

**POONA COPPER PLATE INSCRIPTION OF PRABHAVATIGUPTA:
REGNAL YEAR 13th**

Dr. Priya Jyoti Samanta

The word Vākāṭaka is derived either from the founder of the dynasty Vindhyaśakti who was a Brahmin of Vishnuriddha gotra or from his territory i.e. Vākāṭaka. His name associates him with a territory around the Vindhya region.

The Vākāṭaka that held sway over parts of Deccan (and sometimes with portions of central India) flourished during the later half of 3rd century A.D. It is difficult to determine the precise meaning or authenticity of most of the Puranic details about the Vākāṭaka.¹ Vindhyaśakti was succeeded by his son Mahārāja Haritiputra Pravarasena-I who has been described as a Samrat in some records.² The eldest son of Pravarasena I appears to have been Gautamīputra who possibly predeceased his father. His son born to the daughter of Bhavanāga was Mahārāja Rudrasena-I, who succeeded his grandfather and is described in the records of his successors. Rudrasena I was succeeded by his son Prithivīsenā-I, who like his father, was a worshipper of Mahesvara. Prithivīsenā I was succeeded by his son Mahārāja Rudrasena-II who married Prabhāvatīgupta, daughter of Chandragupta-II alias Deva-gupta and his queen Kuberanāgā of the Nāga lineage.³

Prabhāvatīgupta who acted as a regent (c. 390 to 410 A. D.) for her elder minor son Divākarasena because of her husband's (Rudrasena-II) immature death in C. 390 A. D., issued Poona grant from Nandivardhan in 13th regnal year⁴ who called herself Śrī Divākarasenājananī śrī Prabhāvatīgupta - 1.10 The place has been identified by some scholars with modern Nagardhan or Nandardhan near Ramtek, about 13 miles north of Nagpur.

This inscription records a grant, non-sectarian in nature, of a village named Danguna to a Brahman, Ācārya Caṇālasvāmin, by the queen dowager Prabhāvatīgupta .⁵

The Poona plates were discovered by K. B. Pathak and K. N. Dikshit. These plates were handed over to them by Balwant Bahu Nagarkar, a copper smith or Poona who hailed originally from Ahmadnagar and these plates were preserved as a hairloom in his family. The size of the plates are (9¼" long x 5¾" broad) and are strung together by means of a ring (¼" thick and ¾" in

diameter) with soldered ends passing through a hole | in diameter, cut through the centre of one side of the plates. The ring is further made to pass through the perforated handle of the seal, which is plain and oval (length 2^{7/8}" breadth 2^{1/8}") and contains four lines of inscription, with figures of the Sun and the Moon above and a flower at the bottom.⁶

Poona Copper-Plate Inscription of Prabhāvati-gupta-Regnal Year 13

Language: Sanakrit.

Script: Nail-headed variety of late Brahmi of the Southern Class (with some Northern peculiarities) of the fifth century A. D.

Metre: Verses 1-2 Anustam (sloka).

Text⁷

1. Vākāṭaka-lalāmasya
2. [kra]ma-prāpta-nripa-sri(va(h) [])*
3. Jananyā yuva-rājasya
4. Śāsanam ripu-śāsn [na] (m) []*

Plate - 1

1. Siddham []* Jitam=bhagavatā []* Svasti Nāndivarddhanād=āsid=Gupta-ādīra [j] ō [Ma]h[a-]raja-]
2. In margin | Śri-Ghatotkachas=tasya sat-putro mahārāja-Śri-driṣṭam* | Chandraguptas=tasya sat-putro=
3. nek-Āśvamedha-yāji→Lichchhavi-dohitro⁹→mahādevyam Kumāra-devyām=utpanno
4. mahārāj-ādhiraja-Śri-Samudraguptas=tat-pat¹⁰-putras=tat-pāda-parīgrihitah
5. prithivyām=a-pratirathas=sarva-rāj-ochhetta¹¹ chatur-udadhi-salil-āsvādita-
6. yasāneka¹²-go-hiraṇya-koṭi-sahasra-pradaḥ=parama-bhāgavato mahā-rā-
7. j-ādhirāja-Śri-Chandragupras=tasya duhitā Dhāraṇa-sagotrā Nāga-kula-sambhu-
8. tāyā[m*] Sri-mahādevyām Kubera-nāgāyam=utpann-obhaya-kul-ālankāra-bhuta=tyanta-bhagavad-bhakta
9. Vākātakānam Mahārājā-Śri-Rudrasenasy=āgra-mahishi Yuvaraja-
10. Śri-Divākarasena-janani Śri-Prabhāvati-gupta Supratishth-āhāre

Plate - 2

11. Vilavanakasya pūrva-pārśve Śīrsha-grāmasya dakṣiṇa-parśve
Kadāpiñjanasy=āpara-pārśve
12. Sidivivarakasy=ottara-pārśve Danguṇa-grāme Brāhmaṇ-ādyān-grāma-
kutumbinah-kusala-
13. m=uktva samājñāpayati Veditam=astu vo yah=aisha grāmāo=smābhi [h*]
sva-puny-āpyāyan-ā[rtham]
14. Kārttika-śukla-dvādaśya[m*] Bhagavat-pāda-mule nivedya bhagavad-
bhakti-āchāryya-Chaṇāla-svamine=purvva-
15. dattvā udaka-purvvam=atisrishto yato bhavabdhir¹³=uchita-maryyādayā
sarvv-ājñah-kartavyā[h*] purvva-
16. rāj¹⁴-ānumatā [m]ś-ch=ātra chāturvidy-āgrahāra-pariharān-
vitarāmas=tad=yath=ā-bhata-chhātra-prāveśyah
17. ā-chār-āsana-charmm-āṅgāra-kinva-kreṇi-khānaka[h] a-pā[ra*] mapara[h*]
a-[paśu]-medhyah a-pushpa-kshira-sandohah
18. sa-nidhis=s-opanedhis=as-kript¹⁵-opakriptah nad¹⁶=esja bhavishyad-
rājibhis¹⁷=samarakshi-tavya[h*] parivarddha-
19. yitavyaś=cha yaś=ch=āsmach-
chhāsanam=agaṇayamānas=svalpām=apy=atr=ābādhā [m*]
kuryāt=kārayitā¹⁸ vā
20. tasya Brāhmaner¹⁹=āveditasya sa-daṇḍa-nigraham kuryyāma [*] Vyāsa-
gītāś²⁰=ch=ātra ślokā bhavati [||*]
21. Svadattām=para-dattā[m*] vā yo haretā vasundharām [*] gavā[m*] śata-
sahasrasya hantur=haratī dushkritam [||*]
22. Samvatsare cha trayodasame likhitam=ida[m*] śāsanam [*]
Chakkradāsen=otkatṭitam

Translation²¹:

Seal: This is the enemy-chastising command of the mother (The name of the prince, as well as that of the queen-mother, is apparently omitted for want of space, as only a quarter sloka was at the disposal of the draft maker) of the young prince, the ornament of the Vākātakas, who has obtained sovereignty in course (of succession).

(L1. 1-10): (In margin, 'seen') Success! From (the town of) Nāndivarddhana; the illustrious Prabhāvati (The name is evidently derived in the same was as those of other members of the Gupta dynasty, and literally means, 'Protected by Prabhāvati', the latter name denoting either the wife of the Sun-god or,

more likely, one of the 'mothers' attendant on the god Skanda. We know that the Guptas were particularly devoted to this commander of the celestial army; and it is quite natural that his 'mothers' were worshipped as well, as tutelary deities in the royal household. The shortening of the last vowel or Prabhāvati gupta is quite in accordance with the rules of grammar). Gupta of the Dharāṇa gotra, born of the illustrious Mahādevi Kuberaṇāga, who, herself born of the Nāga family, was an ornament to both the families (or her father and husband); immensely devoted to the Divine (Viṣṇu); chief queen of the illustrious Mahārāja Rudrasena of the Vākātakas; mother of the illustrious Yuvarāja Divākarasena²², and daughter of the illustrious Mahārājādhirāja Chandragupta II²³, the great devotee of the Divine (Viṣṇu), the bestower²⁴ of many thousands of crores of cows and gold, whose fame was tasted by the waters of the four oceans, the exterminator of all princes, who had no rival on earth, the excellent and the favoured (lit. accepted by His Majesty) son of the illustrious Mahārājādhirāja Samudra-gupta, born of the great queen Kumāra-devi, daughter's son of the Licchhavi (Chief), the performer of several horse-sacrifices, the excellent son of the illustrious Mahārāja Ghatotkach who had been mentioned as the first king Gupta king.²⁵

(L. 10) After announcing (her) well-being-commands the village house-holders, Brāhmins and others, of the village of Danguṇa, in the Supratistha Āhāra to the east of (the village) Vilavanaka, to the south of the village of Śirsha, to the west of Kadāpiñjana and to the north of Sidivivara.

(L. 13) Be it known to you that, on (this) twelfth (day) of the bright (half) of (the month of) Kārttika, we have, for the accumulation of our religious merit, bestowed, as a grant not previously made, this village with (a libation of) water upon the great devotee of the Divine (Lord), the Āchārya Chaṇāla-Svāmin, after having first offered it at the feet (lit-root of the feet) of the Divine (Lord Viṣṇu); hence you should carry out all injunctions with proper defense.

(L. 15) We there confer the exemption incident to a village belonging to a community of Chāturvediyas, (as) approved by former kings; (it is) not to be entered by soldiers²⁶ and umbrella-bearers; not (yielding the right) pasturage, hides, charcoal, the purchase of fermenting²⁷ drugs, and mines; not (entitling to) the succession²⁸ (of cows and bulls); not to have an animal-sacrifice²⁹ not (to have the right of) abundance of flowers and milk; with the hidden treasures and deposits, with kṛipta and upakṛipta-

(L. 18) So this (grant) should be maintained and increased by future kings. Whosoever, disregarding this charter, shall make or cause to make the slightest

molestation, upon him, on his being reported by the Brāhmanas, we will inflict punishment together with a fine.

(L. 20) And on this point there is a verse sung by Vyāsa; He who confiscates land given by himself or by others incurs the sin of one who kills a hundred thousand cows.

(L. 22) And this charter is written in the thirteenth year; engraved by Chakkradāsa.

Review:

The Vaishnavite expression *jitam bhagavatā* i.e. victory of divine lord (Viṣṇu) is found at the beginning and after that she called herself *atyanta bhagavata bhaktā* (1.8) i.e. greatly devoted to divine lord (Visnu). In the Rithpur copper plate inscription issued by Prabhāvati Gupta at the time of Pravarasena II in her 19th regnal year, same Vaiṣṇavite expression is indicated which think us to conclude that in the 4th-5th century A. D. Vaiṣṇavism was popular in south India. The Vākāṭakas were Śaivas and it was Rudrasena-II, the husband of Prabhāvati Gupta who became a devotee of Viṣṇu through the influence of his Gupta wife and father-in-law who were Vaiṣṇavas.

The inscription refers to the genealogical line of Prabhāvati Gupta's paternal side. The first king of the family is represented as Gupta who is evidently Mahārāja Śrī Gupta followed by Ghatotkaca whereas in Rithpur Copper-plate inscription Mahārāja Śrī Ghatotkaca has been mentioned as the first king of the Gupta dynasty which is confusing. So it can be concluded that the geneology of of Guptas drawn by Vākāṭaka is wrong.

Chandragupta-I was the worthy son (*satputrah*) of Ghatotkaca and the son of Chandragupta-I was Mahārājādhirāja Samudragupta born of great queen Kumaradevi and who was the grandson (*Licchavi dauhitra*) of the Licchavi chief. Samudragupta is said to have performed several horse sacrifice (*anekāśvamedhayāji*). However, Samudragupta's Allahabad pillar inscription is silent about it but Kumaragupta's Bilas stone pillar inscription throws light that Samudragupta revived the horse sacrifice. It is possible that Samudragupta performed the horse sacrifice after Allahabad prasati was incised, to celebrate his digvijaya.

Prabhāvati Gupta presents herself as the daughter of Chandragupta belonging to Dhārana gotra, born of Mahadevi Kubernāga, who herself was born of Nāga family; an ornament of both the families of her father and husband; very much devoted to lord Viṣṇu, chief queen of Mahārāja Rudrasena of the Vākāṭakas mother of the Yuvarāja Divākarasena.

The date of grant is given as the 12th of the bright half of Kārttika which should be counted as the 13th regnal year (samvatsare ca trayodaśe likhitam idam sāsanam 2.22). The regnal year 13 should be counted from when queen Prabhāvatiḡupta was acting as a regent on behalf of her son Divākarasena (Śri-Divākarasenajanani Śriprabhāvatiḡupta 1.10). If the queen had acted as a regent from the death of her husband Rudrasena II in C. 390 A. D., then the grant must have been issued in C. 403 A. D.

Prabhāvatiḡupta, after announcing her will wishes, issued an order to the Brahmanas and other householders of the village Danguna.³⁰

Prabhāvatiḡupta informed the villagers that for storing religious merits, she had granted the village, not previously granted, to the great devotee of lord Viṣṇu, Ācārya Caṇālasvāmin who belonged to agrahāra community. The village was provided some exemptions from providing pasturage, feeding and lodging to royal officials during their tour etc. and restrictions like no entry of soldiers, umbrella bearers, peons, etc. which was generally enjoyed by a village granted to Caturvedin community. Before granting the village, she first offered libation of water at the feet of divine lord (Viṣṇu). The grant also makes it clear that if any complaint is made by the Brahmanas (donees), the guilty would be punished. From the grant it is clear that Brahmanas received respect by the Vākātakas. She also makes it clear that this grant should be protected and increased by the successors. Like other land grants, this grant also makes it clear that the confiscator would incur the sin of a killer of hundred thousand cows. And lastly the engraver Cakradāsa has engraved his name.

The most important aspect of this inscription which makes it rare is that the queen Prabhāvatiḡupta presents herself to Dhāraṇa gotra, the gotra of her paternal side and retains her paternal cognomen by calling herself Gupta. It is remarkable to note that like Prabhāvatiḡupta, her mother Kuvernāga who was born in a Nāga family and was one of the queens of Chandragupta II, did not lose her paternal family name. Generally, Hindu women adopt the gotras or clan names of their husbands during marriage. But in Gandharva and other marriages gotrantara does not take place owing to pradanabhava.³¹ So it can be presumed that the practice of mentioning the gotra of the bride appears to be prevalent in old times. At least one can say that there was no binding in changing the gotra of bride during marriage in the early period in all parts of India.

The characters belong pre-eminently to the 'nail-headed' variety of alphabets of which the present is the earliest example, the only other instance

from which the variety was known being the Majhgawan plates of Hastin, issued about a century later. A few letters are also written in the better known 'box-headed' variety, which was largely used in the central parts of India from the fifth century A.D. onwards and in which all the other known inscriptions of the Vākāṭaka rulers were written.³²

Though the central Indian alphabets are generally supposed to be a variety of the southern, the present record shows a considerable admixture of northern peculiarities. For example, the letter ma occurs in its unlooped form, la has a short vertical, ha curves down to the left, ga has a loop arrow-head at the bottom of the left member; sa, sha and sa have similar loops; medial i consists of a curved line drawn from the top to the left, being distinguishable from medial e only by a slight difference in curvature. In all these respects the alphabets closely resemble those used in the Allahabad pillar inscription of Samudragupta. On the other hand southern characteristics are apparent in the following letters; a, ka. Ra and even ta and ga have curves at the bottom curling up to the left; the lingual da is round backed; the subscript ri consists of a curve to the left added at the bottom; the northern form of the lingual na is generally used, but in one place the southern also occurs. So it is rather difficult to ascertain whether the northern or the southern characters predominate. The most conspicuous feature of the central Indian script of this period, as remarked by Buhler, is the straightening of all curvilinear strokes. This peculiarity is somewhat developed by the time of the issue of this grant, though not to the same extent as we find later on; e.g. the letters pa, va, cha, etc. have sharp angles, but not the letters ma, va, la and others, as in the grant of Pravarasena II. Indeed the difference between the characters used in the present grant and those in the grants of Pravarasena II strikes us as in the every way too great for the period of 25 or 30 years which must have intervened between these records. It is also noteworthy that the affinities of the present script, which ought to have been with the contemporary records of the time of Kumaragupta I, are more with the older Allahabad pillar inscription of Samudragupta. The language is Sanskrit and the whole record is in prose, except the two Anushtubh verses, one on the seal and one, the usual imprecatory verse, at the end. Regarding orthography, we may note the doubling of the consonant after r as in varddhanad (1.1) artham (1.13) āchā ryya (1.14 and 15), charmma (1.17), parivarddha (1.18), kuryyama (1.20). The Jihvāmūlya is used twice, viz. in binah=kuśala (1.12) ajnah-kartavyah (1.15), the Upadhmānīya is used in

pradah=parama (1.6). The class nasal is generally used in the body of a word, and an anusvara is preferred at the end; the only exceptions being Jitam=bhaga (1.1) and dattam-para (1.21). The rules of Samahi are generally observed except in places in the second plate. A few forms are ungrammatical, such as trayodasame (1.22)³³

From the inscription one can assume that Divakarasena who is mentioned as crown prince, died before ascending the throne. Because he is mentioned nowhere personally ruling the country.

It can also be assumed that the Vākāṭakas were subordinate to the Guptas is evident from the inscriptions of Prabhāvati-gupta calling the Gupta kings as Mahārājādhirāja and Vākāṭaka kings as Mahārāja. V. A. Smith opines that due to geographical location of the Vākāṭaka, Chandragupta II made a matrimonial alliance with them to suppress the northern invader of the dominions of the Saka Satraps of Gujarat and Surashtra.

Footnotes & Reference

1. Sircar, D. C., *The Deccan After the Satavahanas*, et. Al., *The Age of Imperial Unity*, ed. R. C. Majumdar, p. 217, 6th edition, Bombay, 1990.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 220.
3. Sircar, D. C., *Deccan in the Gupta Age*, et. al. *The Classical Age*, ed., R. C. Majumdar, pp. 177-179, 4th edition, Bombay, 1990.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 180.
5. Banerjee, M., *Historical and Social Interpretation of the Gupta Inscription*, p. 203, 1st edition, Calcutta, 1989.
6. *Epigraphia Indica*, vo. XV, 1919-20, p. 39, New delhi, 1982.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 41ff.
8. *Epigraphia Indica*, op. cit., read dristam, p. 41.
9. *Ibid.*, read dauhitro, p. 41.
10. *Ibid.*, read sat, p. 41.
11. *Ibid.*, read ochchhetta, p. 41.
12. *Ibid.*, read naika, p. 41.
13. *Ibid.*, read bhavabdhir, p. 42.
14. *Ibid.*, read raj, p. 42.
15. *Ibid.*, read sakripta-opakripta, p. 42.
16. *Ibid.*, read tad, p. 42.
17. *Ibid.*, read rajabhis, p. 42.

18. Ibid., read read karayeta, p. 42.
19. Ibid., read brahmanair, p. 42.
20. Ibid., read gitas, p. 42.
21. Ibid., pp. 42-44.
22. Ibid., It is likely that Divākarasena died shortly afterwards. Or he may, on attaining his majority, have come to the throne with the name Pravarasena, p. 43.
23. Ibid., The name of the father of Queen Prabhāvatīgupta is given in all the three grants of her son Pravarasena, as Devagupta, which was the more familiar name Chandragupta II. (cf. the Sanchi inscription of the same king, which gives Devarāja as the familiar name; Corpus Ins. Ind., vol. III, p. 32). The present record, containing almost an official genealogical account of the Imperial Guptas, gives the official name, while Pravarasena naturally refers to his grandfather by his family name, p. 43.
24. Ibid., This and the following three epithets are generally found in apposition to Samudragupta. (cf. Corpus Ins. Ind., Vol. III, pp. 43, 49, 53). Owing to some confusion they are here applied to Chandragupta II. One of the epithets, at least, viz. scrvva-rāj-ochchhetta, cannot be appropriately descriptive of any other king than Samudragupta, p. 43.
25. Ibid., The construction is very faulty here. The relation between Gupta and Ghatotkacha is not given, p. 43.
26. Ibid., We follow Dr. Fleet in translating this passage, p. 43.
27. Ibid., Kinva is not mentioned in connection with kreni in the other records, which generally have lavana-klīana-kreni, p. 43.
28. Ibid., According to the other grants the words go-balivardah ought to follow parampaura, p. 43.
29. Ibid., This condition is not to be found in the other records, p. 43.
30. D. C. Sircar reads the name as Unguma (cf. Select Inscriptions Bearing on Indian History and Cultural, vol. I, p. 437, II edition, 1965, Calcutta).
31. Garuda Purāṇa (Uttara, 22.22)
32. Epigraphia Indica, op. cit. p. 40.
33. Ibid.