

## Discovery and Decipherment New Sāti Inscriptions From Erān, District Sagar, Madhya Pradesh

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**Abstract:** The modern Erān village was known as Erikīn, Erkīn and Eraknyā in ancient times, which reference are found in various inscriptions and coins reported from Erān and vicinity. The ancient mound of Erān situated on the banks of the river Bina. British Captain T.S. Bert first discovered Erān in 1838 AD. Later General Alexander Cunningham conducted a detailed survey of the place in 1874–75 AD, during which he had found a number of inscriptions, coins and remains of temple architecture.<sup>1</sup> Erān has been witness to the gradual development of various human cultures and traditions since ages. Various archaeological remains have been found in excavations belong to the prehistoric period, proto-historic period and historical period.<sup>2</sup> The Mauryas, Sungas, Satavahanas, Śaka-Kshatrapas, Nagas, Guptas, Hunas, Kalchuris, Chandelas, Paramaras and various local dynasties dominated the Erān region.<sup>3</sup> Erān was established as a center of political importance during the period of Śaka-Kshatrapa and Gupta period.<sup>4</sup> A number of Sāti records from the Gupta period to the Medieval period have been found in Erān. The text of some new Sāti inscriptions received recently has been deciphered in this research paper, which throw light about political, social, religious, cultural and fine arts of that time.

**Keywords:** Sāti, Society, religion, Inscription, Traditions, Language etc.

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## INTRODUCTION

Erān is located 75 km north-west direction from Sagar district headquarters. It comes under the Bina tehsil of Sagar district of Madhya Pradesh.<sup>5</sup> The Bina river encircles this place on three sides and provides natural protection. In the fourth side an earthen fortification wall and a moat was built all around.<sup>6</sup>

Before this new discovery several others inscriptions were also reported from this region that provided political status, social status, economic status, religious status and other cultural activities.<sup>7</sup> The important inscription of Saka ruler Sridhar Varma,<sup>8</sup> inscriptions of Gupta ruler Samudragupta<sup>9</sup>, inscription of Gupta ruler Budhgupta<sup>10</sup>, inscription of Gupta ruler Toramana,<sup>11</sup> Sāti inscription of Goparajā.<sup>12</sup> Among these the Goparajā Sāti inscription is very important. The Sāti inscription of commander in chief Goprajā received from Erān is the oldest evidence of the first dated Sāti practice in India. This Sāti Pillar mentions the Gupta date 191 (510 AD).<sup>13</sup>



Fig. 1: Satellite view of the village Eran with river Bina

According to this inscription, after the death of Goparajā, a friend of Gupta king Bhanuguptā, her beautiful wife entered her husband's funeral pyre, and become Sāti.<sup>14</sup>

This Sāti pillars was discovered by General Alexander Cunningham in 1874–75 AD.<sup>15</sup> Apart from this Sāti pillar inscription, several Sāti columns from Erān have been found in the medieval and modern periods few of them were have been destroyed, but the ten Sāti pillars are still safe, which has brought to light many new facts of the ancient carpet society, art and culture of Erān village.<sup>16</sup> Sāti inscription obtained from Erān include the name of the deceased person, date, month, place name of his family, father's name, information about the incident of Sāti, and the fame of Sāti.<sup>17</sup> These Sāti columns in the Sun, Moon, Stars, Śiva-dāmru (pellet drum), Sāti's hand is engraved giving blessings, possibly this marking proves that as long as the existence of Sun, Moon, Star or Śiva exists on earth, this Sāti will remain famous. It is noteworthy that Sāti, the wife of Lord Śiva, gave her life by sacrificing her life in the Yājñā-Kuṇḍā due to the insult of Śiva in the yājñā to be done here.<sup>18</sup>



Fig. 1: First Sāti Pillar

The Sāti inscription obtained from Erān is engraved in the Devanagari script and local language. The people of this region and the descendants of the deceased couple still worship Sāti stone pillars. There is a strong belief in people that worshipping Sāti Mata will bring happiness and prosperity to their family. Statues of husband and wife are made on Sāti pillars obtained from Erān. Some of the Sāti pillars have intricate battle scenes.<sup>19</sup> These Sāti pillars depicts the devotion of the husband woman. These Sāti pillar inscription are indeed very important antiquities of information on social, political, economic and cultural life of the ancient time. Most of the Sāti pillar inscription

in Erān village are found in the area in front of the elephant door. On the Sāti pillars obtained from Erān, the spouses are inscribed holding each other's hands, worshipping the Śiva linga, sleeping on the pyre.<sup>20</sup>

The text reading and detailed analysis of the three new Sāti pillar records obtained from Erān is the foremost. The details are as follows:

**(1) The first Sāti inscription:** Discovered by the author in 2003-2004.<sup>21</sup>

1. Location : Near Primary School Building. Erān Village.
2. Stone: Hard red stone.
3. Date : 788 of the Saka Samvat (866 A.D.).
4. Imprint : Taken by the author.
5. Main Objective: Sāti information.
6. Measurement: Column height 1.92 meters. width- 40 cms. and thickness 10cms.
7. Script: Devnagari (Inscription in four Lines)
8. Language : corrupt Sanskrit with some Hindi words.
9. Charater size : 3” to 4”

### Original Translate in English text: (Fig. no. 01)

1. Sāmvāt 788 dāmhā putrāsya (ṇ)
2. Mushātirfer chetrā mase pāchmi tithisyā (syā)
3. Erāni mukamsāy sārḥād yudhe bhāhe
4. Maā Sāti rāmo ramosya.

### English Translations

1. Sāmvāt 788 Dumhā son
2. Mushtirfer on day 5<sup>th</sup> and month of Chetrā
3. There was a war on the border of Erān village.
4. Mother became Sāti ( she was Beloved in God Ramā)

The language of the inscription is incorrect Sanskrit and some local words have been inserted in the inscription. These inscriptions are engraved on the central part of the Sāti stone having total of 4 lines. Three lines are preserved while some words in the last line are damaged and erased. The first line mention in Date 788 of the Saka Samvat (866 A.D.). In this the name of Sāti woman has not been mentioned instead her husband name mentioned as Mushtirfer son of Dumha. The second line contains the person name Mushtirfer and Month Chetra while third line mentions the village name as 'Erān i'. The four line mentions as prayer of God Rama.

The horse with a warrior and a husband wife couple is carved in standing position. Sāti's hand is made as blessing in the upper part of this pillar. Śiva linga, the Sun, the Moon, Five Stars and lord Śiva Damru (pellet drum) are engraved on this pillar. Sāti pillar is shown in a permanent position, husband, and wife. The depiction of the sun and the moon and the star symbolize the glory of Sāti. As long as the Sun and the Moon are Stars, the glory of truth will remain in the Universe. This Sāti inscription is of the Sāti of a soldier's wife. Hand bangles symbolize the blessings of Sāti. This Sāti is engraved on a Śiva Linga on a stone, representing a Sāti powers.



Fig. 2: Second Sāti Pillar

(2) **The second Sāti Pillar inscription** : Discovered by the author in 2003-2004.<sup>22</sup>

1. Location: Rammu and Bhagirath kevat agriculture Farm (Near Mata ki madia at Erān ).
2. Stone: Red sandstone.
3. Date : Saka Samvat 1832 (1910A.D.)
4. Imprint: Taken by the author.
5. Main Objective of inscription : Sāti information
6. Measurement: Column Height **1.78 mts**, width **43 cms.** and thickness **10 cms**
7. Script: Devanagari (Inscription in nine Lines)
8. Language: corrupt Hindi and some words of local language Bundelkhandi
9. Charater size : 3” to 4”

**Original Translate in English text : (Fig., 02)**

1. shri Panchāsenu ko kūrān be Erān se
2. sāmvaṭu 1831 ki Sāti ki
3. sālāng paush somvar ko sā
4. ti nāndee ne veer ke santh keerāt paī
5. shrī Panchāsenu ko kūrān Erān se
6. khādāj lāgāt agraijī rajyā faujā
7. ko d (...) mārān lāryo per surgāvas
8. ne saiya ke chīta (-----) vār sāmva

9. tu 1832 mūkām Erān sāhī.

### English Translation

1. In Erān village descent of Punchāsenu
2. Sāti's Sāmvāt is 1831
3. Sāti time is monday in paush month
4. Sāti Nāndi gained fame with her husband
5. And its Sāti Puchasenu descent in Erān Village
6. In the war of the British state army
7. On getting dead while fighting
8. On husband's funeral pyre
9. Sāti in the village Erān in Sāmvāt 1832 is correct.

The Inscription is in Nāgarī script and corrupt Hindi and Bundelkhandi language. There are nine lines in this inscription. They are not well-formed. The record is all in verse. Some local words are put in the inscription. These inscriptions carved on the lower part of the Sāti Stone. Sri Panchsen mention in the first line in this inscription. The second line read as 'Sak Samvat' 1832 (1910A.D.) and Hindi's month name is Posha. The Village name Mukam Erān mentions in the last line. The inscription starts from the bottom of the Pillar and runs gradually upwards. The figure of the Horse is also depicted upside down. The husband and wife are shown holding each other's hands. In this pillar two blessings hands, the Surya, The Moon, Five Stars, Śiva's Damru have been engraved. The Sun and the Moon and the Stars symbolize the glory of Sāti woman.



Fig. 3: Third Sāti Pillar

(3) **Third Sāti Inscription:** Discovered by the author in 2003–2004.<sup>23</sup>

1. Location: Village Erān, is located on the mound of Donavir.
3. Stone: Red Sandstone
4. Date: Saka Samvat 1628 (1706 AD)
5. Imprint: Taken by the author.
6. Main Objective: Information about the woman being Sāti is given.
7. Measurements: Column height 1.89 meter, width 48,cm and thickness 10 cm.
8. Script: Devanagari (inscription in six lines)
9. Language : Written in local language Bundelkhandi.
10. Charater size : size 3” to 4”

### Original Translate In English: (Fig. 03)

1. Sāmvā 1628 me Paush Sudī dā
2. Shī dīn Būdhvīr kār dhāherī maā sī
3. ti Bhāye Rājneesh Erān Gāvo ke vāsi
4. Hai Sāti Śāhargvāshi pātī kūlā
5. Kaushlībūt ke Sāti hai
6. ....Sū Māngālām

### Translation of Inscription

1. Śākā Samvat 1628 (1706 AD), tenth date of Pauā month Śuklā Pākshā
2. Day Wednesday, Dhāherī (Sāti’s name) Maā Sāti
3. occurred. Rājnīs (husband’s name of a woman who is Sāti) is a resident of Erān village.
4. Kūlā of Sāti heavenly husband
5. Kaushlībūt (name of Sāti Husband Kūlā).
6. Goodness and blessing. .

This Sāti pillar is situated on the Donāvīr mound located outside the village Erān . A Guptā Śivlingā is also established near it. The language of the Inscription is in local language Bundelkhāndī and the script Devanagāri. There are a total of six lines in the inscription. The first line mentions date of the inscription 1628 as well as the date of the Hindi month Paushā and Śūklā Pākshā that corresponds to year 1706 A.D. and month of December to January. In the second line, the day Wednesday is mentioned along with the virtuous wife being the Sāti. There is hand marking giving blessings on the top part of the column. Surrounding the hand is an artistic engraving of the Sun, the Moon, the Stars and the Śīvā dāmārū (pellet drum) of Lord Śivā . The husband and wife are shown in a hand held position.

### CONCLUSION

Keeping in view of above facts, it can be said that apart from the above mentioned Sāti inscription, many Sāti pillar inscription have been reported from Erān, but have not been deciphered yet. The effort to translate these texts of these inscriptions is in progress. Many Sāti columns have been installed

by the local people in houses and platforms. The Sāti Pillar inscription obtained from Erān provide a lot of factual information about social, political, religious and cultural activities, along with pre-medieval and later medieval period. The art of the pillars shows the popularity of the fine arts of the time in the society. It is clear from the texts of the above mentioned inscription that along with Erān in the medieval period, the people of Bundelkhnad were follower of Vaishnāvīsm and Shaivīsm. Sāti inscriptions indicate that most of the Sāti in Erān belonged to the Kshatriya caste. According to the above inscription, most of the women's husbands were killed in the war.

The Sāti pillar depicts Śiva's dāmru (pellet drum) which reminds of the story of Śiva and Sāti. The depiction of the Sun, Moon and Stars can be considered as indicator of the worship of natural powers and unwavering faith in them. The hand is engraved giving blessings on the Sāti pillar, which is considered to be an indicator of the welfare of the entire public. From the depiction of the Sun and the Moon, the Stars and the Śivā dāmārū (pellet drum), it can be deduced that as long as the sun, moon and stars and Śivā exist in the universe, the blessings and glory of Sāti will remain in the society.

The God Ramā prayer is mentioned in the first Sāti column, in this inscription the name of Erān is written as Erān i. In the inscription, the woman who is become Sāti has been called mother (Maā). Mention of a war is also found in this Inscription. In this Sāti inscription, the date and month are written in Indian months and dates. On the basis of this inscription, it can be said that the Vaishṇavā sect in the Erān region must have had considerable dominance in the society. The people of this region used to remember the stories of God Rama narrated in the Ramayana as well as narrate important incidents related to Rama in the form of stories to the incoming generation. Even today the stories of Ramayana are prevalent in Erān village and people in Bundelkhānd region greet the word Rama while meeting each other daily. Erān's name is written in this Sāti column, that makes it clear that the Erikin of the Gupta period came to be known as Erān i in the early medieval period, later in the coming of age, Erān i came to be known as Erān Battisee by the time of the Mughal era. The present time, the locals know this village by the name of Erān Battisee. It is noteworthy that during the Mughal period, administration of thirty-two villages was run from here. It is known from this article that Erān was an important center of the royalty even in the medieval period, so there used to be wars here. It is mentioned in the article that the wife of the soldier who was martyred in the war had become Sāti. Since, Sāti is mentioned as mother. it can be said that a woman being a Sāti had a special place in society as a mother. In society, Sāti was associated with the story of Lord Śiva and Sāti with respect, but this Sāti-like practice was more prevalent in the medieval period, whereas in ancient India, it is mentioned in the Rigveda that Sāti was symbolic. In this, the woman used to lie on her husband's funeral pyre in a symbolic manner and later, her family members used to bring her back home by urging her to live a new life and usually married the unmarried member of the brother-in-law or any other family members. In the Ramayana and Mahabharata epics, the practice of Sāti was based on the willingness of the wife. After Maharaja Dasharatha death, his three wives not become Sāti. After Ravana's death his wife Mandodari did not become Sāti, while Meghnad's wives Sulochana become Sāti. It is mentioned in the Mahabharata that after Pandu's death, his younger wife Madri became Sāti and the elder wife Kunti did not become Sāti.

Two dates are mentioned in the second Sāti inscription, the first Saka Samvat 1831 date is the actual date of Sāti. The second date Saka Samvat refers to the date of writing the Sāti inscription of 1832. The month day and date are given in Hindu months and dates. Sāti's name is written Nandi. This Sāti inscription discusses the incident of a brave soldier being martyred in battle with the British army. It is clear from this that in 1909 AD, the region of Erān was invaded by the army of the British Government. In which many Indian brave soldiers were martyred. In the third Sāti inscription, Erān

Village has been written as Mukam Erān . Sāti is also mentioned as mother in the inscription. The word Sumangal (Goodness and blessing) has been mentioned in this inscription. It is clear that the blessings of Sāti were considered to be auspicious for public welfare. The Pure local Bundelkhandi language has been used in this inscription.

It is noteworthy that in Erān , evidence of Sāti practice starts from the Gupta period. The Erān inscription of the Gupta ruler Bhanugupta reveals that the Gupta army was defeated by the Huna ruler Toramana at Erān . According to this inscription, after the death of Bhanugupta's friend and commander Gopraj, his wife Gopabai Sāti with her husband's body in Erān .

Through these Sāti stone columns, much intimation was obtained about the circumstance of women and the village of Erān during the medieval and modern periods. Based on the inscriptions and iconoclast on the pillar, it can be reported that the villagers of the medieval period and modern era of Erān had henchman of 'Ganapati Sampraday', 'Vaishnava Sampraday' and 'Shaiva Sampraday'. Various inscriptions found at Erān , displays that apart from the Kshatriya castes, the Brahmin castes and the Vaishya castes also followed the Sāti system.

It shows that the royal family was also involved in the Sāti practice. The depiction of Śiva on the Sāti pillar shows the sun, moon and damru (pellet drum) that believers believed in natural powers and the goddess. Blessed hands are engraved for global welfare. The depiction of the sun and the moon and the star symbolizes the glory of Sāti. The above mentioned Sāti pillars of Erān throw light on the socio, political, economic situation and cultural life of 'Bundelkhand'.

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