

# Puskarana, Chandravarman and an Inscription at Susunia Hill

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## Abstract

There is a small hill named Susunia at Bankura district of West Bengal. A small inscription, written in Sanskrit language, is inscribed on the Susunia hill. The inscription at Susunia hill and identity of Puskarana and Chandravarman have been a subject of debate for long times. The Sanskrit inscription at Susunia hill refers a king named Chandravarman who dedicated something to his lord Chakraswami. The debate has ensued with the decipherment of the inscription and its interpretation and also with the identity of Puskarana and Chandravarman. The name Chandravarman is also mentioned in the Allahabad Pillar inscription, the Mandasor inscription dated 404 A.D. and the Meherauli Pillar inscription. The debate has ensued from here if the Chandravarman of the Susunia rock inscription is same Chandravarman of the Allahabad Pillar inscription, the Mandasor inscription and the Meherauli Pillar inscription. In this article, I will be trying to make a comparative study of the arguments already given by the scholars and I will also try to give my own interpretation of the inscription. In this way I will try to come into a conclusion of the debates grown surrounding this inscription.

## Keywords

Susunia, Pokhanna, Chandravarman, Bankura

## Introduction

Susunia is a small hill at Bankura district, a district of western part of West Bengal. Archaeologists have found proofs of early settlements on Susunia hill and its surrounding area. Susunia was an important settlement in lower Paleolithic age. An interesting inscription, written in Sanskrit language, has also been found on Susunia hill. Nagendranath Basu discovered the inscription. The inscription was

written in Brahmi script and from the letters of the script, it seemed to be engraved on about 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D.

### **The Inscription**

There are two parts of the Susunia rock inscription. The inscription is also surrounded by a large circle or chakra. Fourteen flames emanate from another circle parallel to this circle. Two semicircles are inscribed after each flame. In terms of script evolution, it can be said that the script of Susunia is Bhavlipi. The Kausambi style is seen in the Susunia rock inscription of Chandravarman. The medial vowel a, applied to the bottom right of na in both these inscriptions, survives later only in Bengal, and this practice is further extended to kha, ga, and ba. In such scripts, a few lines or 'motifs' were used to convey an object or a feeling without drawing the whole picture. Scholars call the script 'Vishnu chakra'. Below and on the sides of this Vishnu chakra are inscriptions on three chhatras. This is the second part of Susunia script. Brahmi script is written in Sanskrit. Many scholars have tried to read out the inscription. Amiyakumar Bandyopadhyay read out in this way:

**“Chakraswamin Dasgrenatisristo Puskaranadhipate Maharaj  
Singhavarmanasya**

**putra Maharaj Sree Chandravarman driti.**

**Chakraswamino Dhosogramotrisristo.”**

[It means that Sri Chandravarman, the lord of Puskarana, the chief servant of the Chakradhari deity (the deity holding discuss), dedicated a special feat. The village called Dhosogram was dedicated to Chakraswami.]

Maniklal Singha has read out the inscription slightly different from Amiyakumar Bandyopadhyay. I am also of similar opinion expressed by him.

Here is the inscription as translated in Devnagari script by me:

'पुष्करणाधिपते महाराज श्रीसिंहवर्मनः पुत्रस्य/  
महाराज श्रीचन्द्रवर्मन कृतः/  
दासाग्रेणातिसृष्टाः चक्रस्वामि”

In English it is:

'Pushkaranadhipate Maharaja Srsinghavarmanah Putrasya/  
Maharaja Srichandravarman Krithah/  
Dasagrenatisrista Chakraswami.'

It means that the king Sri Chandravarman, the son of Singhavarman, the king of Puskarana dedicated something (perhaps the cave where the inscription is located) to lord Chakraswami (another name of lord Vishnu).

So we have got from the inscription that the king Chandravarman was the son of the king Singhavarman. They ruled over a kingdom named Puskarana. Chandravarman was a follower of lord Vishnu. The chakra may refer to the Sudarshan Chakra of Lord Vishnu. Chandravarman preached the Vaishnavism in this area. He was also aware of Sanskrit language and he might have taken the Aryan culture first in this area.

### **Where Puskarana is**

Now the question rises on the location of Puskarana. Scholars like Haraprasad Shastri claimed that Naravarman of the Mandasor inscription was the same person, identified as Chandravarman of the Susunia inscription. In the Mandasor inscription, the king Naravarman has been referred as "Maharaja". In the Susunia inscription, the king Chandravarman has also been referred as "Maharaja". In the Mandasor inscription, the king Naravarman has been referred as the son of Singhavarmman. In the Susunia inscription, the king Chandravarman has also been referred as the son of Singhavarman. Both the kings were referred as the rulers of Puskarana which seemed to be Pokaran in the Jodhpur State of Rajputana. So Haraprasad Shastri intended to mention that both kings were the same person. But the locations of these two inscriptions are in two different places of India. The Mandasor inscription is in Madhyapradesh and the Susunia inscription is in West Bengal. Second thing is that there is a place named Pokhanna in Bankura district beside the Damodar river. Archaeologists from excavation at the place suggested that the place was a rich place and linked to different places of India by water road. It is probable that the name Pokhanna comes from the word Pokhanna. So many scholars like

Dinesh Chandra Sarkar have suggested the place Pokhanna as the ancient Puskarana, referred in the Susunia inscription.

### **Identity of Chandravarman**

Next problem comes out with relating the identity of the Chandravarman who is told to be defeated by Samudragupta in his second invasion in Aryavarta and Chandravarman of the Susunia rock inscription. The Allahabad Pillar inscription was inscribed by Harishena, the court poet of Samudragupta. It tells about Samudragupta's heroic win over a large part of Aryavarta, some Southern kingdoms, some frontier kingdoms and some forest kingdoms. The inscription is written in Sanskrit. The Allahabad Pillar Inscription of Samudragupta mentions that Samudragupta vanquished twelve kings of Aryavarta. In his first Aryavarta campaign, Samudragupta defeated Achutya, Nagasena and Ganapatinaga. On the 21 line of the inscription, Samudragupta's second invasion in Aryavarta has been expressed in this way:

**“(Who) is great through the extraordinary valour, namely, the forcible extermination of many kings of Aryavarta such as Rudradeva, Matila, Nagadatta, Chandravarman, Ganapatinaga, Nagasena, Achyuta- Nandin and Balavarman; who has made all the kings of the forest regions to become his servants.”**

In his second Aryavarta war he defeated Rudradeva, Matila, Nagadatta, Chandravarman, Ganapatinaga, Nagasena, Achyuta, Nandin and Balavarman. Many scholars believed that the name Chandravarman who is mentioned in the Allahabad Pillar Inscription as being defeated by Samudragupta was the same Chandravarman of Susunia rock inscription. If it is true we have to consider that the king Chandravarman was obviously a strong king whom Samudragupta considered to defeat to establish his Paramountcy in the Aryavarta. It is to note here that Naravarman appears to have ruled as a feudatory king in Western Malwa in 404 A. D. i.e. during the reign of Chandragupta the second, son of Samudragupta. So it was not possible for Samudragupta to defeat him. So we can conclude that Chandravarman of the Susunia inscription and Chandravarman of the

Mandasor inscription were two different persons. Samudragupta defeated Chandravarman of the Susunia inscription. Ramesh Chandra Majumdar has suggested that the kingdom of Chandravarman was extended up to Faridpur of present Bangladesh. Scholars have explained that due to his urge for invasion to Kalingadesh, Chandravarman might have built a fort at the South West of Susunia hill. A place named Garh at the South West of Susunia hill, a stone built kunda, a stone image of a lion from whose mouth a fountain is letting out, a big stone built statue of Narasimha, (Larsing in local language) refer the evidence of the reign of the king Chandravarman at Susunia hill. The statue of Narasimha again gives the evidence that Susunia and its surrounding area was once under Vaishnavism.

There are names of some villages like Thumpathar, Nethkamla, Chandra, Dhapali, Housee, Karrah around Susunia which are linked to Chandravarman. Chandravarman brought brahmins and karmakars in this area. Karmakars were brought here for making war weapons for the king. Brahmins were brought here for worshipping Lord Vishnu. It is assumed that Kshatriyas of this area are descendants of Chandravarman.

There is an iron pillar near Qutub Minar complex at Meherauli at New Delhi. There is an inscription. The inscription is written in Sanskrit language. It is written there that the King Chandra extirpated in battle in the Vanga countries (East and South Bengal) his enemies who offered him a united resistance and thereby he achieved fame. Many scholars are in the opinion that this Chandra was the same Chandravarman of the Susunia rock inscription. But if this Chandra was the same Chandravarman of the Susunia rock inscription, the inscription had to be built before he was vanquished by Samudragupta i.e. 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D. because Samudragupta ruled in second half of 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D. and it is also to note that from the style of the Brahmi script of the Susunia rock inscription it has been already proved that the Susunia rock inscription was inscribed in 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D. In another side, most of the scholars are in opinion from

the style of the Brahmi script of the Meherauli Iron Pillar inscription that the inscription could not be engraved before 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D. So the Chandravarman of the Susunia rock inscription cannot be the same Chandra of the Meherauli Iron Pillar inscription. Scholars like Radhakumud Mukhopadhyay and D.C. Sircar with their arguments proved that the Chandra of the Meherauli Iron Pillar inscription is none other than Chandragupta the second, the Gupta emperor. The period of his reign also resembles with the Meherauli Iron Pillar inscription.

### Conclusion

So from above discussion it might be concluded that the Susunia rock inscription was an interesting inscription which is an important proof to understand the Sanskrit language and Brahmi script in West Bengal especially in Susunia and its surrounding areas. From above arguments it is also clear that the king Chandravarman was not same Chandravarman or Chandra of the Mandasor inscription and the Meherauli Pillar inscription respectively and he was a local ruler. So I can conclude that Chandravarman was a local ruler of Puskarana, in present Pokhanna who inscribed the Susunia rock inscription. Inscribing an inscription and his knowledge of Sanskrit proves that Chandravarman was an important king at that time. So Samudragupta overthrew him to establish his Paramourncy in this area which has been inscribed in the Allahabad Pillar inscription of Samudragupta.

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