

AIHOLE PRASASTI INSCRIPTION OF POLEKESHI II

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This research paper is a thorough epigraphic study of the Aihole Prasasti inscription engraved by Ravikeerti on behalf of Polakeshi II of Chalukyas of Badami. In a sense it is comparable to Allahabad Prasasti of Harisena engraved on behalf of Samudra Gupta. This inscription is a detailed biographical sketch of Polakeshi II. Having been composed in Sanskrit language and Brahmi script, the inscription provides the socio-cultural backdrop of the Chalukyan era. This paper comprises following components:

- (i) Description of Space and Time of the Inscription
- (ii) An Epigraphic Out-line of the Aihole
- (iii) Genealogical Components of the Inscription
- (iv) A Critical Appreciation of the Aihole Prasasti
- (v) A Chronological Lineages of the Inscription

Glossory

Epigraphia Indica, Chalukya Kula, Trivargas, Mahakadamba, Avabhrita Snana, Baimarathi, Indra Vajra, Matte Bhavikridita Aihole is a small village in Hunagund taluka of Bagalakot district (Karnataka State of India) famous for temples of unique order. The hamlet has a small hillock where-upon a shrine dedicated to an ancient religion of the sub-continent is situated. Upon the western wall portion of the temple a well drafted inscription has been engraved by Ravikeerti, the court laureate of the Chalukyan dynasty ruler Pulakeshi II. The content of the inscription is expressed in "...refined poetic language with embedded grammatical and regional elements."⁽¹⁾ The inscription comprising 19 lines is dated as 556 Shaka era and 634-635 Christian era. Its language is Sanskrit and script is Kannada and Telugu of 7th CAD. The inscription has been published by J.F.Fleet in Indian Antiquary,

volume V and VIII. Keelarn has published the same in the VI volume of the Epigraphia Indica.

A Brief Synopsis of the Inscription: Literary Ornamentation and Historicity

This inscription begins with praising the Prime God, '...Hey You, Almighty Free from birth, old age, and death and having hidden the entire world in knowledge bank, I wish you a lasting success'. Likewise, it eulogises, '...Hey you, 'Chalukya Kula' having given birth to earthly studs, referred to as 'male diamonds' I wish a lasting success. Similarly, it praises, '... Satyashraya (Polakeshi), the one who offers charity and felicitation, I wish unillusive furtherance.

After many Chalukyan rulers with Prithvi Vallabha title passed on, ...Jayasimha Vallabha became the King. He conquered the weaving Goddess of Wealth Lakshmi through his valourous battles. His son Ranaraga was a divine ordained, a man with universal character and a bright bodied individual.

His son was Polakeshi (the first). Though he had a spouse Indukanti by name, being Lakshmi Vallabha, he married a bride Vatapipuri (synonym to Badami). It means he made Badami his capital. Like him, the observation of trivargas' (Dharma, Artha and Kama) is essential till today for all rulers on earth. When he undertook Ashwamedha Yaga, due to his Avabhrita snana (clean-up campaign) the land startled with brightness.

Keerti Varma was the son of this Polakeshi. He was a night thunder to Nala, Maurya and Kada mba dynasty rulers. He was totally free from womanisation. But he conquered the wealth of the opponents in wars. He conquered Jayalakshmi through wars. He eliminated a cluster of trees (Mahakadamba) known as Kadambas.

After his death, his brother Mangalesha became King. His cavalry had degraded the land from eastern part to western part. He battled against Kachuris, drove away their elephantry, incorporated their wealth, subsequently captured Revati Dveepa with his large troops.

Like Nahusha, his brother's son Polakeshi was valorous. Having observed His uncle Manga lesha being jealous, he thought of moving away from the state for quite some time. With the application of magic and enthusiasm, he reduced the power of Mangalesha. In his attempt to place his son upon the throne, Mangalesha lost his kingdom and life as well.

After Mangalesha lost the sovereignty the world being cloudier was brightened-up due to adventurous and prolific rise of Polakeshi. Utilising this

opportunity to their favour Appayika and Govinda, with the assistance of elephant force, marched to conquer the land to the north of river Baimarathi (synonym to Bheema) Appayika among them due to the troops of Appayika had had the taste of trepidation. The other man Govinda began serving Polakeshi instantaneously. He received fruits worth of his service.

When he invaded Vanavasi (Banavasi) rivaling Surapura, a locational fort (sthaladurga) appearing as if Bucks playing upon the waves of river Varada, surrounded with an ocean of troops it appeared at once like a Jaladurga (WaterFort).

Ganga and Alupa rulers, having already had the status of being gorgeously wealthy, being snubbed by his manliness, started serving him.

In Konkana, his ferocious troops, having slashed the Mauryans, their wealthiest township Puri in the west coast, took over the town like Purari (Ishwar or Indra) Latas, Malawas, Gurjaras and the feudatories who were penalised due to his gallantry, themselves became the Acharyas, the righteous models of an ideal conduct.

A war was fought against HarshaVardhana who had several feudatories. In that war Harsha Vardhana having observed his elephantry being toppled lost his state of happiness.

Near Vindya Mountains, on the banks of River Reva (synonym to Narmada), when Polakeshi was camping with his large troops, that river wombing out of the river mountains was lit-up with instinctive charm.

Having assumed status of being master, magic and enthusiasm the three powers, born in a cultured family, and the other brighter qualities he became equivalent to Indra gained the over lordship of 99,000 villages comprising Mahakshatrapa.

Kosalite and Kalingites had had the fear of his troops. He conquered extremely difficult Pishta pura fort. The lake water of Kaunala being chartered became reddish due to blood.

Polakeshi forced Pallavaraja of Kanchi to hide in his fort. He with his large elephant force was enthusiastic about crossing over river Cauvery to

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conquer the Cholas. There he appeared like the Sun to melt away the Pallavas, provided greater fortune to the Chola, Kerala and Pandya rulers.

Thus Satyashraya with his over lordship, magic and enthusiasm conquered all directions, fare-welled all greatest among the great rulers, offered obeisance to divine Brahmanas ruled the land from ocean to ocean including Vatapinagar like a city itself.

After three thousand seven hundred thirty five years, 556 years passed away after the Saka era (equivalent to 634-35) this greater monumental stone edifice (Meguti) was built by the intelligent, Ravikirti being gracious enough to have the patronage of Satyashraya(Poakeshi).

The architect of this inscription, a devotee of the lord of the three worlds, Ravikeerti himself was the builder of this monument with his own money. Let Success shower upon Ravikeerti who is equivalent in this poetic construction to Kalidas and Bharavi, This inscription being typical in applying contextually the ornamentation techniques of "...a prosaic and poetic language comprising upama, rupaka, utprekse, paryayokfti and other relevant metaphors."⁽²⁾

Following transliterated Sentences from the inscription reveal the early history of the Chalukyas of Badami. These are crucial in the reconstruction of the History of the Chalukyas of Badami

- Victorious is the holy **Lord** -he who is exempt from old age, death and birth--in the sea of whose knowledge the whole world is comprised like an island.
- And next, long victorious is the immeasurable, wide ocean of the **Chalukya** family, which is the birth-place of jewels of men that are ornaments of the diadem of the earth.
- And victorious for very long is **Satyashraya**, who in bestowing gifts and honours on the brave and on the learned, both together on either, observes not the rule of correspondency of number.
- When many members of that race, bent on conquest, applied to whom the title of Favourite of the Earth had at last become appropriate, had passed away,
- There was, of the **Chalukya** lineage, the king named **Jayasimhavalabha**, who in battle--where horses, footsoldiers and elephants, bewildered, fell down under the strokes of many hundreds of weapons, and where thousands of frightful headless trunks and of flashes of rays of swords were leaping to and fro--by his bravery made Fortune his own, even though she is suspected of fickleness.

- His son was he who was named **Ranaraga**, of divine dignity, the one master of the world, whose superhuman nature, (even) when he was asleep, people knew from the pre-eminence of his form.
- His son was **Polekeshin**, who, though endowed with the moon's Beauty, and though the favorite of Fortune, became the bridegroom of **Vatapipuri**
- Whose path in the pursuit of the three objects of life the kings on earth even now are unable to follow; and bathed by whom with the water of the purificatory rite, when he performed the horse-sacrifice, the earth beamed with brightness.
- His son was **Kirtivarman**, the night of doom to the **Nalas, Mauryas and Kadambas**, whose mind, although his thoughts kept aloof from others' wives, was attracted by the Fortune of his adversary.
Who, having secured the fortune of victory by his valour in war, being ascent-elephant of a king, of great strength, at once completely broke down the multitude of the broad Kadamba trees the **Kadambas**

Critical Notes about the Inscription

Among Inscriptional sources of Indian history, Aihole Prasasti of Polakeshi is an important one. Beng composed in matured poetic Sanskrit by Ravikeerti, throws a flood of light on early political history of the Chalukyas. Having built on Meguti hillock by Ravikeerti has provided a befitting context for inscribing the inscription. In this backdrop, this inscription records the dynastic history of the Chalukyas, prominently the achievements of Polakeshi II in greater detail. Generally, historians refer to this ruler as Pulakeshi, Pulikeshi. However this inscription points out his appropriate name as 'Polekeshi'.

It is remarkable that though the inscription being Poetic in form, the achievements of the Chalukya rulers have been objectively recorded. It has been documented that in Chalukya dynasty, after Jayasimha and his son Ranaraga completed their tenures', the son of Ranaraga Polakeshi made Vatapipuri his capital and performed Ashwamedha yaga. Polakeshi was the real founder of the Chalukya dynasty. However, he generally, as historians have recorded, not to have conflicted against his contemporary dynastic families. Polakeshi, the son of Keertivarma stated openly that he was a nightly terror to Nala, Maurya and Kadamba rulers. Keertivarma also was credited for bringing down the Kadamba dynasty from power. This substantiates the fact that the extension of the Chalukyan kingdom with Keertivarma himself. After Keertivarma, Manga Isha came to power. He defeated Katakuris,

conquered Revati Dvipa (possibly Goa), thus extended the Chalukyan kingdom from east coast to the west coast. The fact that Mangalesha refused to hand over power to Polakeshi after he came of age , tried to make his son the ruler of the kingdom and failed and died in the endeavor has also been recorded well in the inscription. This is an indication to the objective outlook of the author of the inscription Ravikeerti. The subsequent exploitation of the state of lawlessness and anarchy by Appayika and Govinda was prevented by Polakeshi on the northern bank of the river Bhimarathi and Polakeshi being punished; Banavasi the capital of the Kadambas being seized and occupied; Gangas and Alupas being inclined to serve Polakeshi; Puri (Gharapuri, Elephanta)-Konkana Maurya's capital being conquered through boats; Lata, Malawa and Gurjaras being penalized to feudatorial submission, defeating Harsha's elephantry making him hapless; becoming the overlord of Mahakshatrayas' (three Maharashtras'), Kosala and Kalinga being terrorized; Pishta pura Durga being captured; The place of Kunala Sarovara–VengiNadu (Kolleru of Andhra, Godavari Region); Pallava king made to take shelter in Kanchipuram; the prominence of the Pallava rulers being degraded to promote the fortune of the Cholas, Keralites and Pandyas; finally retreat to Vatapi Puri , -these all achievements are being observed by Ravikeerti as chronological but different phases of the same campaign. But, a glaring mistake being names of the rulers of different dynasties defeated by Polakeshi has not been mentioned. However, as Hyderabad Copper Plate suggests until 613AD until Harsha was defeated it appears his victory being incomplete. It is evident from the inscription that by about 616-17 AD, in Vengi region, Pulakeshi's brother Vishnuvardhana was serving as Yuvaraja (would be ruler). This indicates that the campaign in Godavari region was already complete. Probably , the second phase of the Pulakeshi's campaign probably had begun by about 630AD. At this stage, Polakeshi had once again had his control upon other regions of Andhra Pradesh and then defeated other rulers like Pallavas of Kanchi and a few more dynasties. Most of the scholars believe that Polakeshi fought two wars with the Pallavas, in the first instance he defeated Pallava Mahendra Varma, in the second instance , he himself was defeated by Narasimha Varma I. According to K.V.Ramesh, Pallava being referred to... in the inscription "...was Narasimha Varma I rather than Mahendra Varma."⁽⁵⁾ This invasion occurred during 632-33 AD. Overall, it is evident from the Aihole Prasasti that by 634 AD , Polakeshi having completed his campaigns, was ruling upon a large kingdom with peace and order.

From other reasons too the inscription is significant. The year of the Maha Bharat war and the Shaka year are simultaneously referred it...in the inscription is evident that as per the convention MahaBharat war was fought during BC 3101. Thus the first year of the Kaliyuga being utilized for chronological estimate is often depicted in the inscriptions of the Kadambas of Goa.

The creator of this poetic creation Ravikirti analogises himself with Kalidasa and Bharavi. As we exactly do not know the exact date of Kalidasa and Bharavi, there are different opinions among scholars about the date. From the present inscription, the date of the inscription is said to have been circa 634 AD. It is evident from the pillar inscription of Chalukya Mangalesha during the period of Chalukya Mangalesha, Kalidasa was already famous in Karnataka. In the inscription, "...a shloka of Raghuvamsa has been directly taken-up. The poetic expertise of Ravikeerti has been squarely accepted by scholars." (6)

The influence of Kalidasa's Raghuvamsa and Bharavi's Keeratarjuniya is depicted in the utility of words by Ravikeerti.

He in his poetic edifice has situationally applied many more alankaras like "...upama, rupaka, utprekse, parya yokfti and shabdalanankaras like yamaka, anuprasa, and chandassus like aryas, aryasgiti, oupcha and ssika, indravajra, matteBhavikridita, mandakranta, malini." Deciding about the chronology of the structural builds of the Chalukyas is problematic.

In this backdrop, this inscription is useful in arriving at a chronological decision about Meguti temple complex. The date is said to have been 634 AD. In this respect, the Aihole inscription is quite useful in arriving at the growth of the Chalukyan architecture.

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