

Feudalism in Inscriptions of 8th Century CE in Rajasthan: Recapitulated

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Abstract: Inscriptions are very valuable resources to study for grants and assignments, especially during early medieval Indian history, as we have lack of resources for that period. North India especially in Rajasthan, during the 8th century, have an evolutionary era regarding political, social and economic history. This research examines the shift from a central monarchy to the rise of regional landholders and provides insight into the evolution of feudal structures. The investigation will explore the detailed evidence provided by historical inscriptions about the allocation and significance of land endowments, highlighting their impact on historical terrains. While numerous scholars have extensively studied these inscriptions, there are still gaps and oversights in their work. This paper revisited the inscriptional history and enquired inscription on a micro level.

Received : 23 August 2024

Revised : 20 September 2024

Accepted : 10 October 2024

Published : 30 October 2024

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Pallavi & Anshal Tiger (2024). Feudalism in Inscriptions of 8th Century CE in Rajasthan: Recapitulated. *Journal of History, Archaeology and Cultural Heritage*, 1: 2, pp. 99-107.

Introduction

Many land grants and assignments from ancient inscriptions have been studied, providing evidence of the gradual shift of control over land and administration from kings to local lords, a sign of emerging feudalism. These have been organized into two time-based groups: the first spans the 8th to the 10th centuries, and the second includes the 11th and 12th centuries. This division reflects the significant political shifts at the turn of the 11th century, particularly in Rajasthan, where the decline of old dynasties led to the rise of new, distinct states.

The study of ancient inscriptions has provided invaluable insights into the evolution of land ownership and administrative control in various regions throughout history. These inscriptions reveal a gradual shift from centralized royal authority to the rise of local lords, a precursor of the emerging feudal system¹. Ancient inscriptions hold a wealth of information about the distribution of land grants and assignments in early societies. Through careful analysis, researchers have been able to uncover the intricate mechanisms by which land ownership and administrative control evolved over time. This study sheds light on the transition from centralized royal authority to the emergence of local lords, offering a deeper understanding of the development of the feudal system. In this paper, we will delve into the complexities of land grants and assignments as evidenced in ancient inscriptions, shedding light on their significance in shaping historical landscapes.

One of the most significant regions for the study of land grants and assignments is ancient Rajasthan. The cuneiform inscriptions found in this region provide a detailed record of land allocations and their associated administrative processes. By examining these inscriptions, we can gain a clearer understanding of the complex systems of land ownership and control that were in place during this period. The detailed records of land grants and assignments in these inscriptions offer valuable insights into the gradual decentralization of power and the emergence of localized administrative authority.

Furthermore, the analysis of these inscriptions allows for a deeper exploration of the social and economic implications of land grants and assignments. It becomes evident that the distribution of land played a central role in shaping social structures and economic systems in ancient Rajasthan, highlighting the interconnectedness of land ownership, power dynamics, and economic stability. As we delve deeper into the study of land grants and assignments in ancient India, it becomes increasingly clear that these inscriptions hold the key to unravelling the intricate systems of land ownership and C.E. administrative control that laid the groundwork for the development of early societies. In the following sections, we will explore specific inscriptions and their significance in shedding light on the complexities of land grants and assignments in this pivotal region.

Inscriptions of the 8th century reveal an abundance of land grants and transfers, with grants for religious purposes outnumbering those for administrative or service functions. In this chapter, numerous inscriptions have been examined, translated, and contextualized regarding land conveyance and the renunciation of sovereign rights.

During this era, many such endowments were bestowed by monarchs and eminent figures, predominantly for religious endeavours. These endowments detail varying extents of sovereign right relinquishment, signalling emergent feudal tendencies in Rajasthan in the 8th century C.E. The aggregated data from these grants and inscriptions offer a glimpse into the feudal structure prevalent in Rajasthan during this time.

Significance

Rajasthan during 8th century have a political turmoil which resulted in lack of literature. Inscriptions provide valuable information for recreating political, economic and social history of the Rajasthan. From the eighth to the tenth century, numerous records document a significant number of land endowments and transactions, with the majority dedicated to religious objectives surpassing those allocated for governance or duties. This research focuses on a comprehensive analysis, interpretation, and setting of these ancient texts, which detail the processes of land distribution and the ceding of royal entitlements. This research paper fulfils the research gap through the postmodern research process, which emphasises every detail of the feudal history of Rajasthan. The inscriptions do not contain any feudal title for women, but this research further provides the position of women in feudal history, which is earlier not mentioned as the prime element of feudalism.

Historical Background

The political instability in Rajasthan region was not new for the folks because of the oblique mountainous region. The inscriptions shows a number of information about the political uncertainties and the start of feudal era in Rajasthan. The majority of philanthropic endowments were allocated during sacrificial ceremonies to accrue greater spiritual value. Such endowments originated from Rajasthan around the third century C.E., exemplified by a pillar found in Badwa associated with the Maukhari family. This

pillar bears an inscription². Based on the deciphered inscription, it has been unveiled that Dhanutrata, a descendant of Hastin from the Maukhari family, conducted an Aptoryama ritual. Corresponding to this event, he compensated Brahmanas with a thousand cows for their role in executing the ceremony. The kings Hastin and Dhanutrata are not given any specific titles within the feudal rankings in the inscription. A.S. Altekar's analysis suggests that Hastin's family did not reach prominent military or administrative ranks similar to Bala, who held the post of mahasenapati, or chief military commander, in the year 239 C.E. Nonetheless, the name Dhanutrata, which implies a protector armed with a bow, indicates their probable Kshatriya caste affiliation. Numerous Maukhari clans were established in the area around the third century C.E., with it being likely that several nearby villages in the regions of Badva and Kotah were allocated to them as military fiefdoms. The grant signifies the delegation of financial benefits from the monarch to a Brahmana. However, it remains uncertain whether the administrative privileges were also transferred from the donating Maukhari sovereign³.

**Mōkharēr-Hasti²-putrasya Dhanutrā²tasya dhīmataḥ [*]
Aptō[r]y[ā]m[ā] kratoḥ⁴ yūpaḥ sahasrō gava-dakṣiṇā⁵ [*]**

A different 7th-century inscription associated with the Guhila dynasty in Mewar, dated to the year 646 C.E., has been found, providing evidence of the degree to which royal rights had been relinquished⁴. An epigraphic record was located in Samoli, Mewar, and is currently housed in the Rajputana Museum in Ajmer. The text begins with a homage to the deity Chandika, followed by an accolade for the ruler Siladitya from the Guhila lineage who governed the region. It also documents the relocation of a group from Vatanagara to Aranyakaupagirin for the purpose of establishing mining operations, which provided a means of support for the inhabitants. Vatanagara is approximately 16 miles from Aranyakaupagirin, and both were under the rule of Siladitya of Mewar during that period; however, the process by which they acquired the new territory is not specified in the inscription. This leads to questions regarding the king's ownership of the land. Additionally, at the instruction of the local community authority responsible for market affairs, known as the Mahajana, Jentaka, who was a community elder, established a temple for the goddess Aranyavasini (a form of Durga) there⁵. The inscription highlights the conveyance of rights to revenue, yet the status of the administrative rights remains unclear, with no definite evidence to suggest that the land may have been bought by the founders.

Approximately fifteen years later, a king from the Guhila dynasty of Mewar named Aparajita is referenced in an inscription unearthed in Udaipur, dating to the year 660 C.E. or V.S. 718. The text describes how Aparajita, as Mewar's monarch, appointed Varasimha as the head of his military forces, bestowing upon him the honorific title of Maharaja. This reflects a feudal structure and the inscription goes on to state that Aparajita's consort, Yashomati, commissioned the construction of a Vishnu temple. The stone bearing the inscription, found within the Mewar territory, is likely situated at the location where the temple was established, within the jurisdiction of Varasimha. This use of the title Maharaja for the military leader further corroborates the feudal characteristics of the society at that time⁶.

Valuable details about the feudal aspects were uncovered in a couple of the earliest Guhila endowment records. One particular inscription, unearthed in Dungarpur in the state of Rajasthan, documents a gift from Bhavihita, dating back to the year 653 C.E. The epigraph notes that the grant was made from Kishikindhapura. These inscribed plates divulge data concerning the Guhila chieftain Devagana—who was the paternal uncle of Bhavihita—and depict Bhavihita as one who revered and sought guidance from his uncle's wisdom⁷.

This document also includes a term indicating a subsidiary rank, specifically the term 'samadhigata-pancha-mahash.' From this, it can be inferred that Bhavihita exercised authority over additional subordinates within his purview. The grant enumerates these subordinate entities as follows:

1. Subordinate chief⁸
2. Son of Rajan⁹
3. Viceroy¹⁰
4. Officer in charge of the gate of the palace¹¹
5. An officer in charge of measuring the king's share of grains¹²
6. Commander of forces¹³
7. Police officer to deal with the case of theft¹⁴
8. Head of a group of policemen¹⁵
9. Collector of custom duties¹⁶
10. A gate-keeper or a collector of tolls¹⁷
11. Head of a village¹⁸
12. Messenger¹⁹
13. Chief of a group of Paiks²⁰
14. Paik²¹
15. Attendant²²

The endowment in question is identified as a Brahmadeya, which refers to land granted tax-free to Brahmanas, initially sanctioned by King Devagana and later confirmed by Bhavihita. The endowment is governed by the 'Bhumi-chchhidra' principle, ensuring that the recipient and his progeny are entitled to the grant in perpetuity. While the beneficiary does not possess the authority to make decisions regarding the land itself—serving it in a spiritual capacity for the deity—they are entitled to receive Uparikara, which are minor taxes or dues from the land or its tenants, as well as any incidental earnings that may result from environmental or climate variations, and penalties collected from minor infringements occurring on the property. This epigraphic evidence indicates the existence of a sophisticated feudal structure characterized by varying degrees of devolution of the monarch's authority to vassals²³.

In the sequence, a subsequent grant references Babhata as paying homage at Devagana's feet, suggesting Babhata's junior position in relation to Devagana. In this record, Babhata also notes the existence of certain official positions that are required to adhere to his directive, which are outlined as follows;

1. Subordinate rulers²⁴
2. Son of a subordinate chief²⁵
3. Minister for war and peace²⁶
4. Leader of forces²⁷
5. Priest²⁸
6. Officer in charge of the measurement of the royal share of the produce²⁹
7. Minister³⁰

8. Officer in charge of the gate of the palace or capital³¹
9. Viceroy³²
10. Governor³³
11. Minister enjoying status of a prince³⁴
12. Officers in charge of the vishayas or districts and *bhogas* or subdivisions³⁵
13. Officer dealing with the case of theft³⁶

And the other terms used for the other responsible persons also mentioned there, these are as follows;

1. Collection of custom duties
2. Royal agent
3. Head of an administrative division or department
4. Head of a group of a policemen
5. Gate-keeper or collector of tolls
6. Head of a village
7. Probably, an officer in charge of a watch station
8. Members of the scribal community.

The endowment was bestowed upon a Brahmana, rather than a deity as in previous instances, with the recipient being granted the rights to enhance and procure minor taxes. additionally, the beneficiary was obligated to continue providing a portion of the grain and scheduled tributes to the monarch. The temporal distance between Bhavihita and Babhata, paired with their similar statuses within the Guhila clan, implies that they were both family members possessing certain degrees of power to manage and oversee the administration within their own domains, as well as within the sovereign's lands. Yet, it is noted that both were considered vassals under Devagana³⁷.

An Agrahara grant dated to 679 C.E. is mentioned in the Dulev copper plate of Maharaja Bhatti, located near what is now called the village of Kalyanpur in the Udaipur area. The reference to Kishkindhapur in the inscription suggests a connection between the Guhila dynasty and Bhatti, with both having similar levels of control over the same expanse of land. This land, as evidenced by the various village names listed in the grant, covered a large geographical area. The Bhattis were part of the Guhila family. The details inscribed on the plate provide insight into the king's authority and governance. The land grant was authorized by the king and the official decree for it was made at the behest of the Samanta, who was a subordinate official. The record includes three Dutakas, or agents in charge of implementing the grant, who were instructed by the Samanta. There appears to be no divine aspect to the relationship between the king and the Samanta, indicating a feudal system in which subordinates such as the Samanta held considerable power. additionally, attention is drawn to the significance of the Vajsaneya in the Rajasthan region. The roster of royal officials included: Ayuktas, Vinayuktas, Chatas, Bhatas, Kutumbins, Mahattaras, Drangikas. These administrative positions were directly associated with the king and adhered to the royal commands, suggesting that certain customary rights were associated with the donation of the Agrahara village. The feudal system is further manifested in the appointment of the grant's executors. Maharaja Bhatti selected the first executor, while Samanta Bhatripada appointed the remaining two, as the village being granted fell within his administrative area³⁸.

8th century C.E.

With the beginning of 8th century there are a number of inscriptions found to the archaeologist. In the year 707 C.E., King Bhojadeva I of Mahodaya reissued an ancestral land grant that was first established by his great-grandfather Maharaja Vatsarajadeva, continued under his grandfather Maharaja Nagabhatadeva, and his father Maharaja Ramabhadradeva. The inscription includes not only the king's moniker but also the name of his royal forebearer. The deeds of the land were conveyed to Bhatta Vasudeva, a Brahmana who was also the patriarch of the official Harshuka, known as Paik. Bhatta Vasudeva designated a one-sixth share of this allotment to Bhatta Vishnu. This endowment, which had been suspended during Bhojadeva I's rule, was now reinstated in the names of both Bhatta Vasudeva and Bhatta Vishnu, granting them the full revenue generated from the land. Moreover, the bequest was secular as well as religious, as the final part of the inscription dictates that the recipients must follow commands given by the grantors. The responsibility for executing this charter fell to the Yuvaraja, Crown Prince Nagabhata. Analysis of the grant reveals that while the beneficiaries were granted revenue collection and administrative privileges over the land, they maintained a subordinate status to the grantor, keeping the king's sovereign rights over the land intact³⁹.

Throughout the era under examination, signs of a feudal system seeped into the most fundamental societal levels, notably evidenced by the land and rights endowments bestowed by the local nobility, including traders. An epitome of such records was unearthed at Kaman in the Bharatpur district of Rajasthan. The absence of a precise date in the inscription allows it to be linguistically ascribed to the 8th century CE. The text commences with an invocation to the principal deity, Shiva, followed by the introduction of a Brahman named Kakkuka. Kakkuka fathered numerous children, with his eldest called Untata. This stone-carved record encapsulates various formalized transactions concerning minor and significant gifts and benefactions. The only ruler mentioned in all documents is Bhojadeva, who has been identified as Bhoja I of the Pratihara dynasty.

The first document contains the information about the donation given by a member of the managing committee⁴⁰. It was a permanent endowment of something (not clear), which they had acquired, in the favour of the deity. The second document was about the grant of land by the merchant Vajrata. The third document is about the donation of two lands in the fort in favour of a temple of Kamyakesvara.

This inscription provides a noteworthy insight into the taxation practices of the time, detailing that potters living near a temple were provided with funds upfront, enabling them to fulfill their tax obligations to the grant's recipient. This points to the grantor likely being a prominent official or merchant, who, upon endowing land, simultaneously devolved their tax-collecting rights to the grantee. This transfer of rights illustrates the presence of feudal characteristics within the localized community structure.

Subsequently, another inscription delineates the arrangement with gardeners who received advance payments for supplying 60 garlands, dividing the delivery between the Vishnu temple with thirty-four garlands and the Chamunda Devi shrine receiving the rest, located in Kamyaka.

Following this, a record is mentioned about a community of craftsmen situated near the Kamyaka temple who were endowed with a permanent grant. This endowment brought the craftsmen under the taxation authority of their own guild, to which they were now financially obligated.

Yet another account mentions Untata, the scribe of these inscriptions, detailing his contribution of land previously worked by Brahmanas named Sahulla, Jajja, and others, and at the time of the donation, cultivated by Eduvaka. This land was assigned perpetually to the same Brahmana. It stipulates that all

yields from such lasting endowments were to be reinvested back into the principal sum as defined by the standing endowment laws. From this, we infer that despite the land being bestowed eternally, ultimate ownership appeared to remain with the regal authority, even in the eighth century CE, signifying the enduring dominion of the monarch or the state over such donations, regardless of the donor's status.

A subsequent record details a gift of two plots of land encloser⁴¹ by an individual named Bhadra, a craftsman specializing in conch shells, formalized through a documented deed. This giver did not come from the upper tiers of societal strata, yet still managed to contribute land to the temple. This instance illustrates that donations were not restricted to the affluent; rather, anyone possessing something to give could make a donation. Accompanying such a contribution, the rights to manage or collect revenue from the property were also conferred upon the temple's administration.

The final inscription describes a monetary contribution made by Bhojadeva to a figure known as Paramanarasi, who subsequently handed the funds to Chamundaka, an educator. Following this, Chamundaka allocated the sum to the Goshtikas, the supervisory council. With this money, the Goshtikas acquired two parcels of land known as avarikas. The commercial establishments within these lands paid rent to the Goshtikas, which was used for the maintenance of temple aesthetics, including whitewashing and providing vermilion and lighting. The aforementioned Bhojadeva is confirmed to be the same as Emperor Bhoja I from the Pratihara dynasty. The essence of this benefaction was spiritual in nature⁴².

At the location of the Golerav tank near the Raghunathji temple in the Chatsu area of the Jaipur state, there exists an inscription attributed to the Guhila monarch Baladitya, inscribed in the year 725 CE. This inscription commemorates the construction of a temple dedicated to Raghunatha by King Baladitya, yet does not mention any land grant. It serves primarily as a tribute to the Guhilas in Chatsu. During that time, the Guhilas held vassal status under the sovereignty of the Pratiharas and possessed the sanctioned authority to erect temples and create water reservoirs. This circumstance demonstrates that the Pratiharas, in their regal capacity, conferred certain sovereign privileges to their vassals within the Rajasthan region.

Supporting evidence of the deepening feudal structures in Rajasthan during the period in question includes an instance where the Sivagana community bestowed two villages along with a temple in the years 738-739 CE. The gift was in honor of their sovereign, King Dhaval of the Mauryan lineage, aimed at fostering his spiritual well-being. This inscription was discovered in the Kansawa area of Kota state and stands out as a distinct example of a subordinate making a contribution to their sovereign.

Conclusion

The examination of these land grants reveals identifiable traits of feudalism that emerged in the 8th century within the Rajasthan area. In that era, there was a significant rise in the count of inscriptions due to the allocation of grants to shrines and religious communities, coupled with the relinquishment of the monarch's privileges. The details within these land grants suggest that the reigning royal families in Rajasthan engaged in a customary process of compensating officials through the distribution of land grants and assignments. It was observed that recipients of the land appropriations adopted designations traditionally exclusive to monarchs and high-ranking officers, indicating that titles were conferred alongside the land grants. There is ample proof to support the notion that the titles associated with kings and officials underwent a process of feudalization.

Notes

1. Jha. D.N., Ancient India In Historical Outline.
2. N.P. Chakravarti (Ed.), *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XXIV, 251-253.
3. Ibid., 251.
4. Hiranand Sastri, (Ed.), *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XX, (Delhi, Manager of Publications, 1933), 97.
5. Ibid., 97-99.
6. E. Hultzsch, (Ed.), *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. IV, (Calcutta, Government of Printing Office), 29-32.
7. D.C. Sircar, (Ed.), *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XXXIV, 167-176.
8. Rajan is a term used for the Subordinate chief but in the hierarchy of feudal structure the position is not clear.
9. Rajaputra title was used for the royal prince.
10. For Viceroy the term rajasthaniya Has been used.
11. D.C. Sircar, (Ed.), *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol., XXXIV, 168., (Pratihara). The term Mahapratihara was used for the official who maintained the propriety in the court and he considered as the overlord of the Mahadandanayaka and Mahasamanta. Sharma, *Rajasthan Through the Ages*, Vol. I, 320.
12. The term used is *pramatri*
13. *Baladhikrita*, the term has been used in two different ways, firstly for the commander of forces. D.C. Sircar, (Ed.), *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XXXIV, 168. Secondly for extract the custom revenues or the overlord of them. Dashratha Sharma, *Rajasthan Through the Ages*, Vol. I, 326 & 333.
14. In the text of the inscription, *chauroddharanika* is the term used.
15. In the text of the inscription, *dandapasika* is the term used.
16. In the text of the inscription, *saulkika* is the term used.
17. In the text of the inscription, *pratisaraka* is the term used.
18. In the text of the inscription, *gramadhipati* is the term used.
19. In the text of the inscription, *gamagamika* is the term used.
20. In the text of the inscription, *chata* is the term used.
21. In the text of the inscription, *bhat* is the term used.
22. In the text of the inscription, *sevaka* is the term used.
23. D.C. Sircar, (Ed.), *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XXXIV, 167-173.
24. The term used is *Nripa*.
25. The term used is *nripasuta*.
26. The term used is *sandhivigrakadhikrita*.
27. The term used is *senadhyaksha*
28. The term used is *purodhas*.
29. The term used is *pramantri*.
30. The term used is *mantrin*.

31. The term used is *pratihara*.
32. The term used is *rajasthaniya*
33. The term used is *uparika*.
34. The term used is *kumarmatya*.
35. The term used is *vishayabhogpati*.
36. The term used is *chaurodharanika*.
37. D.C. Sircar, (Ed.), *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XXXIV, 167-173.
38. N. Lakshminarayan Rao, (Ed.), *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XXX, (Delhi, Manager of Publications, 1958), 1-6.
39. E. Hultsczh, (Ed.), *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. V, (New delhi, Government of India Press, 1959), 208-213.
40. *Goshthikas* is used for managing committee.
41. *Avaris* is identified as Land Enclosures.
42. N.P. Chkravarti, (Ed.), *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XXIV, 329-336.