

SCIENCE OF EPIGRAPHY IN THE LATER PĀḌĪYAR INSCRIPTIONS

P. Chandrasekaran*

ABSTRACT

Epigraphs are one of the main repositories of ancient and medieval India. These epigraphs have been analysed by the veteran epigraphists. The inscriptions offer much insight in writing history. Most of these inscriptions found in the temple are donative in nature and they give information on the donations given to the temples for their upkeep. The phrases found in these inscriptions throw much light about the nature of the society, politics and administration during that time. Hence, in this paper, semiotics analysis is applied for the epigraphs of southern India. The epigraphs taken for this analysis are the royal epigraphs issued by the later Pāḍīya king SrĀ Vallabha Dēva of 14th century C.E.

Key Words: Tamil Nadu History, Pāḍīyar, Epigraphy,

Introduction

Epigraphs are one of the main repositories of ancient and medieval India. These epigraphs have been analysed by the veteran epigraphists like D.C. Sircar, Ajay Mitra Sastri, B.N. Mukherjee, K.V. Ramesh, K.A. Nilakantasastry, N. Karashima and Y.Subbarayalu.¹ Despite these analyses, the epigraphs yield new and, new meaning, whenever a new approach is adopted. Hence, in this paper, semiotics analysis² is applied for the epigraphs of southern India. The epigraphs taken for this analysis are the royal epigraphs issued by the later Pāḍīya king SrĀ Vallabha Dēva of 14th Century C.E. which give detailed information.

Semiotic analysis in short tells: under what sort of understanding the royal inscription had been written with encoded message. Accordingly, the signs, and codes found in the inscriptions, have been picked up, and a detailed description of the same is given.

The Sign of Royal Inscriptions (Encoding)

- 1) The religious affinity of the temple, i.e., Siva or Vishōu
- 2) The place of the occurrences in the temple
- 3) The introductory part of the inscription
- 4) The *meykĀrti* (eulogy) portion
- 5) The format of the writing
- 6) The terminologies like *nām*, *namakku* and *tiruvāy moḥintaruḍi*, *a*

The code of the inscriptions (decoding)

The terminologies like *uḍvari*, *tirumukam* and *uḍvarippaḥiyāl uḍḍa nilam kallil veḥḥuka*

Encoding part of the inscription

The royal epigraphs belonging to SrĀ Vallabha Dēva are prominently found on the east walls of the shrines and *prakāras* (Table-1). The eastern side is more auspicious than the other sides, as the king's inscription have been placed more on the eastern side. Next to the eastern side, the royal epigraphs got chiseled on the north walls of the temples, in

* Associate Professor (Rtd.), Department of History, Rajapalayam Rajus' College, Rajapalayam, Residence: 1/20, Muthunachiyar Illam, Ram Nagar, Rajapalayam-626117

succeeding sequence, the south, and west walls were preferred. This is a sign to show that, the king's epigraphs had a definite space according to the direction in relation to the sanctorum. The east is, often, the entrance, and so, the king's inscriptions would be easily visible to the devotee for their reading. Then the northern side, which is stepping path of circumambulation *pradakshaṭṭā* of the temple, would get the immediate attention of the worshippers.

The epigraphs under study are found most in Vaishṭvite temple, and less in Siva temple. This is a sign to indicate that the king SrĀ Vallabha Dēva had a soft corner for Vaishṭvism than Saivism. As a third sign, the *meykĀrti* portion of SrĀ Vallabha's epigraphs are very short. As rightly told by D.C. Sircar, the description of kings in the *praśastis* often contain claims that are conventional and therefore of little historical value. The *praśasti* portion indicates that his kingdom had extended up to the Kumari in the south and the Bengal in the north, only as a convention. Apart from this, the *praśasti* portion signified that his queen had been always associated with him as a symbol of royal gesture.

Signs in the royal epigraphs

However, there are many epigraphical terms which function as signs of the royal epigraph of SrĀ Vallabha Dēva. The term *nām* (we), *namakku* (for us) referring to the king signify that, the king in the public exposure is always remained as a plural person, although in reality, he was a singular person. The words were so used as to indicate his superior position in the society.

There are many verbal signs which indicate about the different types of royal epigraphs. The earliest among the royal inscription of the king SrĀ Vallabha Dēva is found on the walls of Veṭkatācalapati Perumāḷ temple of CōḶapuram.³ This inscription which contains the *meykĀrti* and the information as to where exactly the king was seated in the temple, indicates that it was uttered by the king. The utterance was coded as *tiruvāymoḶintaruḶi, a*. In *tiruvāymoḶintaruḶi, a*, the term *tiru* is equivalent to the Sanskrit term *SrĀ* and the other word *vāy* means mouth, and the word *moḶintu* means to utter and the word *aruḶi, a* is grace. Here the king had given oral order, but in the inscription, it was reflected as that the king had graciously told and implied by the word *tiru* as sacred one. Thus the king's position was projected through the inscription as a sacred and pious one. The royal inscription found in the TaḶpaticamutram is clearer than the above inscription. It gives some amplified version to the term *tiruvāymoḶintaruḶi*. The word *tiruvāymoḶintaruḶi* clearly indicates that the king never wrote the text personally, and signed it, particularly. All the royal epigraphs that are chiseled in the temples had been written by the officer, who was present along with the king, when the king told about the donations to the temple. The point is that the king did not dictate, but only told, which indicates the structural relationship that prevailed between the king and the people. This type of functioning clearly indicates that the king's power was established through ritual homage salutation, rather than the bureaucratic apparatus.

TaḶpaticamutram Inscription

TaḶpaticamutram inscription is far advanced than the CōḶapuram inscription, for it contains the sentence, as that the temple would possess the land, and the lands as written by the department men of *puravuvāriyār*,⁴ which is called as *uḶvāri*, should be chiseled. Then this epigraph had the attestation of the two officers. Thus the term *tiruvāymoḶintaruḶi* signed as the royal order, does a functional value as a code. This means that some procedure is to be followed, subsequently. They are: 1) the written form

of oral order of the king should be entered into the register, 2) a subsequent written order, namely, *uḍvari* should be prepared.

Uḍvari

The term *uḍvari*⁵ is explained from the point of semiotics in the inscription of Kuruvitu⁹ai.⁶ This inscription is just a lengthier one and it contains two parts. This *uḍvari* inscription is in second part. Part one inscription contains the information of the donated land, which the king had told (*tiruvāymoḍintaruḍi, ār*). The second part inscription appears as a separate one. But it does not contain any *meḡkĀrti*. It just contains only the details of the extant of the land and the nature of tax exemption (*tēvatā, a i^o aiḡyili*). This epigraph contains the signature of the officers which indicates that the this inscription was chiseled after the writing of the text by the officers on the palm leaves, with their signatures. In the inscription, the signature done by the officers were chiseled as *eḍuttu* in writing.

Table 1. THE PLACE OF KING'S INSCRIPTIONS

Ref. No. SII Vol. XIV	Place of the Temple	Temple
205	East wall of the maḍḡapā	Vishḡu
206	South wall of the shrine	Sivā
214	West and south walls of the central shrine	Sivā
220	South wall of central shrine of VālĀśvarā temple	Sivā
223	South wall of the central shrine	Vishḡu
228	North wall of Tiruttaḍiśvarā temple	Sivā
229	North wall of Perumāḍ temple	Vishḡu
234	East wall of Store room of the temple	Vishḡu
236	West wall of the temple	Vishḡu
237	South Veranda of the First Prakārā	Sivā
239	South wall of central shrine of TiruvālĀśvarā temple	Sivā
241	South wall of central shrine of TiruvālĀśvarā temple	Sivā
245	North wall of E ^o iccō uḡaiyār Shrine	Sivā
254	North wall of Perumāḍ temple	Vishḡu
255	North wall of Perumāḍ temple	Vishḡu
257	East well of Perumāḍ temple	Vishḡu
262	On the door jambs of Sivā temple	Sivā

Thus the oral order of the king was transformed into the inscriptions through the following : 1) when the king's oral order was put into written form by an officer, it is called as *tiruvāymoḍintaruḍi*, 2) when the *tiruvāymoḍi* was entered into the register and a

separate order was written, which was called as *uḍvari*. However, the available royal inscriptions on the temple walls invariably contain still many other signs in the verbal form. An inscription from Āttūr contains a statement of saying that a *tirumukam* had been received. What is the meaning of *tirumukam*? K.A.Nilakantasastry in interpreting the term *tirumukam* assigning that king's communication to the local bodies were called *tirumukam*⁷ or *srāmukam* and received by the addressees often with great ceremony; at any rate, the official formula recording their receipt is highly formal and deferential. But as per Āttūr inscription, it is understood, that *tirumukam* means the receipt of both the orders of the king, i.e. *tiruvāymoḥintaruḍi* and *uḍvari*, minor tax order. So, the two orders had been combined into one form called as *tirumukam*.

Three segments in *tiruvāymoḥintaruḍi*, *apaḥi*

But the peculiar feature is the *tiruvāymoḥintaruḍi*, *apaḥi* contains three segments. This is very clear in Tiruppattūr inscription. In this inscription, the first paragraph contains an introduction saying that the king had orally ordered. But it was written in third person. It is just like an announcement. But in the second part, the information is written as if the king was directly talking, and it was written in direct speech form, using the first person plural form like *nām* (we), *namakku* for us. Then the third part inscription is in the form of indirect speech.

But the sign of royal order is further extended in the inscription of Tirukkōḥḥiḥyūr.⁸ This inscription consists of verbal sign for the royal epigraphs as: *tiruvāykeḍvi*, *uḍvari*, *tirumukam*, and *kaḥaiāḥu*. Here the meaning of *tiruvāykeḍvi* can be ascertained only by the conjunction with the word *tiruvāymoḥintaruḍi*, *ār*. The epigraphs call as *tiruvāymoḥintaruḍi*, *ār*, when the king's order was written in the letter form. After this, *tiruvāymoḥintaruḍi*, *ār* became as a form of *tiruvāykeḍvi* i.e., heard from the sacred mouth.

However, the royal epigraphs found in the temples do not have the engravings only of the king's order. But they also include the processes of what had happened prior to the engraving of the order. Tirukkōḥḥiḥyūr inscription is a good example in this regard. But unfortunately, it is damaged in many places. Here the format for chiseling the royal inscription is substantially changed. Normally, as noted above, the royal inscriptions start with the process of order giving. But here the inscription was engraved based on *tiruvāykeḍvi*, *uḍvari*, *tirumukam*, and *kaḥaiāḥu* which had come over for the engraving and it was chiseled by the village carpenter under the supervision of the temple priests. Then the inscription proceeds to mention where the king was seated, and uttered the order. Subsequently, there is another inscription and it was addressed to the temple priests (*mulaparuḥaiyār*) by the king saying that he had given tax-free lands and ordered to show the smaller tax order and *ōlai* of Kāliōkarāja. Further, the king ordered the temple priests as that they would engrave it on the stone and copper as per his *keḍvi* and *ōlai*⁹ Thus this is also another kind of written order of the officer.

Another sign of royal epigraphy is discernible in Kuruvittu°ai inscription.¹⁰ It consists of two sorts of announcements made by the king. First one is as usual, the proceedings of the king's tax exemption; the next part is in the letter form written to the beneficiary.

In the last regnal period of the king, the chiseling became compulsory and it got significance even in the royal orders. An inscription of Āttūr¹¹ contains the order of the king by saying *kalluveḥḥikkuḥukka* for chiseling.

Not only the royal epigraphs are in various forms, but also the incorporation of information into the royal epigraph also happened substantially. As noted above, the royal inscriptions incorporated the message of insisting the engraving on the stone. Now, the inscription began to incorporate the information of the processes of engraving on the stones. TiruvāliĒvaram¹² inscription incorporates the processes of *tirumukam* and *uḍvari*. Apart from that, the process of engraving on the stone is also recorded.

The recording procedure of royal inscription was further extended as seen through the inscription of Taḍpaticamutram.¹³ It records not only the royal order of the tax-exemptions, the boundaries of the land; but also the process of pointing out the boundaries of the land by the various persons. The following sentence: '*ivarkaḍ kāḷḷiḍapaḷikku cantṛātittavar celvatāka kallilum cempilum veḷḷikkoḍkave, u tiru vāy moḍintaruḍi, ār*' indicates that the king himself was present, when the boundaries of the land were shown.

Conclusions

Ideology of Royal Inscriptions Text

The royal inscriptions as a category of text indicate that the king was very pious in donating the lands to the temple. So, the king should be revered as the sacred personality and his royal epigraphs should find suitable places in the temples. Moreover, those epigraphs should be engraved without any failure, and the king's order is a code which should be adhered to by the temple priests with great ritual importance. It is a code of behaviour as the beneficiary should be loyal to the king, as they were loyal to the god. As the beneficiaries did service to the god, they should also serve to the king in the same manner as service to god.

End Notes

¹ Sircar, D.C. 1965. *Indian Epigraphy*, Delhi:Motilal Banarasidas. Reprint, 1996.

² Daniel Chandler. *Semiotics for Beginners*. Electronic version.

³ *South Indian Inscriptions (SII)* Vol. XIV No. 205

⁴ Revenue Department, *SII* Vol. XIV No. 206

⁵ Mahalingam, T.V. 1967. *South Indian Polity*, Chennai:University of Madras, Second Edition, Glossary:444.

⁶ *SII* Vol. XIV No.229 9. *SII* Vol. XLV No.214

⁷ Nilakantasastry, K.A. 1984. *The Cōḷas*, Chennai: Madras University:469, 11; *SII* Vol. XIV No.228.

⁸ *SII* Vol. XIV No.234

⁹ "ōlai" means Palm leaf in Tamil.

¹⁰ *SII* Vol. XIV No.236

¹¹ *SII* Vol. XIV No.237

¹² *SII* Vol. XIV No.239

¹³ *SII* Vol. XIV No.264