundi	5th century CE	11 [37]	Deccan and parts of Southern India
13	Rajadhiraj Chola	Chol	11th century CE	1 [38]	(Eastern Chalukya and Kalinga), Southern India
14	Vashisthiputra Chamtamula	Ikshaku	3 century BEC	1 [40]	South India
15	Gajayana Sarvatata	Kanva	1st century BCE	1 [39]	Chittodgad, Rajasthan
16	Devimitra	Not able to avail	1st century BCE	1 [30]	Mausanagar, Kanpur, North India
17	Devavarman	Salankayanas	4th century CE	1 [44]	(Vengipura), South India
18	Dahrasena	Traikutaka	5th century CE	1 [43]	Konkan, Western-Central India
19	Krisnavarman I	Kadamba	5th century CE	1 [45]	(Karnataka), South India
20	Mayuravarman	"	4th century CE	18 [38, 44]	(Karnataka), South India
21	Shivarman	Varman	6th century CE	1 [47]	(Assam), Eastern Indian subcontinent
21	Narayanvarman	"	5th-6th century CE	1 [47]	(Assam), Eastern Indian subcontinent
21	Bhutivarman	"	6th century CE	1 [33]	(Assam), Eastern Indian subcontinent
Not in text	Samudragupta	Gupta	4th century CE	1 [21]	Northern India
Not in text	Kumargupta	"	5th century CE	1 [21]	Northern India
Not in text	Adityasena	"	7th century CE	1 [45]	Northern India

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 inscriptional 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

References

- [1] Chandel E. Mathematical and Scriptural Aspect of Yagya Mandap construction. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Yagya Research*. 2022;5(1):20-29. doi.org/10.36018
- [2] Rig Veda. Mandala 1. Sukta 1. Available from: <https://sri-aurobindo.co.in/>
- [3] Singh R. Yagya: Ek Aitihāsik evam Vaigyanik Drishti. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Yagya Research*. (2):15-21. doi.org/10.36018
- [4] Sharma B, editor. *Akhand Jyoti*. Mathura, India: Akhand Jyoti Sansthan; 1992;11:p56-57.
- [5] Ghosh A. *Indian Archaeology Review 1953-54*. Archaeological Survey of India, Government of India Delhi; 1954. p. 10. Available from: asi.nic.in
- [6] Kashyap RL. *Yajur Veda Taittiriya Samhita - Volume 4 (Kanda-s 5, 6 & 7)*. SAKSHI Trust; ISBN-10: 8179940039.
- [7] Ghosh A. *Indian Archaeology Review 1962-63*. Archaeological Survey of India, Government of India Delhi; 1965. p. 102. Available from: asi.nic.in
- [8] Ghosh A. *Indian Archaeology Review 1953-54*. Archaeological Survey of India, Government of India Delhi; 1954. p. 67-69. Available from: asi.nic.in
- [9] Ghosh A. *Indian Archaeology Review 1953-54*. Archaeological Survey of India, Government of India Delhi; 1954. p. 11. Available from: asi.nic.in
- [10] Thapar BK. *Archaeology Review 1974-75*. Archaeological Survey of India, Government of India Delhi; 1979. p. 124. Available from: asi.nic.in
- [11] Lal BB. *Archaeology Review 1969-70*. Archaeological Survey of India, Government of India Delhi; 1973. p. 112. Available from: asi.nic.in
- [12] Jhoshi MS. *Archaeology Review 1988-89*. Archaeological Survey of India, Government of India, Delhi; 1993. p. 71-72. Available from: asi.nic.in
- [13] Kalyanaraman S. syenaciti vedi discovered in Purola, Uttarakhand and links with pola 'magnetite', polad, faulad 'steel', on Vedic River Sarasvati Basin. Available from www.academia.edu
- [14] Puratanachar Jinivan Muni. Shrikrishna Bhatt Kavi Kalanidhi. Ishawar Vilas Mahakavya. Chaturth Sarg Shloka 3, 31, 32. Rajasthan Puratatvveshanmandir; 1880. Available at: archive.org
- [15] Singh AK. Morphological and Demographic Characteristics of a Planned City: A Case Study of Jaipur City. *Maharshi Dayanand University Research Journal ARTS*. 2019;18(1):145-160. Available from: <https://mdu.ac.in>
- [16] Tod JC. *The Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*. Madras; 1873. p. 328-332. Available at: archive.org
- [17] Rani Durgawati Museum Jabalpur. Available at: archaeology.mp.gov.in
- [18] Chattopadhyaya S. *Some Early Dynasties of South India*. Motilal Banarsidass; 1974. pp. 41-45. ISBN 978-81-208-2941-1.
- [19] Burgess J. *Report on the Elura Cave Temples and the Brahmanical and Jaina Caves in Western India*. Truberg and Ludgate Hill, London; 1883. p. 205. Available at: archive.org/
- [20] Bühler G. *Report on the Elura Cave Temples and the Brahmanical and Jaina Caves in Western India*. In: *The Nanaghat Inscriptions*. Archaeological Survey of India; 1883. pp. 59-64.
- [21] Sircar DC. *Select Inscriptions Bearing on Indian History and Civilization*. University of Calcutta; 1942. Vol. 1. Pp. 96
- [22] Nagaarjun, Rao MS. *Indian Archaeology Review 1982-83*. Archaeological Survey of India, Government of India; 1985. p. 190. Available from: www.asi.nic.in
- [23] Raychaudhuri H. *Political History of Ancient India*. University of Calcutta; 1972. p. 117-8.
- [24] Geetapress. *Valmiki Ramayan, Sarg 6, Chapter 128, Shloka 95-96*. Geetapress Gorakhpur; 2015.
- [25] Pathik P. *The Historical and Philosophical Exegesis on Yagya in Ancient India*. *Interdis J of Yagya Res* 2019;2:20-8. doi.org/10.36018
- [26] Jayaswal, V. *Aadi Kashi se Varanasi Tak*. Aryan Book International, New Delhi; 2011.

- [27] Agrawal A. Rise and Fall of the Imperial Guptas. Motilal Banarsidas; 1989. ISBN 978-81-208-0592-7. p. 55.
- [28] Sharma RK. Ancient history of the Naga tribe of Central India. In: Abbasi AA, editor. Dimensions of Human Cultures in Central India: Professor S.K. Tiwari Felicitation Volume. Sarup Sons; 2001. ISBN 978-81-7625-186-0. p. 156.
- [29] Burgess J. Epigraphia India Vol. 1. 1892. The Director General Archaeological Survey of India, Delhi. Available at: archive.org
- [30] Hultzsch E, Konow S. Epigraphia Indica Vol. IX 1907-08. Archaeological Survey Report of India, Delhi; 1981. p. 270. Available at: archive.org
- [31] Shashtri H. Epigraphia Indica Vol. XX. 1929-30. Archaeological Survey Report of India, Delhi; 1983. Pg. 55. Available from: archive.org
- [32] Chhabra BC. Epigraphia Indica. Manager of Publications, Delhi; 1951. Vol. 29, p. 35. Available at: archive.org
- [33] Chhabra BC. Epigraphia Indica. Manager of Publications, Delhi; Vol. 28. Pg. 4-9. Available at: archive.org
- [34] Chhabra BC, Rao L. Epigraphia Indica 1947-48. Manager of Publications, Delhi; Vol. 27, pg. 4. Available from: archive.org
- [35] Thomas FW. Epigraphia Indica 1910-20. Archaeological Survey Report of India, Delhi; 1925. Vol. 15. Available at: archive.org
- [36] Burgess J. Archaeological Survey Report of Western India 1883. Vol. 4, pp. 120. Available at: archive.org
- [37] Sircar DC. Successors Of The Satavahanas In Lower Decan. 1939. pp. 77, 280. Available at: archive.org
- [38] Sircar DC. Studies in the Religious Life of Ancient and Medieval India. Motilalbanarsidas, Delhi; 1971. p. 180.
- [39] Thomas FW. Epigraphia Indica 1921-22. Archaeological Survey Report of India, Delhi; 1983. Vol. 16. Available at: archive.org
- [40] Shashtri H. Epigraphia Indica 1929-30. Archaeological Survey Report of India, Delhi; 1983. Vol. 20. Pp. 19 Available at: archive.org
- [41] Rao NL. Epigraphica India 1953-54. Archaeological Survey Report of India, Delhi; Vol. XXX. 1958. p. 118. Available at: archive.org
- [42] Cunningham A. Annual Report of the Archaeological Survey of India Volume 10, Report of Tours in Bundelkhand and Malwa in 1874-75 and 1876-77. 1880. p. 4. Available at: ignca.gov.in
- [43] Sten konow. Epigraphia Indica 1909-10. Archaeological Survey Report of India, Delhi; 1959 Vol. 10. Pp. 56 available at archive.org
- [44] Cunningham A. Annual Report of the Archaeological Survey of India Volume 10, Report of Tours in Bundelkhand and Malwa in 1874-75 and 1876-77. 1880. p. 4. Available at: ignca.gov.in
- [45] Sircar DC. Studies in the Religious Life of Ancient and Medieval India. Motilalbanarsidas, Delhi; 1971. p. 176.
- [46] Vandana D. Journal of Indian History. Vol. XV. University of Calcutta; 1988. pp. 301-309. Available at: archive.org
- [47] "The Indian History Quarterly." Vol. 21. 1929. pp. 143. Available at: archive.org