

# ALLAHABAD PILLAR: Symbol Of Enriching Cultural And Historical Glory Of India – A Study

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## **Abstract**

*The Allahabad Pillar inscription of Samudragupta is one of the important epigraphic sources for the study of the political history of the Imperial Guptas. It is written in excellent Sanskrit in the form of a panegyric. It popularly called as Allahabad Prasasti in the academic circles. Historians, both ancient and modern, have considered the historical value of Allahabad Prasasti. Allahabad Prasasti is inscribed with ornamental and literary Sanskrit, befitting the taste of the elite class of the time. The inscription is a panegyric praising Samudragupta and lists the political and military achievements of his reign including his expeditions to the south. It provides a unique snapshot of the Gupta Empire and its neighbours and is the source of much of what is known of the geopolitical landscape of that era. The Allahabad pillar inscription described the eulogy and Prasasti of a king, couched in the court language of the elite class and full of imperial attitude, reflecting the glory of the imperial Guptas. This paper is an attempt to examine the cultural and historical importance of Allahabad Pillar inscriptions.*

**Key words:** *Pillar, Inscription, Archeology, Eulogy, Edicts, reconstruction*

## **Introduction**

Samudragupta court poet and minister Harisena composed the Allahabad pillar Inscription or Prayag Prasasti. The Pillar was an Asokan Pillar erected by Asoka six century before him. This Inscription is a eulogy of Samudragupta and mentions about the conquests of Samudragupta and boundaries of the Gupta Empire. As per this inscription, Samudragupta defeated 9 kings in North, 12 Kings in South, reduced all the Atavika states to vassalage. The stone pillar now situated in the fort of Allahabad built by Akbar the Great now carries the inscriptions of three rulers viz. Ashoka, Samudragupta and Jahangir.

The pillar which was originally erected by Ashoka at Kausambi was subsequently shifted to Allahabad in the medieval times. The pillar as it stands today is a 10.75 mts. tall monolith with a base diameter of 0.9 mts. and an apex diameter of 0.7 mts. The capital of the pillar has been lost. The round and tapering shaft is highly polished and very graceful in its proportions.

The Allahabad pillar is of immense value for the reconstruction of the History of ancient India as it carries contemporary writings of the times of the Maurya ruler Ashoka , the Gupta ruler Samudragupta and the Mughal ruler Jehangir. In addition to the aforementioned writings, the pillar also carries some other inscriptions which are dismissed by Alexander Cunningham the Father of Indian Archaeology as a mass of modern scribbling.

The famous Allahabad pillar inscription is the most important historical document of the classical Gupta age. Its detailed list of conquered and allied dynasties and kingdoms contains not only a unique state of the art or who is who of contemporary South Asia. It also depicts the concentric structure of the emerging Gupta Empire with its dynastic core area, extended by annexed neighbouring kingdoms and surrounded by a circle of tributary vassals and by powerful allies at the periphery the Gupta mandala. The list of twelve rulers whom Samudragupta captured and released out of favour on his expedition to the South (daksinapatha) provides an indispensable source of our knowledge of late fourth-century eastern and southern India. The inscription is written in excellent Sanskrit and its author Harisena rightly calls it a poem (kavya). He was a princely minister of war and peace and a military commander and praised Samudragupta as a God, living on earth only for performance of rituals and conventions.

The inscriptions are engraved in continuous lines around the column in Brahmi Script and Prakrit language. The column carries Major Pillar Edicts messages one to six first six of Ashoka which is also seen elsewhere in other Ashokan Pillars. These inscriptions describe among other things about what is Dhamma and various activities undertaken by Ashoka for the propagation of Dhamma. This pillar also carries two other edicts; the Schism edict and the Queens edict. The schism edict was aimed to address internal dissensions among the monks and nuns of the Buddhist order. The edict is also seen in Sanchi and Saranath. Queens's edict - This edict refers to the charitable deeds of Karuvaki, the second queen of Ashoka and the mother of Tivara.

In the Allahabad pillar immediately below the Ashokan edicts is recorded an inscription attributed to fourth century Gupta ruler Samudragupta, the son of Chandra gupta 1st in the Lichchavi princess kumaradevi . The inscription written in ornate Sanskrit language was composed by Harisena who was the court poet and minister of war and peace of Samudra Gupta (Sandhivigraha).The eulogy which is a mixture of prose and verse is written in 33 lines. Vincent Smith describes Samudra Gupta as the Napoleon of India. Many other Historians have raised valid skepticism about assigning flattering titles singularly on the basis of an eloquent eulogy composed by the court poet of the emperor probably under the instructions of the emperor. This however is not altogether true, for contemporary records belonging to the Vakatakas do partially corroborate and supplement claims made in this inscription. Another contemporary epigraph (Eran inscription) credits the Emperor with the overthrowing of the whole tribe of Kings upon the earth.

Allahabad pillar inscription of Samudra Gupta is a unique document. This long eulogy is devoted to the conquests of the Gupta ruler. The Prayagprasasti first mentions three Aryavarta rulers. Then the inscription goes on to mention about a number of defeated rulers, who were grouped mainly into five categories.

The prasasti mentions twelve rulers from south India (Dakshinapatha) and their kingdoms who were defeated by Samudra Gupta . These rulers were defeated,captured, liberated and reinstated (Grahanamokshanugraha). Historians consider this as quite possible as they think

that expediency and pragmatism compelled Samudra Gupta to adopt such a policy towards the Dakshinapatha rulers. Then the prasasti gives a list of nine aryavartha rulers who were defeated and whose territories were annexed to the Gupta Empire. The names of their kingdom were not mentioned as the kingdoms became non-existent following their annexation to the empire. Atavika Rajyaswere forest kingdoms situated in the Vindhya regions. They were reduced to servitude.

The inscription then gives the list of five Border States (Samatata, Davaka, Kamarupa, Katripura and Nepala), and twelve Republics of Punjab region who were vanquished by Samudra Gupta. The inscription further claims that the defeated rulers were forced to pay all kinds of tributes, to carry out his orders and pay him homage. This category included Daivaputra Shahi Sahanushahi, the Saka Murundas and the dwellers of Simhala and all the other islands. It is claimed that these rulers pleased the Gupta emperor by offering their own person to him, bringing presents of maidens and applying for charters bearing the Garuda seal for the enjoyment of their own territories.

The unorthodox nature of Harisenas enumeration has given rise to endless speculations among the Historians regarding the exact significance of the list. K.P. Jayswal is of the opinion that in his categorization Harisena was following the principle of a geographical plan with accuracy. Some other Historians like B.G. Gokhale argues that the basis of enumeration was chronology. Eminent Historian S.R. Goyal has rejected both these contentions and has given an altogether new interpretation to the problem. According to him the only one thing that is common to all the five categories is the treatment the conquered powers received from Samudra Gupta. According to Goyal if there is one governing principle behind Harisenas categorization it is the policy adopted by Samudra Gupta towards the vanquished powers.

It is widely perceived that Harisenas account of Samudra Guptas relationship with the Foreign Powers is an exaggeration. The other available meager evidences suggest that the contacts were merely in the nature of diplomatic relations in which the Guptas enjoyed a superior position. According to a Chinese Source, Meghavarman the ruler of Srilanka sent a missionary to Samudra Gupta for permission to build a Buddhist Temple at Gaya, which was granted. On the basis of this inscriptional evidence it can be undoubtedly concluded that Samudra Gupta forcibly unified greater part of India under him, and his power was felt in a much larger area.

A later Persian inscription traces the ancestry of Jehangir. It was carved by Mir Abdullah Mushkin Qalam shortly before the accession of Jehangir. Jehangirs inscription partly overwrites Ashokan inscriptions. Inscription partly overwrites the older Asokan inscriptions. The Allahbad pillar also records the visit of Birbal as part of a pilgrim trip in the city in the year 1575.

## Conclusion

There are many pillars in India that carry the occasional inscriptions, but the Allahabad Pillar of Ashoka is remarkable for the particular inscriptions that it carries and the very different inscriptions that it carries, with wide-ranging references. These are a reflection of the diverse period of history extending across three millennia with each later inscription registering a change. It provides crucial insights into millennial history of India. It is a treasured heritage of India.

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