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Production of Courseware
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Paper: Indian Epigraphy
Module: Epigraphy as a Source for the Political History of India

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Component-I (B) – Description of module:

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| Pre requisites | Knowledge of English  
                     Basic Knowledge in history |
| Objectives   | • Understanding the meaning of History  
                     • Knowing the meaning of Politics and Political history  
                     • Finding out how epigraphy is useful for reconstructing political history in India |
| Keywords     | Political History, Epigraphy |

E-text (Quadrant-I) :

1. Introduction

Epigraphy is an important source for reconstructing history. This module presents how the discipline of epigraphy and inscriptions are useful for understanding the political history of India. India has tens of thousands of inscriptions, in innumerable languages and scripts, covering a time scale of more than 2000 years, and it is simply not possible to present a complete survey of the inscriptions related to the political history of India in a short text such as this module. Therefore, this lesson seeks to present the main ideas about how epigraphy is useful in the reconstruction of the political history of India. You may consult several publications cited in the Bibliography including, D.C. Sircar (1966, 1971), Subbarayalu 1973, 2012; Karashima 1984; 2001; Saloman 1997, Upinder Singh 2008, 2009.

It introduces the subject of epigraphy, political history, and presents an account on the various aspects of political history such as the dynasties, battles, expeditions, administration and justice. It seeks to draw the epigraphical sources from different parts of India to elucidate the point. However, students should seek to look for reading the original texts of the epigraphs to understand how people communicated various ideas, instructions and proceedings through the formal texts called inscriptions. A point to be remembered by the students is that ‘epigraphy’ is not the only source of history, and it is one of the sources; therefore, a holistic study of all kinds of sources, including literature and archaeological and art historical remains is important for properly understanding the historical developments.

Objectives

- This lesson focuses on the definition of epigraphy and political history.
- It brings out how the inscriptions are useful for the reconstruction of political history.
- It deals with some of the important inscriptions related to the political and administrative history of India.
2. Epigraphy

You would have by now learnt about the branch of knowledge called epigraphy in the general introduction of this paper. But, let's recapture the basics here. Epigraphy deals with the study of inscriptions, copper plates and other forms of writings. It pertains to the study of the documents or records issued for political, administrative, social, economic and cultural purposes. These documents were not issued as historical records and they were issued for their day-to-day needs. The inscriptions are one of the primary sources, in the sense that they were created by the people of past. The epigraphical records are technical documents, which were originally written on the palm leaves and probably, some of them were inscribed on the copper plates and stones. What is preserved now is only a limited quantity of the original records.

The documents that were written on the palm leaves are gone, leaving only those inscribed on the stone and metal. Short inscriptions are also found on the coins, images, seals, and other objects and they are also useful in understanding the history. A very few of the documents written in the late medieval period are preserved in the palm-leaf manuscripts. Hence, the study of epigraphy is intimately linked to the study of manuscriptology. Epigraphy is discipline that deals with original source documents, their meanings and interpretations. It is essential for the historians to be familiar with the “words” and their meanings and their context from the inscriptions. Therefore, mastering epigraphy requires, knowing and having a good ground in the concerned or related languages; for example Kannada, Malayalam, Persian, Sanskrit, Tamil, Telugu and Urdu. A researcher has to crosscheck the meanings of specific terms and usage in context, through the parallels found in other languages. Cross regional comparison is also important. One has to understand the script, i.e. palaeographical variations and style, and should have the quest to dig the meanings of the words and their usage from contemporary texts, which could be literary or religious. Besides, scrutiny of the oral or living traditions of a region, which could sometime use the words mentioned in the inscriptions in a modified or transformed form, is also important.

As Noboru Karashima points out, we have to listen to the “whispers” and “murmurs” of the inscriptions. Therefore, epigraphy is the critical study of ancient documents with sound theory, methods and knowledge of history, languages, literature, culture, ethnography, anthropology and palaeography.

3. Sources

The sources for the study of inscriptions are published in numerous publications. To understand the importance of the inscriptions the original texts have to be consulted, and the texts published in various reports may not be accurate. The short account of inscriptions is published in the Annual Report on Indian Epigraphy, published by the Archaeological survey of India. The Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, South Indian Inscriptions, Epigraphia Indica, Journal of the Epigraphical Society of India and the various publications of the Archaeology Departments of the State Governments have the texts of the inscriptions.

4. Political History: an Introduction

What is politics? The standard definition of politics, according to the Oxford Dictionary is “the activities associated with the governance of a country or other area, especially the debate or conflict among individuals or parties having or hoping to achieve power.” Politics is about managing the society or a group of people and determining their destiny. Politics has always attracted people because of the power and perks associated with it. Now we live in the age of modern democracy dictated by complex set of laws and administrative systems. People who led a very simple life in the prehistoric time too felt the necessity of a leader to represent them and guide them. The leader who was a simple person initially became part of and head
of a complex system of polity controlling people and creating several complex rules and procedures. Political history studies how people were managed and administered through the ages, and how state emerged as a political entity, how various institutions controlled and administered the territories. It also studies the interrelationships among the spheres of political, social, economic, and cultural.

Political history

“Political history is the narrative and analysis of political events, ideas, movements, organs of government, voters, parties and leaders. It is interrelated to other fields of history, especially diplomatic history, as well as constitutional history and public history.” Political history often deals with the rulers, state formation, taxation system, and the battles that they fought, and the administrative and judicial systems.

Political history studies

- the various forms of governments
- how people were managed and administered through the ages
- how kingship was legitimized
- how state emerged as a political entity,
- how various kingdoms fought and established their power
- how the institutions called state controlled and administered the territories.

Can we divide history into political, economical and cultural? Are these categories justifiable? In a sense, yes; but in another sense, no! History is one and it has to be approached, holistically. Everything is interconnected in this world; many spheres of activities are interrelated. Therefore, these divisions of history are artificial, and we should look at history beyond these narrow divisions. In the early stages of historiography, political history and only the kings and royals political history was given importance, and nowadays the discipline of history gives more importance to the study of social formations, cultural and economic aspects. However, political history cannot be considered unimportant. In the contemporary democratic world, politics plays an important factor and the power to control the society lies with the few, who could be just ordinary citizens, in the initial stages of their career.

The *Annales* school that developed in France due to the efforts of Lucien Febvre (1878–1956) Marc Bloch (1886–1944), and other researchers sought to focus on the history of ordinary people, environment, population, agriculture, commerce, technology, transportation, and communication, communities and mentalities. History has become a broader and theoretically well-informed discipline from the middle of the twentieth century. Some scholars may regard political history as not a very important branch of knowledge; however, political history cannot be completely ignored, but it should be studied in tandem with other components of history. Because of the nationalism and the obsession with kings and empires, the early researchers gave too much importance to the empires and polities. Political history is equally important and it has to be studied in relation to other components of the society.

In this lesson, we would focus on certain important components of political history in a conventional sense, while at the same time, we keep in mind that political history is just one
aspect of history and it cannot be studied in isolation, and that it is interrelated with other spheres of history.

5. Importance of Epigraphical Sources

Inscriptions--the Tamrasasanas (copper plates) or Silasasanas (stone inscriptions) as they are called--are valuable, permanent records available in India for the reconstruction of history. There are in a sense the most authentic documents that we have for Indian history. People of the ancient and medieval India felt the importance of the documents and records for their day-to-day activities and sought to preserve the documents for posterity as long as ‘the Sun and moon last’ by etching the records on non-perishable media such as stone or metal.

D.C. Sircar (1965:2) divides inscriptions into two categories: those that were issued by the kings and those issued by the private individuals. While the inscriptions issued by the kings give the details of their expeditions, fame, deeds and activities; sometimes, the inscriptions issued by the private individuals present only the names of the king and the regnal year as a point of reference, and the main theme of the inscription. The inscriptions of the second category are more in number and they help us to reconstruct the extent and duration of a king’s rule.

The inscriptions often provide the missing link or completely new information regarding the kings. This point can be explained by an inscription. The king Budhagupta was identified through an inscription found in Eran in Sagar district of Madhya Pradesh. The inscription mentions about one Surasmicandra was a viceroy of Budhagupta. This inscription has the date of 165 in Gupta era, which corresponds to 494-495 CE. It helps us to understand that Budhagupta ruled over the Malva region (Sircar 1965: 12).

The ideas and concepts including state formation, gender and any other aspects can be studied by critically looking at the information from the inscriptions. Careful analyses of the inscriptions have helped us to understand the multiple dimensions of the political systems of the medieval period. Students of history need to work with the inscriptions, the primary, original sources to understand and interpret history. Epigraphy offers the source, and but the use of theoretical and methods perspectives, right questions and frameworks could only offer the best results in historical research.

6. Epigraphy and Historical Sense of the Indians

One of the issues in Indian historiography concerns the historical sense of the Indians. The earlier contention was to accuse the Indians for completely lacking historical sense. This perception developed, because of the monolithic, unilinear view of history that had developed because of the influence of modernism. However, from an introspective approach points out the Indians did have certain degree historical sense and this is reflected in the itihasa-purana traditions and vamsavali narratives, as discussed by Romila Thapar (2013) in her work The Past Before Us.

The inscriptions do give evidence to the extent that the Indians had did have a sense of history, and it is reflected in the vamsavalis presented in the prasasti or meikirti portion of the inscriptions. The kings used their lineages, both actual and mythological, as a means of acquiring political legitimacy. Apart from the genre of prasasti and meikirti of texts, other references also do suggest that people had maintained the records of events in ancient India. This is exemplified by some of the inscriptions that attempt to give the earlier activities and events. The Junagad inscription of Rudradaman, datable to 150 CE, records about the events that happened before that time with regard to the Sudarsana Lake. It is not clear if this information was available with them in any written form or it was prevalent as an oral
tradition then. The inscription mentions that Sudarsana lake was created by Rastriya Pusyagupta, and the Yavana king Tushapa created irrigation channels nearby, on behalf of Asoka. It discusses the events that developed from the time of Chandragupta Maurya, and we could assume that there existed some records as pointed by D.C. Sircar (1965).

7. Polities and Dynasties

Inscriptions do help us to reconstruct the polities and dynasties of a particular region and the issues concerning the formation of polity and state. The inscriptions offer two kinds of information. The first dataset is related to the content of the inscriptions and the second dataset concerns the locational context and the geo-coordinates, i.e., actual location of the inscription and time dimension and association. Both the data inputs are important for understanding the polities and their domain in space and time.

Inscriptions are crucial to understand the names, regnal years and the area of control and the political and administrative activities of the kings. The data on the dynasties can be obtained from the literary texts, traveller’s accounts and inscriptions issued by the kings. Indians seems to have made very few systematic attempts to document the political history, and the historians have to depend upon the fragmentary records issued by the various kings, which possess bits and pieces of political information. Let’s look at how the data from inscriptions is useful in understanding the polities and their domains and their activities. Another problem is the adoption of identical names by the kings, and princes, perhaps became of the tradition that grandfathers’ name may be given to a person.

Asokan Edicts

The earliest, coherent royal documents preserved in the form of inscriptions belong to the Mauryan emperor Asoka and the Asokan inscriptions help us to reconstruct the political scenario around the third century BCE in South Asia, and West Asia and parts of Europe.

Read the following excerpts from text of Rock Edict XIII carefully.

“Now it is conquest by Dhamma that Beloved-of-the-Gods considers to be the best conquest. And it (conquest by Dhamma) has been won here, on the borders, even six hundred yojanas away, where the Greek king Antiochos rules, beyond there where the four kings named Ptolemy, Antigonos, Magas and Alexander rule, likewise in the south among the Cholas, the Pandyas, and as far as Tamraparni. Here in the king's domain among the Greeks, the Kambojas, the Nabhakas, the Nabhapamkits, the Bhojas, the Pitinikas, the Andhras and the Palidas, everywhere people are following Beloved-of-the-Gods' instructions in Dhamma. Even where Beloved-of-the-Gods' envoys have not been, these people too, having heard of the practice of Dhamma and the ordinances and instructions in Dhamma given by Beloved-of-the-Gods, are following it and will continue to do so. This conquest has been won everywhere, and it gives great joy -- the joy which only conquest by Dhamma can give. But even this joy is of little consequence. Beloved-of-the-Gods considers the great fruit to be experienced in the next world to be more important.” (Sircar 1965)

This edict of Asoka gives an idea of the political situation in the region from India to the Europe. The text indicates that the Greek kings Antiochus Ptolemy, Antigonos, Magas and Alexander ruled in the area to the west of Asoka’s empire. In the southern part of India, the Cholas, the Pandyas, and Tambapanni (Sri Lanka) are mentioned. Other edict (No. II) of Asoka mentions about Keralaputra and satiyaputra of South western part of South India. From the above account, it is clear that Asoka’s domain was confined to a central area and certain groups of people and polities were outside, and his message of Dhamma reached as far as this area.
Asokan inscriptions mention that in the king's domain were "the Greeks, the Kambojas, the Nabhakas, the Nabhapamkits, the Bhojas, the Pitinikas, the Andhras and the Palidas" and "everywhere people are following Beloved-of-the-Gods' instructions in Dhamma." This statement perhaps indicates that some of these polities or groups did not fully merge with the Asokan domain and they had their original identity, but were within the Asoka's domain and control, or they accepted Asoka as their lord.

Portraits of Kings

Portraits of kings of found as sculptures as well as coins. Coins which have short legends also serve as an important source of political history. The portrait sculpture from a stupa at Kanaganahalli in Karnataka has the inscription in Brahmi as "Ranyo Ashoka" (Upinder Singh 2008: 333; Poonacha 2007).

Hathigumpha Inscription of Kharavela

Another important inscription related to the early history of Orissa is the Kalinga king Kharavel's record. The Hathigumpha inscription is found in a Jain cave at Udayagiri in Orissa. It presents a verse of Jain mantra and mentions about the repair of the Kalinga Nagara. His invasion of Satavahana kingdom, the defeat of the Rathika, Bhojaka and Yavana kings, invasion of Rajagriha and Pataliputra. It also mentions about his clashes with the confederracy of the kings of southern part of India (Sircar 1965).

Bhattiprolu Inscription

The Bhattiprolu casket inscription (Fleet 1908) and other records found in Andhra Pradesh in Buddhist context are very important for understanding the political condition of Andhra Pradesh, apart from its use in understanding the development of the early South Indian scripts. Although it is a very short inscription, it mentions about a king Kubiraka, about whom no other source of information is available.

Prasasti

Prasasti, which is found in the first part of the inscriptions, is useful in understanding the polities and the ruling dynasties. Prasasti is a genre of text produced as part of the legitimization process of the ruler and the state. Sanskrit poetics (Kavya meter) and astronomical details have been incorporated in the prasastis. The earliest prasasti comes from the inscription of Samudragupta from Allahabad. The prasasti portions of the inscriptions talk about the ancestry of the kings, which is often starts with mythical account, thereby equating the kings' ancestry to a very ancient period. The prasasti also provides the actual list of kings. Although the prasasti part is written in a poetic style, it elaborates the military victories, and cultural activities, skills and fame of the kings. The meikirtis of the Chola inscriptions are similar to prasasti in nature.

The names of the poets who composed the inscriptions in the kavya style are also mentioned in the inscriptions. The poet Harisena, who composed the Allahabad Pillar inscription of Samudragupta (360 CE), and Kubja, the poet of Talagunda inscription of Santivarman (460 CE; Vatsabhatti of the Mandasor inscription (473 CE); Ravirkirti of the Aihole inscription of Pulakesin II (634 CE); Chittapa of the Bhilsa inscription (1050 CE); Vacaspati of the Bhubaneswar inscription of Bhavadeva-bhatta (1000 CE) and Umapatidhara of Deopada inscription of Vijayasena (1130 CE), are some of the important poets who find place in the historical records (Sircar 1965).
The Allahabad Pillar Inscription of Samudragupta

The Allahabad pillar inscription of the Gupta king Samudragupta is one of the most important inscriptions dealing with the *prasasti* genre of texts. The Allahabad *prasasti* speaks about the fame of the king as

"Whose body was most charming, being covered with the plenteous beauty of the marks of hundreds of scars caused by battle-axes, arrows, spikes, spears, barbed darts, swords, iron clubs, javelins, barbed arrows, long arrows and many other weapons."

While this above account is clearly a poetic expression and exaggeration, it may also highlight the tradition of praising the king in the courts, and this text was perhaps read out and explained to the king in the royal court, before its approval and transformation into a permanent record. The description of the king presented here is resembles the descriptions found in the literary traditions of India. The Allahabad *prasasti* was composed by Harisena and the inscription mentions that it was in Kavya meter.

The expression “Samudragupta the Maharajadhiraja” brings out the superlative titles adopted by the kings. The inscription mentions that “Samudragupta, the Maharajadhiraja, son of the prosperous Chandragupta (I), the Maharajadhiraja, born of the Mahadevi Kumaradevi, (and) daughter's son of the Lichchhavi son's son of the prosperous Ghatotkacha, the Maharaja and the son of the son's son of the prosperous Gupta, the Maharaja.” The conquests of various kings are mentioned in the inscription in great detail.

Aihole Parasasti

The Aihole inscription of Pulakesin II ca. 634 CE narrates the events of about a century. It mentions about Jayasimha Vallabha who founded the Chalukya dynasty and his son Ranaraga. Ranaraga's son Pulikesin who made Vatapi as the capital is mentioned. Along with his son and successor Kiritvarman I, who subdued the neighbouring powers such as the Nalas, Mauryas and Kadambas. He was succeeded by his younger son Mangalesa, and then followed Pulakesin II. This narrative about the genealogy and the events suggest that the dynasties maintained an account of the historical record or they were recollected from the memories and the poets documented them.

Inscription of Prithvi Vigraha Bhattacharika

Prithvi Vigraha Bhattacharika inscription found in Orissa refers to the grant of a village Ardhaka-Manduka and Chandan Vataka in the Parakkala Marga visaya of Maharaja Dharmaraja. Dharmaraja was ruling over Padmakholi as a feudatory of Prithivi Vigraha Bhattacharika, who was a governor of Kalinga rashtra during the Gupta rule. The inscription dated in the Gupta year era 250 suggests that this part was under the reign of the Guptas.

Inscription of Satrubhanja, Orissa

The inscription of Satrubhanja, from Asanpat village of Kheonjhar district of Orissa and datable to ca. 6th century CE is found on a stone slab under an eight armed the Nataraja-Siva image. It refers to the son of Maharaja Manabhanja and queen Damayanti of Naga Family. The king is described as lord of *Vindhayavati*, and this perhaps refers to Kheonjhar district. The king is said to have visited Pataliputra, Tamluk, Gaya, Kirimila, Lalavardhana, and Pundravardhana. He might have been a feudatory of the Guptas (Tripathy 1997: 44-45). This inscription sheds light on an important aspect related to the early history Orissa.
Gunaigarh Copper Plate Inscription, Comilla, Bengal

Gunaigarh Copper plate Inscription was found in Comilla of Bengal. It is important for understanding the history of eastern India. This copper plate sheds light on the Gupta history after Budha Gupta. Vainyagupta's name appears in the Gunaigarh Copper plate inscription. It refers to the victory camp at Kripura and donation of land to Maharaja Rudradatta for the maintenance of a Vihara. It perhaps refers to the Tripura area. Dated in Gupta Era 188 and corresponds to 507 CE. Vijayasena was his governor in the Bhukti of Uttaramandala in Samatata. It mentions about Kumaramatyas serving as his Vishayapatis.

The Meikirthi of the Cholas

The *meikirti* for each king is unique and it goes on to elaborate the conquests and achievements of the king in a poetic style. The Chola king Rajaraja I introduced the *meikirti* in the Tamil country. Each king adopted a specific poetic text and that became their identity. For example, Rajaraja I adopted a *meikirti* that begins with “Thiramagal polapperunilachelviiyum” or “Kantalurcalai Kalarumarutuli” and Rajendra I adopted, the text that begins with “Thirumanni valara irunilamandaiyum Porjaya paavaiyum.” Though Nilakanta Sastri described the *meikirti* as *poykirthi* (Sastri 1955: 5) (*mei* means body and also truth, *kirti* means fame, while *poy*, means false in Tamil), he himself admits there are of exceptional value. These texts present an account of expeditions and events that represent the version of the issuer of the grant. The authenticity of the claims may be checked with the other epigraphs and accounts.

7.1 Battles and Expeditions

The inscriptions are very useful to understand the political battles and conflicts. The battles, war or clashes are very much part of the political history. Such political fights go back to the prehistoric period, when communities fought with simple bow and arrows or stones. The rock paintings too depict such clashes in the form of illustrations. The details of political conquests are mentioned by the kings in their own inscription

The inscription of Asoka lists the devastating effects of the war with Kalinga. This is one rare, early inscription that discusses about the battle in some detail.

Read the text of Rock Edict X III carefully,

“Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, conquered the Kalingas eight years after his coronation. One hundred and fifty thousand were deported, one hundred thousand were killed and many more died (from other causes). After the Kalingas had been conquered, Beloved-of-the-Gods came to feel a strong inclination towards the Dhamma, a love for the Dhamma and for instruction in Dhamma. Now Beloved-of-the-Gods feels deep remorse for having conquered the Kalingas.”

The kings often claim their victory over the enemies. The *prasasti* of Samuaragupta, Pulakesin and Rajaraja and Rajendra all vividly portray the victories of the kings. Through these inscriptions the nature of the conflicts and their effects and expeditions are brought out. For example the Pallava king Mahendravarman I claims to have defeated Pulakesin II, who claims to have defeated the Pallava king. Such claims can be corroborated only after studying the inscriptions and their distribution.

7.2 Distribution of Inscriptions

Apart from the claims, the distribution of inscriptions of a particular king could offer information on the domain under the control. After the loss at the battle of Takkolam to the
Rashtrakutas, the Chola influence decreased briefly in the region of Tondaimandalam (Northern Tamil Nadu). The Atakur inscription of Bututuga II, which dates to 949-50, mentions about the battle. The inscriptions of the Chola Parantaka I are not found in the region of Tondaimandalam after 948 CE, while the inscription of Rashtrakuta king Krishna datable to 16th to 28th regnal years are found in the area (Sastri 1955: 132). This evidence points to the loss of the territory to the Rashtrakutas (Sastri 1955: 131).

7.3 Domain of the Dynasties: The Hero stone Inscriptions of the Pallava period

Not the least is the conflicts at the local level among the chiefs. While the major battles and conflicts find mention in the prasasti, the minor clashes are not listed in these inscriptions. The hero stone inscriptions of South India too reveal about the conflicts at the local level, especially in north western Tamil Nadu and Karnataka border during the Pallava times. Therefore, it is important to understand the different scales of conflicts that existed in the Medieval society.

Often based on the inscriptions, it is assumed that a particular region or a landscape was under a specific dynasty. However, a closer look at the reality would reveal the nature of the polity. The hero stone inscriptions found in the Chengam region of Thiruvannamalai are important documents to understand the nature of politics during the Early Pallava period. Although these regions are under the Pallavas, the local chiefs seem to have enjoyed influence and probably the areas were under the direct control of the local chiefs who owed their allegiance to the Pallavas.

7.4 Political Geography and Administrative Divisions

Political geography deals with the territorial divisions from the micro level to the macro level. Political geography and the administrative divisions are an important part of the political history. Territorial formation was important in the formation of early kingdoms. The Asokan inscriptions mention about the territory based entities such as the Greeks, the Kambojas, the Nabhakas, the Nabhapamkits, the Bhojas, the Pitinikas, the Andhras and the Palidas. The inscriptions do refer to about the geographical territories such as Renadu 7000, Tadigaipadi and Anarta.

The domain of the kings was divided into rashtra, bhukti, naadu, mandala, seema (sirmai) and valanadu for the purpose of administration. These divisions are brought out in detail in the descriptions from in the inscriptions. Renadu, Banavase 12000 and Belvola 3000 are some of the territorial divisions found in the inscriptions. D.C. Sircar’s Studies in the geography of ancient and medieval India, is an important work, Y Subbarayalu has studied the political geography of the Chola Country based on the inscriptions (1973). The territories were named after the kings and perhaps it was an attempt to establish their authority over the landscape.

7.5 State Formation

State formation is another important area in the context of political history. The level and degree of political control and the organization of state can be understood by studying the state formation. The inscriptions that offer information on various bodies, agencies and their relationships with the kings provide opportunity to understand the nature of the state. Based on the inscriptive records, scholars have studied the state formation and the nature of the Mauryan, Gupta, Chola and Vijayanagara states.

Donation of lands to Brahmanas was a political act since the Brahmanas and their knowledge on the Vedic-Sanskrit ideology supported the legitimization of the royal authority. Numerous land grants are found in India especially from the Gupta times. Almost all the
dynasties of medieval India made donation of lands to the Brahmanas (Upinder Singh 2009). For example Nidhanpur (in Sylhet) copper-plates of Bhaskarvarman (ca 620 and 643 CE) (Sircar 1971; Ghosh 2014) speaks about land donation to the Brahmanas. The Vakatakas issued many grants to the Brahmanas. The Chamak copper plates of Pravarasena II mentions about donation of land to 1000 Brahmanas and they are entitled to enjoy the privileges as long as they do not wage a war against the king and involve in murder (Upinder Singh 2008: 496; Mirashi 1963).

R. S. Sharma based on the land grants has argued that feudalism emerged from the Gupta times in India (1987). The argument of the Chola state as a Byzantian empire was developed by Nilakanta Sastri. Burton Stein proposed that the state of the Cholas was segmentary in nature (Stein 1980). The states had many segments constituting a pyramid as a whole. Each segment that had identical structure and political control was exercised within each segment by the chief and ritual sovereignty exercised by the one occupying the top of the pyramid. In the case of Cholas, the nadu was considered as a segment and Stein argued that the Cholas controlled only the main area of the Kaveri Delta. Noboru Karashima criticizes this view and argues that the monumental structures such as the Rajarajeswaram (or Brihadhiswara or Big) temple and the donation of lands for the temple from various parts of the territory and the detailed measurements and officials suggest that the Chola state was not segmentary as argued by Burton Stein (1980).

7.6 Administration and Administrative Officers

The administration of the kingdoms at various scales, from the higher level to the village unit level, forms part of political history. Administrative officers were the important component of the state machinery. The inscriptions help us to understand administrative system and the various functionaries involved in administration. From the Mauryan times, the administrative officers find their place in the inscriptions. Asoka’ inscriptions mention that “Everywhere in my domain the Yuktas, the Rajjukas and the Pradesikas shall go on inspection tours every five years for the purpose of Dhamma instruction and also to conduct other business.” This inscription indirectly informs us that these were specially appointed to look after the administrative affairs. The Eran inscription (484-485 CE) mentions about Surasmicandra, was a viceroy of Budhagupta. Likewise the labels related the officers and administration and matters related to administration are discussed in the inscription.

The Gupta period witnessed remarkable modification in the administrative system. The system of feudalism developed in this period. The political powers after the Mauryas began to engage the smaller regional powers in the political system. The land grant system, especially to the Brahmana, became common during the Gupta times and this system created a bond between the ruler and the donees. The merchant guilds seem to have managed some of the towns on their own. The Gupta records mention about the mahabaladhikrta (commander-in-chief), mahadandanayaka (general) and mahapratihara (chief of the palace guards). The Sandhivigrahika was the foreign minister (also performed the work of military general) mentioned in the Gupta inscriptions. Samanta which was used as a title for feudatory rulers is found commonly in the inscriptions of the medieval period.

In the areas of Cholas numerous administrative offers are mentioned. Senapthi, mukavetti, Tirumanthira olai nayakam, tiruvaikelvi and madhyasta are some of the officers mentioned in the inscriptions of Chola. Muvendavelan was the title given to the administrative officers of the Cholas, who belonged to a higher rank.

*Land Revenue and Revenue Administration*

Land revenue was a main source of income for the medieval kings. The lands were measured and classified and various measurement rods and units are mentioned in the
inscriptions. Various taxes that were collected from the peasants and craftspersons are also mentioned in the inscriptions (Jha 1967; Shanmugam 1987; Goyal 2005).

Welfare Measures by the Kings

The Sohagura (Gorakpur dt of Uttar Pradesh) plaque inscription mentions about an order issued from Manavasiti by Mahamatas of Shravasti. It mentions if drought occurs the goods from the storehouses at Tirveni, Chanchu, Modama and Bhadra were to be distributed to the people. Similar inscription from Mahastahngarh mentions about the relief offered during drought (Upinder Singh 2008: 329; Jayaswal 1933-34)

7.7 Local Administration

The village assemblies were functioning in the villages and they took care of the local administration. The Sabha was the assembly of the Brahmin villages. The merchant towns and the Non-Brahmin villages had their own system for managing the villages. Here in the Uttiramerur inscription of the Chola period is presented to understand how the local bodies selected their representatives and managed their affairs.

Uttiramerur Inscription

The Chola king Parantaka’s inscription from Uttiramerur gives a detailed account of selection of members for the committees of the Sabha in a democratic manner (Subrahmaniya Aiyar 1967). This system cannot be literally called modern democracy in which the ballot paper system is adopted and the person who wins maximum ballots is elected. But it is an open, democratic, transparent system of electing the representatives. This system was perhaps restricted to the Brahmin villages and we can assume that many of the Brahmin villages adopted this system. The Uttiramerur inscription is important, since it gives the code of conduct for the members and stipulates the qualification and in this manner it can be considered a landmark record in the history of Indian election system.

7.8 Regnal Years and Reckoning of Time

An important tradition related to the political inscriptions is counting time in terms of the elapsed years from the coronation of the king. Certain Asokan inscriptions mention that when 12 years passed since the installation on the throne. The calculation mentioned in relation to the known eras such as Saka or Kali, is rare. The creation of era in the name of the king or dynasty was another important practice adopted in India and this practice helped the domination of royal dynasties in chronological reckonings. The Gupta Era was created by the Gupta dynasties, and this era was used in northern India and it began in 318-19 CE. (Sircar 1965: 287). The Vikrama Era, which is considered to have begun in 58 BCE, is associated with a king Vikramaditya by an inscription (Sircar 1965: 251: Saloman 1997: 182).

7.9 Administration of Justice

Administration of justice is an important component of the political history, and the kings were sometimes directly involved in the administration, in the medieval times. There are several inscriptions that deal with the crime and punishment, and civil cases such as the restoration of rights over lands donated. The inscriptions reveal that administration of justice in the cases of clashes and disputes were done at different levels. While the important issues were dealt with by the king directly, various local bodies and the associations of nagaram were also involved in the administration of justice. For killing of persons by accident, the Chola inscriptions mention about the burning of lamps in the temple, as a type of punishment. Confiscation of land and ordering to pay fine or making donation for lighting
lamps in the temple are the means of punishment for crimes mentioned in the medieval inscriptions.

A few of the important inscriptions are described below.

Case Study 1: The Velvikkudi Grant of the Pandiyas

The copper plate grant of the Pandiya king Maranjataiyan is an important early medieval document that mentions about the restoration of traditional rights over a property. The village of Velvikkudi was given to a person called Narkorran by a king name Palyagasalai Mudugudumipperuvazhuti for performing a yagna. Then a king called Kalabhra who defeated many kings took away the land and the descendant goes and meets the king Parantakan Netunjataiyan and presents the evidence for the earlier donation. The king restores the donation. This is an important case related to the administration of justice and suggests the importance of the documentary records in proving the ownership of land and properties (Nagaswamy 1978).

Case Study 2: Manur Inscription of Pandiyas

The Manur inscription of Southern Tamil Nadu issued by Maranjadaivan reveals the constitution of the court of justice for enquiring into the disputes. This inscription dates in 805 CE. It mentions about Manraduvar (Judges) and Sravanaipuhuvar (hearers). It stipulates that the Sravanaipuhavar has to sit through the entire proceedings and not quarter, half or three-fourth of the hearing. It also states that one who buys a share in the village can become sravanipuhuvar only after, he passes a test in one Veda and including its parisistha (Nagaswamy 1978).

The Basrur inscription of Karnataka (1444 CE) mentions about the killing of Thirumahadavala and Bommasetty by the members of Nakhara association and the episode was enquired by the Settykara association and the accused persons had to make donations to the temple of Nakhareswara Mahadevaru temple of Basrur (DK 2011: 567).

7.10 International and Diplomatic Relations

Can we think of international relations when we deal with the history of the Medieval period? Yes. The inscriptions of Asoka are the earliest records of India dealing with the diplomatic connections between the empires and polities beyond the domain of the Mauryas. Asokan Rock Edicts mention about the diplomatic mission of dhamma and the planting of herbs for treating humans and animals in the region of modern Tamil Nadu, Sri Lanka and in the Greek areas.

The inscription from Nalanda mentions about the king Devapaladeva of Bengal who granted permission to Balaputradeva of Srivijaya to build a Buddhist monastery at Nalanda. Balaputra is mentioned as the son of Samaragrawira, grandson of Šailendravamsatilaka in the inscription.

The Leiden Copper plates of Rajaraja I mention about the donation of the income from the village of Anaimangalam to the Chulamanivarvamvihara built by the Sri Vijaya king at Nagapattinam. The smaller Leiden Copper Plates of 1090 CE mention about the restoration of the rights on the same village to viharas at Nagapattinam.

The inscriptions of Rajendra I refer to his expedition to Southeast Asia and conquest of many kings and territories. Although Rajendra Chola did not bring the area under the direct control, he continued to maintain relationships with the region.
These inscriptions point to the fact that some of the political entities of India had connections with the empires and kingdoms in the Asian region, and that Indian political history was not confined to the region of modern boundary of India.

8. Political, Economic, Social and Cultural Histories: The Inter-Connectedness

Although this lesson focused on the political history, at one level, history cannot be fragmented into various categories such as political history, economic history and social history. Often political history is intimately linked to the economic, social and cultural histories. The donation of the lands to the Brahmins in the medieval period and the associated activities cannot be simply reduced to cultural or social history, and they connect with the realm of political, economical, social and cultural histories. Carla M Sinopoli in her work titled *Political Economy of Craft production in South India* (2003) has investigated the nature of craft production during the Vijayanagar period in South India. She defines political economy “as the relations between political structure and systems and the economic realms of production, consumption and exchange.” Political decisions influence the economic realm and cultural traditions too influence the political activities.

9. Summary

The inscriptions are the most important sources for the reconstruction of history of a particular region. However, the availability of inscriptions and the quantity and quality of information available in them vary place to place. The inscriptions that deal with the political history were often issued by the royal establishment. The *prasasti* or *eulogy* portion of the inscriptions offers data on the *vamsavali* or genealogy of the kings. The political history can be reconstructed by carefully studying the regnal year of the kings mentioned in the inscriptions and their distribution on the landscape. The administration, justice and nature and level of state formation can also be studied using inscriptions and scrutinising the data from the inscriptions. Inscriptions may help us to understand the political history of a region in an authentic manner.

They sometimes offer the genealogy of the kings in detail. The Asokan inscriptions offer the political scenario of India very clearly. Sometime inscriptions offer completely new data which is not found in any other texts. They offer information on the battles and conquests. They help us to understand the central administration, local administration and the administration of justice. The use of inscriptions depends upon the methods and conceptual frameworks that we use to extract the information.

Historical geography of a region can also be studied using the data from the inscriptions. The data from the inscriptions need to be corroborated with the help of other sources. Sometimes, inscriptions may offer false claims and information. They need to be verified through internal as well as external criticisms. The external sources, inscriptions of the enemy kings and the distribution of inscriptions have to be analysed to get an accurate understanding. The data from the inscriptions can be beneficial by the critical use of statistical methods to extract maximum data.