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Revisiting a Tenth Century Copper Plate Inscription : A Rāstrakūța Record Restruck by the Paramāras

Dev Kumar Jhanjh

The importance of Copper-plate charters, for understanding the history of early-medieval India (c. 600-1300 CE), is undeniable. The absence of any paramount power in this phase, paved the way for the emergence of several regional powers, whose political ambition led them to engage into constant conflicts to prove/claim their supremacy. Prominent among them were the Pālas of eastern India, Pratīhāras of central India, the Rāṣṭrakūṭas of Deccan and others.¹ There is a plethora of documents to understand the power politics of these powers individually, and the contestation that took place among them. This paper seeks to address a kind of power politics between the Rāṣṭrakūṭas and the Paramāras through the study of a copper-plate charter, which typifies one of these political contestations. The charter is further interesting and important because it is a restruck copper-plate, initially a Rāṣṭrakūṭa record which the Paramāras attempted to obliterate to engrave their own statement, at a later period.

Before embarking upon the detail of this inscription, we may have a look into the tradition of restriking copper-plate charters. Both D. C. Sircar² and Richard Salomon³, in their pioneering works under the same heading *Indian Epigraphy*, have mentioned about the palimpsest. In Sircar's word:

... sometimes old or rejected copper plates were utilised for the preparation of fresh charters. In such cases, the old writing is completely lost even though sometimes traces of hammering are noticeable on the plates. But, in some cases, the old writing was merely beaten in by hammering and the text of the new document

was written on the erasure. In such records, traces of the old writing are often visible under the later writing.⁴

Some of the finest examples are the Andhvaram plates of Vajrahastadeva (c. 10th century CE)⁵ (Subrahmanyam 1955-6), two inscriptions on copper plate from Nutimadugu (c.10th and 15th CE)⁶, Veligalani grant of Kapileśvara (1458 CE)⁷ and obviously the present Rāṣṭrakūṭa-Paramāra grant, which is the central theme of this discussion.⁸

Copper Plate of Rāṣṭrakūṭa Suvarṇavarṣadeva (Govinda IV) (Śaka 851) and Paramāra Vākapatirājadeva (V.S. 1038)

Found at the village of Gaonri, situated about 5 kms. to the northeast of Narwal (18 kms. to the south-east of Ujjain) in Madhya Pradesh, three plates were edited, without translation, with a discussion by K. N. Dikshit in 1935-36, and subsequently re-edited (excluding the Rāṣṭrakūṭa grant) in 1978, again without translation by H.V. Trivedi, who offered some new identification of ancient place names along with some alternative evaluations of the previous readings. The plates are now preserved in the Indian Museum, Kolkata.

The plates are three in number and without any seal attached to them. While the back side of the first plate decrees a Rāṣṭrakūṭa charter, others explicitly belong to the Paramāras. The plates measuring 38.10/39.37cms. x 26.03/26.67cms. x 3mms. and weighing 6.43 kgms.⁹, spread across twenty-two (Rāṣṭrakūṭa) and fifty-four lines (Paramāra). On the proper left side (wrongly called right side by Prof. Trivedi¹⁰) of the bottom of the last plate of the Paramāra record is incised a representation of flying Garuḍa in human form, with the nose of a bird, wearing a crown and holding a snake in the left hand with the right hand raised. The text of both the inscriptions is written in Sanskrit, with some errors in some parts; the character of the Rāṣṭrakūṭa epigraph is of northern variety; and the Paramāras used *Devanāgarī* script to engrave their statement. While the Rāṣṭrakūṭa record is dated Sunday the full-moon day of *Māgha* in the Śaka year 851 Vikṛita-Samvatsara (930 CE), the Paramāra grant was issued

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52 years after the former-full moon day of *Kārttika* in the (Vikrama) year 1038 (982 CE).

The repeated mention of the Rāṣṭrakūṭas and the Paramāras in a single epigraph naturally arises multiple questions. Why and how did the Paramāras get hold of the Rāṣṭrakūṭa record and subsequently attempt obliterating earlier writings to engrave their own record on the same inscription? Is it merely an indication of the Rāṣṭrakūṭa-Paramāra political clash? Or there is something beyond this? These are the questions which we are going to address, and finally an attempt will be made to understand its overall significance. These queries push us to look into the details of the document to explore the proper picture.

During the ninth and first half of the tenth centuries CE, the Rāstrakūtas of Mālkhed and the Gurjara-Pratīhāras of Malwa continued their long-term political rivalry. From the time of Gurjara-Pratīhāra king Vatsa (c.783-84 CE) and Nāgabhata II (c.815-33 CE) and Rāstrakūta rulers Dhruva and Govinda III (c.783-815 CE), they, with brief intervals, continued their fight for about a hundred and fifty years.¹¹ After the Gurjara-Pratīhāras, with the rise of the Paramāras in Malwa, they inherited this former pattern of rivalry. The third quarter of the tenth century CE witnessed the political rivalry between the Rāstrakūtas and the Paramāras.¹² The Panher inscription informs us about the political contestation between Rāstrakūta ruler Khottiga (c.967-972 CE) and Paramāra king Siyāka (c.945-972 CE) and the conquest of the former.¹³ Dhanapāla's Pāiyalacchi (verse. 276) (c.972-973 CE), besides corroborating this event, also throws light on the devastation of Mālkhed, the Rāstrakūta capital by Paramāra Siyāka.¹⁴ This time he looted the booties from the Rāstrakūta treasury and it is possible that the said copper plate, also following the same route perhaps, finally reached Malwa.¹⁵ This plate belongs to Subarnavarsadeva (Govinda IV) (c.918/19-934 CE), the son of Nityavarsa (Indra III). The object of the inscription was to record the donation of an area namely Payalipattana (line-13) situated in the western boundary of Mānyakheta or Mālkhed to establish a sattra or charitable feeding house where a thousand brahmanas belonging to

different groups were to be fed - 360 Karnātaka brāhmanas of Mālkhed, 300 belonged to the Kanvaśākhā, 240 Karahātaka brāhmanas, 72 Catuścarana brāhmanas and 28 Sahasrasāmānya. The boundaries of the granted locality from the east were the Karigrāma, Mandavaka, Nandasura, Nandalagrāma, Nāsapura, Yamalagrāma, Vellavaśa, Dhammanagrāma, Sellavi and Kapitthakheda. None of these localities have been identified. The donated land Payalipattana has been labelled as a village by Dikshit, the editor of the inscription. But the term *Pattana* as a suffix to a place name denotes a township.¹⁶ Besides, the presence of the expression *śulkotpatti* (line. 14) can only express its association with trade. Śulka was a transit duty which included toll, i.e. a tax for using roads or rivers, and octroi, a tax on the articles brought in for sale.¹⁷ And here with the help of Google satellite imagery we find the Kagina river which was situated to the west of Mālkhed, possibly some area near Payallipattana as its location was on the same direction. Moreover, the establishment of a vast charitable feeding house for thousand brahmanas, though the number may be conventional, is unlikely to have been located in a rural space.

We may now turn our attention to the Paramāra charter of Vākpatirājadeva (c.974-994 CE), the son of Siyāka, grandson of Vairisimha, the great grandson of Kṛṣṇarāja. It records the grant of seventy-eight portions of village Vaṇikā situated in the Āvaraka-*bhoga* in the Hūṇa-*maṇḍala* to twenty-six (wrongly stated thirty-six by Prof. Trivedi)¹⁸ brāhmaṇas hailing from different parts of the country. According to Prof. Dikshit, Hūṇa *maṇḍala* evidently refers to the country ruled over by the Hūṇas in Malwa. The granted land Vaṇikā is to be identified with the village of Benkā, 15 miles north-west of Awār near which the Āvaraka-*bhoga* was placed. On the contrary, Prof. Trivedi inclined to identify this Āvaraka with the village known as Āvrā (approximately 30 kms. by road from Shāmgaḍh) wherefrom about 10 kms. in south-east there is Banī village which he identifies with Vaṇikā village and located it in present day Mandsaur district (in Madhya Pradesh) instead of Ujjain proposed by Dikshit.¹⁹

The present record is one of the most valuable accounts regarding the migration of the brāhmaņas. Here we come across twenty-six

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brāhmaņas hailing from different parts — Bengal (Daksina Rādha) Magadha, Madhyadeśa, Śrāvasti etc.; they received the share according to their qualification. Thus, the granted portions (*amsa*) to the Rgvedic brāhmanas are much more than the Sāmavedi and Yajurvedi brāhmanas, Therefore, the Magadha brāhmana Sarvānanda, trained in Rgveda received eight amśa (..... brāhmaņasarvvānandāyapaņditadīksi[ta] lokānandasunaveamśaustau... line-14-15). Another Rgvedic brāhmāna Donāka from Daksina Rādha acquired five amsa (...brāhmanadonākāyagosaranasu(sū)nave amśapamca ... line-21-22) which is more than the others. While in total four Rgvedic brāhmanas got nineteen shares (approx. five portions per head), Sāmavedi eleven brāhmanas acquired thirty-four portions (a little more than three portions individually) and the rest eleven Yajurvedi brāhmanas received twenty-five shares (about two and half portions each). However, the numerical strength of the Sāmavedi and Yajurvedi brāhmānas are much higher than the Rgvedic one and their immigration in large numbers from other areas also suggests their necessity for performing Sāmagāna for the Sāmavedis and the performance of sacrificial rituals by the Yajurvedis. These differentiation clearly reflects the social division among the brāhmanas, whose identity have clearly been mentioned here by citing their names, fathers' names, original places, veda and śākhā, gotra and pravara, portion of granted village. Below we present a chart by mentioning the details of each brahmanas:

Sl.	Name of	Father's	Original	Veda and	Gotra and	Parts
No.	Donne	Name	Place	Śākhā	Pravara	of Village granted
1	Sarvānanda	Dīkshita Lokānanda	Kanopā in Magadha	Rgveda, Bahvṛca	Sāmkŗitya-3	8
2	Mūlasthāna	Brahmapa- ṇḍita	Ayaka in Madhya- deśa	Sāmaveda, Chandoga	Vaśiṣṭha	3
3	Lohiṇa	Īśvara	Kāvaḍa	Yajurveda, Vajimādh- yandina	Gautama-3	3
4	Candrāditya	Pitavāsa	Candrāditya	Sāmaveda, Chandoga	Śāṇḍilya-3	4

Sl. No.	Name of Donne	Father's Name	Original Place	Veda and Śākhā	Gotra and Pravara	Parts of Village granted
5	Śābara	Raņāditya	Kulāñcā	Do	Do-3	2
6	Agnihotrin Lohapa	Vāsudeva	Avivā in Aśuresa- maṇdala	Do	Vatsa-5	4
7	Donāka	Gosaraṇa	Vilvagavāsa in Daksiņa Rādha	Do	Parāśara-5	5
8	Anantāditya	Surāditya	Khaḍupa- llikā	Yajurveda, Vājimādhya- ndina	Maudgalya-3	2
9	Vāmanas- vāmin	Dīksita Hari	Pauṇḍarika in Uttarakula	Sāmaveda, Chandoga	Gārgya-5	3
10	Ātuka	Ŗsiula	Umvarācara	Yajurveda, Vājimādhy- andina	Agastya-3	1
11	Purușottama	Līhā	? in Madhyadeśa	Do	Maitreya-3	4
12	Govindas- vāmin	Devasvā- min	Madhu- pālikā	Sāmaveda, Chhandoga	Kāśyapa-3	3
13	Sihața	Mitrānanda	Śravaṇa- bhadra	Rigveda, Bahvrca	Vatsa-5	4
14	Śaṅkara	Devāditya	Dardurikā in Sāvathikā	Śāmaveda, Chandoga	Bhārgava-3	2
15	Madhuma- thana	Acala	Mitilapāṭaka in Sāvathikā- deśa	Yajurveda, Vājimādhy- andina	Parāśara-3	2
16	Svayaṁtapa	Śrīnivāsa	Kheḍāpālikā	Do	Mauni-3	3
17	Nenaiyaka	Madhu	Kheṭaka	Ŗigveda, Bahvricha	Bharadvāja-3	4
18	Jāmaṭa	Viṣṇu	Ānoha	Yajurveda, Vājimādh- yandina	Bhārgava-3	2

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Sl. No.	Name of Donne	Father's Name	Original Place	Veda and Śākhā	Gotra and Pravara	Parts of Village granted
19	Dedeka	Do	Do	Do	Do-3	2
20	Āvasthika Śarvadeva	Lohața	Sopura	Sāmaveda, Kauthuma	Śāṇḍilya-3	2
21	Varāha	Śrīdhara	Kharjūrikā	Sāmaveda, Chhandoga	Māhula-3	4
22	Āśāditya	Māhula	Dapura	Ŗgveda, Bahvṛca	Vārāha-3	3
23	Bhāila	Hari	? in Lāṭadeśa	Yajurveda, Vājimādh- yandina	Kāśyapa-3	1
24	Devāditya	Līlāditya	Rājakīya	Sāmaveda, Chandoga	Vatsa-5	2
25	Muṁjāla	Īśvara	Nāndipura in Lāṭadeśa	Yajurveda, Vājimādh- yandina	Bhāradvāja-3	2
26	Amātta	Guṇākara	Śravaṇa- bhadra	Do	Vatsa-5	3

It is very difficult to identify the exact locations of these place names, wherefrom the above mentioned brāhmaņas migrated. Sometimes it refers to a wide area and not a particular spot as the original home of the donee, i.e., the area of Madhyadeśa mentioned in this record, covers a vast region. According to Sircar, on the basis of *Manusmṛti* its eastern limit extended till Allahabad, Magadha according to the *Brahmāṇḍa* and *Vāyu Purāṇa*, and Varanasi according to Rājaśekhara's *Kāvyamīmāṁsā*, and Kājaṅgala (Kankjol near Rajmahal hills) and Puṇḍravardhana (Mahasthan in Bogra dist. in Bangladesh) in the *Mahāvagga* and *Divyavadāna*.²⁰ K. K. Dasgupta, therefore, concludes that the whole territory between the upper and middle Gangetic basin and the Yamuna-Chambal area is the central point of Madhyadeśa.²¹ So, it is hardly possible to locate the exact location of the brāhmaṇas coming from Madhyadeśa. It is to be mentioned here that as Madhyadeśa is viewed as a pre-eminent zone, a brāhmaņa hailing from Madhyadeśa or claiming to have hailed from these, would possibly lead a special status or prestige to such a brāhmaņa (brāhmaņas). The ruler granting land to such brāhmaṇas, naturally would claim himself as patron of such eminent brāhmaṇas and thereby establish his own pre-eminence.

There are many more places like Madhyadeśa where identifying the exact location is problematic. Still attempt has been made to identify and re-identify the place names mentioned in the said epigraph by the editors. The place name Kulāñcā, wherefrom brāhmana Ranāditya hailed from, has been located by Dikshit in the Bogra district of North Bengal. According to D.C. Sircar, this place was inhabited by the Kulina brāhmanas and was situated in Śrāvasti region of Uttar Pradesh,²² while R.S. Sharma identifies it with Korañca near Varanasi.²³ Another locality, mentioned in this Paramāra grant as Śāvathideśa or Śāvathikā, has been placed by Dikshit in some areas which lay between North Bogra and South Dinajpur in Bengal. Again, the identification of the Śāvathi is problematic as we find its various locations. P. N. Bhattacharya has suggested its different locations. Besides its location in Uttar Pradesh as Śrāvasti, he cited another Śrāvasti in old Kāmarūpa.²⁴ B.P. Mazumdar has expressed his doubts in identifying Sāvathideśa with Śrāvasti.²⁵ Place names the Kharjurikā, Sopura, Dapura, Āhoha, Avivā and Rājakīya grāma of the present grant have been posited within the province of Malwa by both the editors of the plate. In fact, Prof. Trivedi, moving further has traced out a number of villages resembling these names in Malwa. For example, Kharjurikā has been identified with Khajūriā-Paramār, Dapura with Devar, Rājakīya grāma with Rānevās or Rāipuriyā etc.²⁶

Most of the brāhmaņas mentioned in the Paramāra record are nonlocal. As these brāhmaņas hailed from widely dispersed zones to Malwa, it may further demonstrate how Malwa was connected with these areas. Malwa's position as a corridor between north India and peninsula and its contacts with Gujarat in the west are clearly borne out in this record. In contrast to the restruck grant, the original

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Rāstrakūta record shows a preference for granting land to brāhmaņas located within their own area— Mālkhed, Karhad etc.

Migrations of the brāhmaņas from different areas to Malwa, evident in the above record, naturally raise the question that why did this migration take place? Put differently, what pushed these brāhmaņas to leave their original homeland and to move towards Malwa or why the Paramāras invited them to their own terrain?

Possibly, the collapse of the Rāṣṭrakūṭas in 974 CE followed by the immediate rise of the Paramāras led the latter to invite brāhmaņas in their homeland to mark their rule as legitimate. Even from the Rāṣṭrakūṭa realm brāhmaṇas came to Malwa. Political instability and uncertainty of the Rāṣṭrakūṭas probably compelled the brāhmaṇas living in the Rāṣṭrakūṭa territory to go somewhere else, and Malwa at that time was a destination imposed upon them by the Paramāras. That's why we see the movement of brāhmaṇa Naineyaka from Rāṣṭrakūṭa dominated Kheṭaka (Kheda of modern Gujrat) (Iine-32) and of Mumjāl from Nāndipura of Lāṭadeśa (present Nandodh of Narbada) (line-39). It continued even during the time of Paramāra

Secondly, the Bengal brāhmaņas had a strong command over the Vedas, which perhaps helped them to move beyond their realm and added further advantage to settle in a new area. The process was further accelerated by the declining condition of the Pālas, which pushed the brāhmaņas of this area to move forward for their betterment, as mentioned by Swati Datta.²⁸ However, Swati Dutta's view on brāhmaņa migration from Bengal due to waning Pāla power is not supported by the recent studies of Pāla polities.²⁹

Furthermore, we have already mentioned about the migrant brāhmaņas of Madhyadeśa, Kūlañcā, Kharjurikā, Sopura, Dapura, Avivā etc. B. N. Sharma is of the opinion that the respect and honour displayed to the brāhmaņas of different regions by the Paramāras was responsible for this immigration to this region.³⁰

Thirdly, brāhmaņas were well accustomed with land grant donations which entailed bringing in new lands under cultivation. Thus, donating land to them indirectly enhanced the process of agriculture. With addition to this, in this way, sometimes uncultivated area could also come indirectly under the arena of Sanskritization.³¹

Fourthly, the brāhmaņas were sought after for legitimising a newly emerging power, especially during a victorious campaign. They had the expertise of imposing legitimacy to the rulers, particularly to those who lacked proper pedigree. That's why, these rulers invited them to make their prestigious genealogy, which would connect them with Solar or Lunar lineage, and donated the land to enhance their esteem. It is to be mentioned here that many theories exist regarding the origin of the Paramāras.³² We do not know whether they belonged to high or low origin. If they had belonged to lower strata of the society, then there would be a considerable amount of possibility for inviting the brāhmaņas to uphold their position.

Fifthly, economic gain played a very crucial role for the brāhmaņas. It is to be noted here that the ruling authority was likely to have offered lucrative economic benefits to migrant brāhmaņas. B. P. Mazumdar in his magisterial survey on fifty-seven inscriptions of north India has drawn the graph of economic gains acquired by this brāhmaņas. In his word, 'It is possible to argue the threat of penury and the prospect of better living may have led to such movements of brāhmaņas from the original habitats'.³³ Though Prof. Mazumdar has pointed out that in this procedure the local brāhmaņas enhanced their position, but in our case it was opposite. Here, the brāhmaņas from distant areas received prestigious portion in comparison to the local brāhmaņas. This happened because the Paramāras maintained the criteria of donating land on the basis of Vedic learning which enabled the Rgvedic brāhmanas to score first, as we have seen earlier.

The above discussed Paramāra grant also reflects the presence of different administrative post like *Pattakilajanapada* (line : 8-9). This *Pattakila*, according to D.C. Sircar, stands for village headman³⁴ and in that way *Pattakila janapada* probably indicates to the post of head of *janapada*. We also find the mention of village unit like *maṇḍala*, *bhoga*

(line-7) etc. along with the mention of reference of taxes like hiranya, bhāga, bhoga (line-13). Pratipal Bhatia considers mandala as the biggest unit divided into visaya and bhoga and which can further be subdivided into different pāțakas.35 From this division we can assume the hierarchies of Paramāra administration. The concept of hierarchy, according to B.D. Chattopadhyaya, can be considered in terms of both how rural residents were socially organised and how differentially individual villages existed in rural landscape.³⁶ The donee mentioned in the said record was not privileged with any administrative right. For that, they probably had to depend on the administration, (pūrvoktrvirabhuktābhuktikrameņayathāsambaddhamāna).³⁷ It is important to note that during c. 10th-11th century CE, copper plate charters often indicate natural boundary markers to delineate the granted portion of land from another. Significantly, in this land grant from Malwa no such boundary specifications are mentioned. On the other hand, we only have the names of the neighbouring villages as boundary markers, which possibly signify the area as the settled one. The significance of the above discussed inscription is manifold. The purpose of reissuing old record, as evident in present instance, possibly was done with political intention, since the Rastrakūta and Paramāra rivalry was quite well branded. The granting of plots of land to brāhmaņas from the Rāstrakūta territory is likely to symbolise the overpowering of the Rāstrakūtas by the Paramāras. Since the original grant recorded the donation of landed property located close to the Rāstrakūta capital, the granted area certainly formed a part of the political stronghold of the Rāstrakūtas. By bringing the Rāstrakūta grant and restriking the same to assign landed property in Malwa, the Paramāras seem to have underlined the claim that they succeeded in penetrating into the very core of the Rāstrakūta domain. In that way, besides exemplifying the nature of restriking, the present record also draws the line of political contestation that occurred between the said two powers. Furthermore, its outlook on the Paramāra administration helps us to understand the political process that took place in the then Malwa. Finally, what cannot escape our notice is the movement of the brāhmaņas, in other words, their migration from different localities, distant as well as nearer to the Paramāra jurisdiction in Malwa, and in this way it deeply throws considerable light on the social history of Malwa too.

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