



Investigation of Chandala forest Rock-cut Cave inscriptions District: Nagpur (Vidarbha), Maharashtra

Nishant Sunil Zodape, Ph.D. Scholar, Department of Ancient Indian History, Culture and Archaeology,
Visva Bharati, Santiniketan, West Bengal, INDIA

ORIGINAL ARTICLE



Author

Nishant Sunil Zodape, Ph.D. Scholar

E-mail : nishantzodape9@gmail.com

shodhsamagam1@gmail.com

Received on : 05/10/2024
Revised on : 05/12/2024
Accepted on : 14/12/2024
Overall Similarity : 01% on 06/12/2024



Plagiarism Checker X - Report

Originality Assessment

Overall Similarity: **1%**

Date: Dec 6, 2024

Statistics: 24 words Plagiarized / 1761 Total words

Remarks: Low similarity detected, check with your supervisor if changes are required.

ABSTRACT

Prehistory to modern period evidence has been found in the Vidarbha region. All types of Buddhist evidence found in the Vidarbha region like stupas, Viharas, sculptures, inscriptions, and numismatic evidence. The inscription is a significant source of History. In the Vidarbha region, so much inscriptions are there. Buddhist, Brahminical, etc. inscriptions are also found there. Pullar, Deotek, Pauni, Bhivkund, Chandala, Bhuyari, Mahurzari, Kunghada, Bhadravati, Hamalapuri, Kayar, etc., places there some important inscriptions have been found. Deotek, Bhadravati, Pauni, and Hamalapuri inscriptions have a direct relation to Buddhism, but others are related to Buddhism. The Chandala forest cave rock inscription is one of the oldest inscriptions in Vidarbha. Two inscriptions are there on a rock. This paper is based on brief investigation of previous studies and a new view of Chandala forest cave rock inscriptions.

KEY WORDS

Archaeology, Vidarbha, Chandala, Rock inscriptions, Cave, Okiyasa, Putasa.

INTRODUCTION

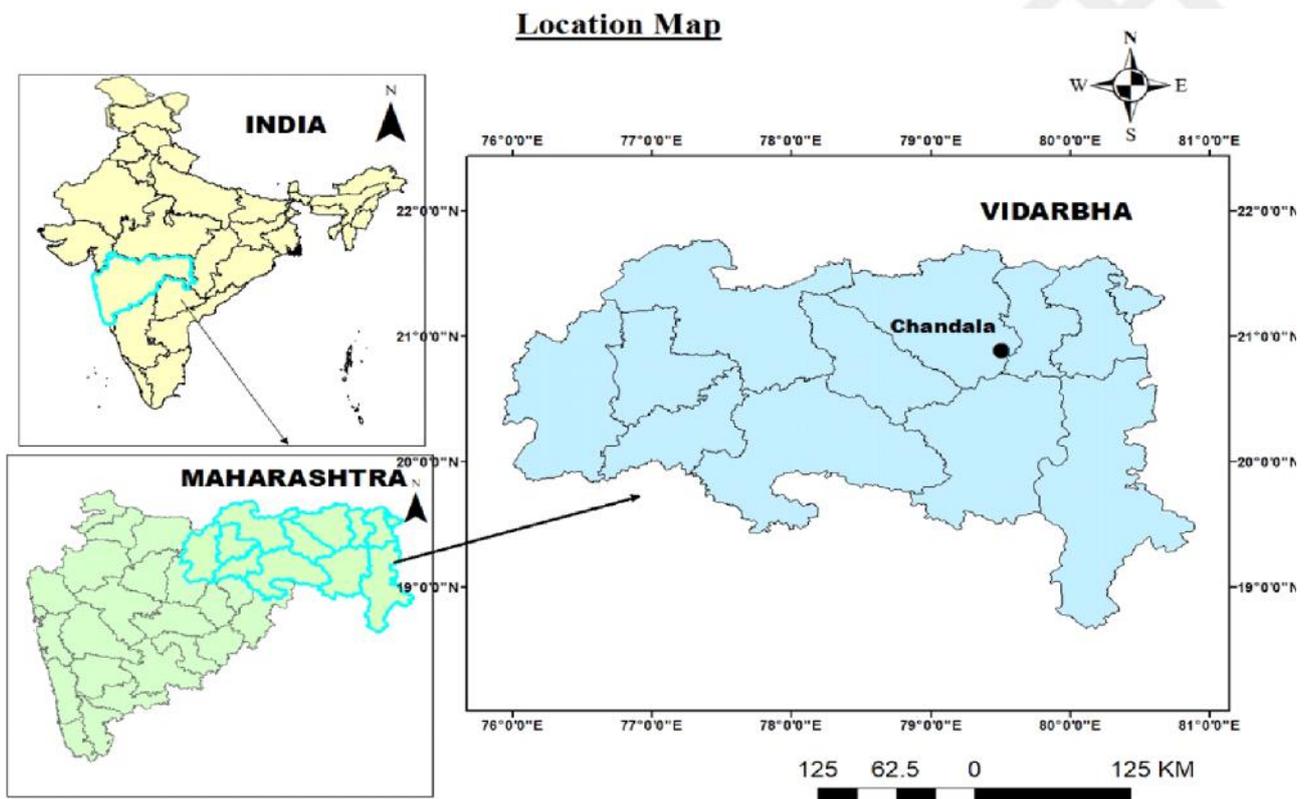
Vidarbha region (Lat. 19°21' N and 76°80' E) the study area of this article is situated in the eastern part of Maharashtra. Wardha River divided Vidarbha into two regions: the eastern part and the western part of Vidarbha. Presently in the Vidarbha region eleven districts viz., Buldhana, Wardha, Akola, Washim, Amaravati, Yawatmal, Nagpur, Bhandara, Chandrapur, Gondia, and Gadchiroli. Vidarbha region is divided into two regions: the eastern part and the western part.¹ (Sawant, Historical Archaeology of Vidarbha, 2012, p. 10)

Vidarbha is in the central part of India. It is Historically important from past to present time. In this region, archaeological remains related to Buddhism are found on a large scale. All types of evidence have been unearthed. Excavated sites, stupa sites, coins, epigraphical evidence, sculptures, etc. are related to Buddhism. Pauni, Adam, Bhon and Mansar are stupa sites. These are the excavated sites. Deotek, Chandala, Pauni, etc. have epigraphical evidence. Mahurzari coin may be Buddhist evidence. Vihara sites are Bhadravati, Patur, Chandala, etc., The Bhadravati rock cut only has direct evidence of Buddhism other caves are not direct evidence of Buddhism.

Nagpur district is the biggest city in Vidarbha region. It is famous for its megalithic culture. Many archaeological excavations are also done in this area. Junpani, Mahurzari, Bhagimahri, Nagardhan, Mansar, Rithi Rajna, Naikund, etc. are excavated archaeological sites. Some Inscriptions have been found in Nagpur District. Mansar, Mahurzari, Hamalapuri, Chandala are inscriptional sites. Chandala forest cave inscriptions have given us important information. *Okiyasa* and *putasa* words are there. S.B. Deo, Chandrashekar Gupta, Bhageshree Kale, Reshma Sawant, and Pradip Meshram had been worked on this inscription. Researcher was done on a brief investigation of the Chandala forest cave rock inscription with the help of previous work.

Location

Figure 1: Location of Chandala Cave inscriptions



Location of Chandala (Google map)

Chandala forest is 55 km. to the southwest of Nagpur. It is approachable from the Pullar. The caves under the present study arc are situated in the deep forest at present and are on the hillocks, facing east. The cave bearing the inscriptions is in the most dilapidated condition. Its stone walls are lying helter-skelter, braving the vagaries of nature. Quite a few stones having inscriptions of this cave attract the attention.² (Kale, 1994)

Environment of Vidarbha and Nagpur

Geographically, Vidarbha lies on the northern part of the Deccan Plateau Unlike the Western Ghats, there are no major hilly areas. The Satpura range lies to the North of Vidarbha region in Madhya Pradesh. Wainganga is the largest river in Vidarbha with Kanhan and Wardha being the two other big rivers that drain the region.³(Joglekar, 2017)

Nagpur and Wardha districts are under the Deccan traps and other districts are Archean and Gondwana. The Archean, Dharwars the Cuddappahs, and the Vindhyan all are exposed in Chandrapur, Nagpur, and Bhandara districts⁴ (Dikshit: 1986). Eastern Maharashtra is therefore virtually a museum of a whole sequence of rocks from the Archean to the Cambrian(Dikshit, 1986)

Discovery of Chandala Cave Inscriptions

APRIL 1971, AN ACCIDENTAL discovery revealed two rock inscriptions written in early Brahmi characters, in the Chandala forest range situated in the Nagpur District. The inscriptions were first seen by Bhandarkar, an officer of the forest department who informed S.G. Chatte, a former teacher in the neighboring village, Chatte communicated the same to Dr.S.B. Deo, the then Head of the Dept. of Ancient Indian History, Culture. and Archaeology of the Nagpur University. Dr. Deo published a short news in the local newspapers along with the photographs. Notes on the readings and interpretation of the inscriptions were later published by Chandrashekhar Gupta and Dr.Deo in the local journals.⁵ (Gupta C. , 1976)⁶ (Gupta C. , 1971)⁷ (Deo, Mandhaljavadil Lekhyukta Prachin Lene, 1972)

Previous Work and Review

Chandala forest cave inscriptions were discovered in 1971. Dr. S.B. Deo, Dr. Chandrashekar Gupta, Bhageshree Kale, Dr. Pradip Meshram and Reshma Sawant working on it.

Firstly, article had been written by Dr. S.B. Deo and Dr. Chandrashekar Gupta in Marathi language. Later on, Chandrashekar Gupta was published another article under the title of Chandala rock inscriptions in Journal on Epigraphical Society of India. He discussed about meaning of inscriptions and relation between trade, trade route and trader.

Bhageshree Kale has published article in Journal of Epigraphical Society of India under title of Inscriptions in Chandala Forest. She discussed social and economic perspective. Dr. Pradip Meshram writes in his books about these inscriptions. Pradeep Meshram Book name is *Vidarbhatil Buddha Dhammacha Itihas* in Marathi language. Reshma Sawant in her book *Historical Archaeology of Vidarbha* make a relation between *Pauni* Inscription and *Chandala* inscriptions. Chandala Cave Present Condition dated September 2020

Figure 2: Chandala Cave Present Condition (Panchbai)



Chandala Forest Cave Inscriptions

One such inscription is as under:

- 1) Vadalaka putasa
- 2) Apalasangati Kamma

Meaning: Chandala cave worked by Vadalaka son Apala or with permission of apala.

Figure 3: Chandala Cave Inscriptions (Panchbhai)



Chandala Cave Inscription

The type of stone is typical basalt of the Deccan trap. After polishing the stone, the matter was inscribed. Seventeen alphabets and two anuswaras are adjusted in the space of eleven inches by twenty-eight inches (27 cm x 70 cm) Each alphabet is the size of cm 7. All these alphabets are meticulously inscribed and very clear. The script is Brahmi without any ornamentation. It is very simple and attractive. There is even space provided between the two alphabets. The paleographical features indicate, according to Dr. S.B. Deo, former director of Deccan College Research Institute, that the inscription belongs to the third century B.C.

One more equally important inscription is identified near the said stone wall. Only four alphabets are inscribed here. The reading is as under:

Okiyasa

Meaning: Name of person (For the making of the cave *okiya* has been given a donation.)

Figure 4: Second Chandala Cave Inscription (Panchabhai)



Second Chandala Cave Inscription

The alphabets measure 5cm in height and are adjusted in the space of 10" (25 cm). The word okiyasa might be the name of a person. It may be of a later period could be stated from the paleographical features suggested by okiyas a. These alphabets are also in the Brahmi script without ornamentation. Though they are carved on a similar type of polished stone, they are not artistically inscribed, nor are they in one line. The space between the two alphabets is also uneven.⁸ (Kale, 1994) The language of both inscriptions might be Prakrit.

Various Scholar's opinions about Chandala Cave Inscriptions

Dr. S. B. Deo, Based on the evidence in the excavations at Pauni and exploration of the rock-cut caves in the Chandala forest, it may be stated that the Vidarbha region had an influence on Hinayana Buddhism in the Mauryan period.⁹ (Deo, New Evidence of Hinayana Buddhism in Vidarbha, 1973)

Dr. Chandrashekar Gupta, It can be concluded that at Chandala, Apala, the son of Vaishya Vandalaka caused the construction of a place for serving water to the travelers.¹⁰ (Gupta C. , 1976)

Bhageshree Kale, Inscriptions in the Chandala forest point out that they are secular in nature as the caves are. They only state the name of their carver. It must be emphasized that the rock-cut caves need not necessarily belong to any religion. Also, the inscriptions on it need not necessarily be in praise of any deity or kind. They, however, help to determine the social and economic activities of the concerned person.¹¹ (Kale, 1994)

Dr. Pradeep Meshram, Chandala cave was worked by *Vadalaka's son* Apala or with the permission of Apala. The second inscription has four words. For the making of the cave, *okiya* has been given donations.¹² (Meshram, 2007, p. 112)

Dr. Reshma Sawant, Dr. Reshma Sawant did a comparative study between *Pauni*, *Bhivkund*, and *Chandala* Inscription in his book *Historical Archaeology of Vidarbha*.¹³ (Sawant, Historical Archaeology of Vidarbha, 2012, p. 61)

CONCLUSION

Chandala cave inscriptions are very important for the reconstruction of the history of Vidarbha. It is one of the earliest inscriptions of the Nagpur district that inscriptions words like *Vandalaka*, *Putasa*, *Apala*, and *Okiyasa*. Different scholars have given different opinions about the meaning of inscriptions.

One word coming is *Putasa*. *Kunghada* inscription having *Putasa* word. That means there was a tradition of giving a father's name, in the Vidarbha region the same tradition went on after the name of the person given the father's name, so from the second century BCE this tradition was also in the Vidarbha region. Scholars have given dates of this inscription from the third century BCE to the first century BCE, but the periods of this inscription are second to third century BCE.

Vidarbha is a very important area for the study of Buddhism in this area related to Buddhism every type of evidence found in this area for example, stupa, Vihara, sculpture, archaeological sites, coins, antiquities, etc. *Chandala* inscriptions are rock-cut cave inscriptions. 2nd century BCE in that period Buddhism in its peak all over India having evidence of related to Buddhism. In this period most of the caves are Buddhist caves. Maybe Chandala was *Hinyana* cave. S.B. Deo also writes about *Hinyana* tradition in this region because the Adam stupa, *Pauni* stupa, Deotek inscriptions, *Kunghada* rock-cut cave inscription, *Pullar* inscription, and Bhadravati Buddhist rock-cut cave are near Chandala. and Pauni inscription having the same name *Vadalaka*. For the meaning and explanation of the Inscriptions, researcher agree with Dr. S.B. and Dr. Pradeep Meshram. One more thing is we can say it is a Buddhist cave and inscription because Dr. Chandrashekar Gupta wrote in the article Chandala was on the trade route. So, most of the Buddhist cave and stupa was in the ancient trade route. It is possible that it was a Buddhist cave made for the monk.

REFERENCES

1. Sawant, R. (2012). *Historical Archaeology of Vidarbha*. Bhopal, New Delhi: Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya, Aryan Books International.
2. Kale, B. (1994). Inscriptions in Chandala Forest. *Journal of Epigraphical Society of India Vol-20*, 77
3. Joglekar, J. (2017). A note on Archelian Findings near Nagardhan, Nagpur District, Maharashtra. *Man and Environment*, XLII, 114-117.
4. Dikshit, K. (1986). *Maharashtra in Maps*. Maharashtra State Board for Litetature and Culture, Mumbai.
5. Gupta, C. (1976). Chandala Rock Inscriptions. *Journal of Epigraphical Society of India vol. - 2 Studies in Indian Epigraphy*, 116.
6. Gupta, C. (1971). Chandala Guhakkha. *Dhammadipa, Nagpur Vol.-7*, 49-55.
7. Deo, S. (1972) *Mandhaljavatil Lekhyukta Prachin Lene*. Vidarbha Sanshodhan Mandal Varshika, p. 108-111.
8. Kale, B. (1994). Inscriptions in Chandala Forest. *Journal of Epigraphical Society of India*, Vol-20, 77.
9. Deo, S. (1973). New Evidence of Hinayana Buddhism in Vidarbha. *Puratattva 1972-73*, Volume 6, Issue 1, p. 84-86.
10. Gupta, C. (1976). Chandala Rock Inscriptions. *Journal of Epigraphical Society of India Studies in Indian Epigraphy*, vol.- 2, Issue 1, p. 116.
11. Kale, B. (1994). Inscriptions in Chandala Forest. *Journal of Epigraphical Society of India*, Vol-20, Issue 1, p. 77.
12. Meshram, P. (2007). *Vidarbhatil Buddha Dharmacha Itihaas*. Shri Mangesh Prakashan, Nagpur, p. 112.
13. Sawant, R. (2012). *Historical Archaeology of Vidarbha*. Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya, Bhopal, Aryan Books International, New Delhi, p. 61.
14. D., D. C. (1971). *Geography of Maharashtra*. New Delhi: National Book Trust, India.
15. Deo, S. (1972-73, 6). New Evidence of Hinayana Buddhism in Vidarbha. *Puratattva*, p. 84.
16. Deo, S. (1973). New Evidence of Hinayana Buddhism in Vidarbha. *Puratattva 1972-73*, p. 84-86.
17. Deotare, B. (2005). Discovery of structural Stupa at Bhon District Buldhana, Maharashtra. *Puratattva (Pravarpur Special)*, 3, p. 1-16.
18. Joshi, D. S. (1972). *Pauni Excavation (1969-70)*. Nagpur: Nagpur University Vidyapeeth Mudranalay.
19. Kane, P. (1965). Ancient Geography and Civilization of Maharashtra. *Journal of Bombay of Royal Asiatic Society Vol. XXIV (1914-17)*, p. 621.
20. Nath, A. (1989). Archaeology of the Wardha Wainganga Divide. *Puratattava Volume 20, Issue 1*, p. 20, 97.
21. Sawant, R. (2010). Review of Archaeological Investigations in the Protohistoric. *Man and Environment XXXV(2)*, p. 45-65.

22. Sawant, R. (2011). *Buddhism in Regional Perspective*. Monasteries Shrines & Society, Manak Publication, New Delhi, p. 84-111.
23. Sharma, J. J. (2005). Mansar Excavation 1998-2004: Discovery of Pravarapur. *Puramathan (Pravarapur Special)* 3, p. 1-16.
24. Vaidya, M. S. (2016). Newly Discovered Terracotta Figurines from Recent Exploration in Nagpur District, Vidarbha. *The Odisha Historical Research Journal Odisha State Museum, Bhubaneswar*, ISSN No: 0474-7269 Volume LV, Issue 1, p. 47.

