

## **Kahaum Inscription of Skandagupta: An Epilogue to his Bhitari Epigraph**

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### **Abstract**

The most significant epigraph for the political history of the reign of Skandagupta is indubitably his Bhitari pillar inscription which, apart from giving his pedigree upto Gupta, accentuates the great catastrophe that befell the Gupta dynasty due to the incursions of the Pushyamitras and the Hūnas and the consequential emergence of Skandagupta as a saviour. The Kahaum pillar inscription of Skandagupta, the objective of which is to document the setting up of the monolithic column and statuettes of the celebutante quintet of sanctified teachers of the Jainas in Kakubha (Kahaum), coincidentally provides a befitting conclusion to the aforementioned Bhitari epigraph in its opening verse. The purpose of the present paper is to delve further into the contents of this Jaina inscription and scrutinize the information gleaned in isolation as well as in the context of some other epigraphs for a better comprehension of the narrative of the saviour of the Imperial Gupta Dynasty.

**Keywords:** Skandagupta, Bhitari pillar inscription, Kahaum pillar inscription

On the three northern faces of the octagonal portion of the pillar built from a single block of coarse grey sandstone 24 feet 3 inches in height surmounted by a low circular band with a metal spike that once crowned probably a Jaina symbol, there is an inscription of 12 lines in the eastern variety of the Gupta alphabet and in chaste Sanskrit with versification in *Sragdharā* measure.<sup>[1]</sup> During a period of seven years,

commencing in 1807, in conformity with the orders from the Court of Directors of the Honourable East India Company and the Governor-General in Council, the Supreme Government of Bengal nominated F Buchanan for the survey of the Eastern territories of British India and he, sedulously pursuing his assignment, collected materials and made observations which were forwarded by the Supreme Government to the home authorities in 1816 and remained in the East India House before the manuscripts connected with this survey were examined and compiled by Montgomery Martin<sup>[2]</sup> in whose book entitled *Eastern India* Vol. II published in 1838 the inscription is noticed for the first time, pp. 366-367 with a reduced lithograph (between p. 398 and p. 399, Plate V, No. 2 ). The task of decipherment was effectuated by J Prinsep who, provided by D Liston with a description of the pillar and afterwards an impression of the inscription, published his reading of the text and a translation of it in *Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol VII, pp. 36ff., accompanied by a lithograph (Plate I). Since then the opening verse of this epigraph has become a cause célèbre for the indologists. In 1854, A Cunningham commented on the date of the Kahaum Epigraph in his *The Bhilsa Topes*, p.144. E Thomas gave the correct reading of the year in a footnote of his article *On the Epoch of the Gupta Dynasty* in *Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. 24, p. 385, the reading being communicated to him by FE Hall. He reprinted the translation of Prinsep with the correction of the year in his edition of Prinsep's *Essays*, Vol. I, p. 250. FE Hall, correcting the error in Prinsep's reading of the hemistich containing the date, gave his reading of the first verse with a translation in 1860, in the *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. VI, p. 530. In 1862, he subsequently published what he felt was a more tenable version in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol XXX, p. 3, note. The correct connotation of the word 'śānte' along with the date appears to have been first pointed out by Bhau Daji in *Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. VIII, p. 246. In 1871, A Cunningham published a full description of the pillar and another lithograph reduced from his own ink impression in the *Archaeological Survey of India Reports*, Vol. 1, p.93f, and Plate XXX. In 1874, Rajendralala Mitra in *Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol XLIII, p. 371, altered Hall's reading of the first verse. It was in 1881 that a fairly reliable transcript and a translation of it, accompanied by a lithograph reduced from an impression which he took in 1873, was published by Bhagwanlal Indrajī in *Indian Antiquary*, Vol X, pp. 125ff. A definitive stage in the decipherment of this inscription was achieved when it was meticulously edited in *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, Vol III, 1888, pp. 65ff, and Plate IX A, among a volume of epigraphs of the Gupta period, by JF Fleet. In 1942, DC Sircar published his readings and annotations from the facsimile given in the Fleet's *Corpus* in his *Select Inscriptions*, Vol I, pp. 308-310.<sup>[3]</sup> RB Pandey proposed alterations in Fleet's connotation of the third verse in 1952 in *Indian Historical Quarterly*, Volume

XXVIII, Issue 3, pp. 298-300. Finally, it appeared in the *Inscriptions of the Early Gupta Kings* Revised by DR Bhandarkar and Edited by B Ch Chhabra and GS Gai, 1981, pp. 305ff, and plate XXIX. Application of the information gleaned from this inscription by numerous scholars in their expositions on the Gupta epoch is axiomatic.

The purport of the inscription is to document the erection of a stone column and in the niches of it the sculptural ensemble of *Pañchendra* in Kakubha village by one Madra, who disconcerted by the transitional nature of the world made the endowment for the sake of final beatitude and the welfare of all existing beings.<sup>[4]</sup> On the western side of the square base of this pillar there is a niche holding a naked standing figure with very long arms reaching to his knees, the snake being folded in horizontal coils, one above the other, and with its seven heads forming a canopy over the idol while two small figures are kneeling at the feet and looking up to the idol with offerings in their hands.<sup>[5]</sup> The capital with a small niche on each side holds a naked standing figure.<sup>[6]</sup> Buchanan<sup>[7]</sup> took the five stone images to be that of Buddha and this view was reiterated by Prinsep<sup>[8]</sup> who felt that the figure in cubic base had very much the character of Buddha. Bhagwanlal Indraji<sup>[9]</sup>, who first pointed out the correct meaning of *Ādikarṭris* as referring to Tirthankaras or sanctified teachers of the Jainas, identified the “five lords” (*Pañchendra*) with Ādinātha, Sāntinātha, Neminātha, Pārśva and Mahāvira for these are oftenest represented in their temples and addressed at the beginning of Jaina books. He further noted that the naked figure in the cubic base was that of Pārśvanātha- the snake being coiled up behind him in the fashion usually represented in Jaina sculptures with its saptaphaṇa spread out as a canopy for the head of the Jina, while two females kneel at his feet.<sup>[10]</sup> Jaina temples in the vicinity of the pillar at Kahaum, a village situated in the Salempur tahsil of the Deoria district lying in the lower Ghaghra Valley of Uttar Pradesh state, point towards it being an important centre of the Jaina faith.<sup>[11]</sup> Jainism held on, though not with the same vigour and traction as the brahmanical faith, as is evident from a handful Jaina epigraphs during the Gupta age. Three Jaina images, containing inscriptions engraved on their pedestals mentioning Mahārājādhirāja Rāmagupta as being responsible for the construction of images of Arhats, were discovered at the Durjanapura village in the Vidisha district.<sup>[12]</sup> Two Jaina inscriptions of the reign of Kumāragupta have also been found- The first one engraved in Cave No. 10 of Udayagiri, dated Gupta year 106<sup>[13]</sup> (although not referring itself to the reign of any king but without doubt belonging to the time of Kumāragupta I), records the installation of an image of the Jina Pārśva by a Jaina monk Śaṅkara and the second one originally unearthed in the Kaṅkālī Ṭīlā at Mathurā, dated Gupta year 107,<sup>[14]</sup> is engraved on the base of an image of a large sitting Jina. Madra, whose pedigree up to his great-grandfather dominates the second verse, was especially full of affection for Brāhmaṇas, religious

preceptors (*gurus*) and ascetics (*yatis*).<sup>[15]</sup> DR Bhandarkar<sup>[16]</sup> deduced from Madra's admiration towards Brāhmaṇas, *gurus* and *yatis* that, though by religious persuasion he was a Jaina, he was a Hindu socially. One can infer from his secular declaration that religious tolerance was practiced, not just by the monarchs alone, but by the general populace too.

The hemistich of the opening verse of the Kahaum pillar inscription containing the date of the epigraph and the word *śānte* has been a subject of varied interpretations and repeated expositions, and understandably so, for its political importance cannot be more stressed upon. Prinsep<sup>[17]</sup>, taking the word *shānteḥ* to mean "of the repose i.e. death", made out the date to be "year 30 and 2 and 1 plus 100" or "year 133 after the decease of Skanda Gupta". Cunningham<sup>[18]</sup> felt that the year 133 referred to the date of Skandagupta's death and belonged to the Gupta era and thus placed the king's demise in 319+133=452 AD. FE Hall, finding Prinsep's translation to be unsatisfactory, made the numerical correction of the date from 133 to 141<sup>[19]</sup> and later read "The month of Jyeshṭha having arrived, in the one hundred and forty-first year; the empire of Skandagupta...being quiescent."<sup>[20]</sup> Hall, superseding his first version, annexed the commencement of the Kahaum memorial with what he felt was 'a more tenable version' and convinced the word *śānte* meant 'being extinct' exhorted that the Kahaum inscription is dated from the overthrow of the Guptas, of whom Skandagupta must have been virtually the last.<sup>[21]</sup> The correct rendering of the word *śānte* (in the peaceful), being an adjective qualifying *rājyē*, and translation of the hemistich was provided by Bhau Daji- "In the month of Jyestha, in the year 141, in the peaceful reign of Skandagupta."<sup>[22]</sup> R Mitra<sup>[23]</sup>, expressing discontent over Hall's and Bhau Daji's acceptance of the word as qualifying the term *rājyē*, applied the word *śānte* to *varshe* and amended Hall's rendering to "In the empire of Skanda Gupta...the year one hundred and forty-one having passed away, and the month of Jaishṭhya arriving." Bhagwanlal Indrajī<sup>[24]</sup> pointed out that the differences on previous renderings of the first *śloka* of this inscription have all turned on the word *śānte*, which means both 'peaceful' and 'expired'. He rejected Hall's second rendering of 141 years after the extinction of Skandagupta's empire on paleographic grounds and discarded Mitra's affixation of *śānte* to *varshe* for the expression that the 'year' was 'expired' affords an unusual construction.<sup>[25]</sup> Fleet in his prefatory note expressed his bewilderment - "The difficulty is", he writes, "not the correct rendering of it, which is perfectly obvious, but to comprehend how it ever came to be read *śānteḥ*, and to be interpreted by 'of the repose, i.e., death,' i.e. 'after the decease (Skandagupta);' or, being read *śānte* correctly, to comprehend how it ever came to be interpreted as meaning '(the empire of Skandagupta) being quiescent,' or '(the empire of Skandagupta) being extinct (for the hundred and forty-first year)'."<sup>[26]</sup> Thus, Fleet, whose translation formed the basis

of most subsequent researches in Gupta history, rendered the opening verse as- “In the tranquil reign of Skandagupta, whose hall of audience is shaken by the wind caused by the falling down (in the act of performing obeisance) of the heads of a hundreds of kings; who is born in the lineage of the Guptas; whose fame is spread far and wide; who excels all others in prosperity; who resembles (the god) Śakra; (and) who is the lord of a hundred kings;- in the one hundredth year, increased by thirty and ten and one; the month Jyeshṭha having arrived.”<sup>[27]</sup> The opening verse makes it apparent that a sense of calmness prevailed in the empire by 460 AD.

The fact that the then emperor was triumphant in stabilizing the empire by effectuating tranquility by the year 141 of Gupta Epoch was recognised by one of the citizens of his dominion. This serenity followed the great catastrophe that had befallen on the Imperial Guptas as is elucidated by the Bhitari Pillar inscription.<sup>[28]</sup> The enemies posing a serious threat to the sovereign power of the Imperial Guptas were the Pushyamitras.<sup>[29]</sup> Phrases like *vichalita-kula-lakshmī* (shaken fortune of the family) and *viplutām-vamśa-lakshmī* (convulsed fortune of the family) in the Bhitari inscription<sup>[30]</sup> make the severity of the situation discernible. The annihilation of the tribe is made conspicuous by the declaration that Skandagupta ‘placed (his) left foot on a footstool which was the king (of that tribe himself)’.<sup>[31]</sup> Skandagupta had to fight one more formidable enemy- the Hūṇas and the battle was so intense that it ‘made the earth shake’.<sup>[32]</sup> Skandagupta worked such a havoc in their ranks, that they suffered a crushing defeat and took to flight, carrying with them the tales of Skandagupta’s extraordinary prowess, and the Indian frontiers were made immune from the menace for another half a century.<sup>[33]</sup> The mighty Gupta Empire could have been washed away by the Pushyamitra and Hūṇa tide. When the very existence of the Imperial family was threatened, the exigency for a saviour was fulfilled by Skandagupta who rose to the occasion and proved himself to be worthy of being the emperor. J Allan found in the third verse of the Kahaum memorial an echo of the predicaments faced by the Empire alluded to by the Bhitari inscription. He, building on the premise of the ninth line of the Kahaum Inscription,<sup>[34]</sup> posited- “It may be that it was the troubled period through which the empire had passed which impressed the donor more than usually with the truth that the world is constantly passing through a succession of changes.”<sup>[35]</sup> It is not impossible that Madra’s benefaction was motivated by the initial chaos caused by the incursions and his subsequent relief after the restoration of *śānti* by Skandagupta.

DC Sircar<sup>[36]</sup> remarked that ‘the *śānti* may have been temporary or local’. The scepticism is unwarranted in light of the information gleaned from other epigraphical evidences belonging to Skandagupta’s reign. The Junagarh rock inscription of

Skandagupta exhorts that ‘verily no man whatsoever from among his subjects is distressed’<sup>[37]</sup> while his Indor copper plate refers to his ‘increasingly victorious reign’ (*ābhivarddhamāna vijaya rājya samvatsare*)<sup>[38]</sup> denoting that what Junagarh inscription claimed during the beginning of his reign proved correct and after the decisive victories over the Pushyamitras and Hūṇas, the Empire and its people enjoyed tranquility for as long as this king ruled.<sup>[39]</sup>

The verse under discussion gives conventional phraseologies, which though a bit exaggerated, aren’t completely unfounded. The find-spots of Skandagupta’s inscriptions from Kahaum, Indor, Supia, Gadhwa, Bhitari and Junagarh give a fairly good idea of the extent of his dominion, meaning that despite great internal pulls and serious external pushes which affected the vitality of the Gupta empire, Skandagupta was able to keep intact the territories he inherited, which extended from Bengal to Kathiawar and from the Himalayas to the Vindhyas.<sup>[40]</sup> Thus, he is labelled as the ‘lord of hundred kings’ in the Kahaum inscription which signifies that he must have ruled over a vast expanse of territory causing numerous rulers to accept him as their sovereign. The Kahaum memorial also uses the idiolect ‘*Pravisṛita-yaśasas=tasya*’ (whose fame spread far and wide) synonymous to the phraseologies occurring in the Bhitari epigraph- ‘*Prithu-yaśasaḥ*’ and ‘*Prathita-yaśāḥ*’<sup>[41]</sup>. Similarly, in a predictable manner, the inscription deifies Skandagupta by comparing him with Śakra. The Kahaum epigraph also alludes to him as belonging to the Gupta lineage. BP Sinha<sup>[42]</sup> asserts- “All the inscriptions of the time of Skandagupta emphasize rather over-emphasize that Skanda Gupta belonged to the Gupta lineage. He is ‘the banner of the lineage’ (Junagarh rock inscription), ‘born in the lineage of the Guptas’ (Kahaum inscription), ‘the most eminent hero in the lineage of the Guptas’ (Bhitari Pillar inscription). It strengthens the suspicion that, Skandagupta had no full rights to the throne according to the Gupta constitutional usage, his admirers stressed the fact of his being of ‘Gupta lineage’ for popular appeal.” KK Thaplyal<sup>[43]</sup> cogently points out that phrases like *Gupta-kula-vyoma-śaśi*, ‘moon in the sky that is the Gupta dynasty’ and *Gupta-kul=āmala-chandra*, ‘pure moon of the Gupta dynasty’, have been used for Kumāragupta I, which in his case have been taken to reflect his noble qualities, and the same may as well be the intention in using similar phrases for Skandagupta. While Samudragupta and Chandragupta II united most of the Indian subcontinent under one banner, Skandagupta made sure that the Gupta flag soared high even in the worst of situations for had it not been for his heroics on the battlefield, the Gupta Empire would have faded into obscurity. The aforementioned expressions used for Skandagupta denote the recognition by the general populace that the then monarch stood head and shoulders above his celebrated ancestors. Finally, ‘whose hall of audience is shaken by the wind caused by the falling down (in the act

of performing obeisance) of the heads of a hundreds of kings' gives a picturesque view of the might of the monarch who was justifiably labelled as 'the most eminent hero of the lineage of the Guptas'<sup>[44]</sup>. Figuratively stating, the Bhitari pillar inscription is more a preamble to Skandagupta's reign and the opening verse of the Kahaum epigraph coincidentally provides an epilogue to the former.

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

- [1] M. Martin, *The History, Antiquities, Topography, and Statistics of Eastern India*, Vol. II, W<sup>M</sup>. H. Allen and Co., London, 1838, pp. 366-367; J. Prinsep, *Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol VII, p. 36; A. Cunningham, *Archaeological Survey of India Reports*, Vol. I, Government Central Press, Simla, 1871, pp. 92-93; J.F. Fleet, *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, III, 1888, p. 66
- [2] M. Martin, *The History, Antiquities, Topography, and Statistics of Eastern India*, Vol. I, W<sup>M</sup>. H. Allen and Co., London, 1838, pp. x-xi
- [3] Also in D.C. Sircar, *Select Inscriptions*, Vol I, 2nd ed., University of Calcutta, Calcutta, 1965, pp. 316-317
- [4] J.F. Fleet, *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, III, 1888, p. 68
- [5] A. Cunningham, *op.cit.*, p. 93
- [6] *Ibid.*
- [7] M. Martin, *The History, Antiquities, Topography, and Statistics of Eastern India*, Vol. II, W<sup>M</sup>. H. Allen and Co., London, 1838, pp. 366-367
- [8] J. Prinsep, *op.cit.*, p. 38n
- [9] B. Indrajī, *Indian Antiquary*, Vol X, 1881, pp. 125-126. Bhagwanlal Indrajī, and after him Fleet (*op.cit.*, p.66), deeming the pillar to be a solitary monument, were of the opinion that the five images refer to the five representations on the column itself. Raj Bali Pandey (*Indian Historical Quarterly*, Volume XXVIII, Issue 3, 1952, pp. 298-300) offered a different explanation and interpretation. He stated- "There are two significant words in the inscription:- (i) *sthāpayitvā* (having installed) and (ii) *dharanīdharamāya* (made of stone). *Sthāpana* or installation is a technical term which means ceremoniously placing an image (an icon or idol) in a shrine and not mere carving a representation on the surface of a stone piece. The term '*dharanīdharamāya*' clearly indicates that the images were made of stone (in round and independent) and not on stone; the carvings on the pillar contain only representations of them." Furthermore he pointed towards the topography of the pillar which consisted of an elevation evidently indicative of a temple in

which the five images mentioned in the inscription were installed and the broken pieces of images near by the pillar were the remnants of the original idols installed in the temple. His case was based on the analogy that generally pillars are erected before the temples bearing either the effigies of the conveyances (*vāhanas*) of the deities (in the case of Brāhmaṇical temples) on some symbols or emblems peculiar to religious sects. "In the circumstances", he wrote, "the conclusion is strongly suggested that *pañca Indras* and *ādikartris* refer to the full- fledged stone idols originally installed in the temple which was built to the west of the pillar and not to the representations on the pillar." (*Ibid.*, p. 300)

[10] B. Indrajī, *op.cit.*, p. 125

[11] Buchanan (*op.cit.*, p. 367) had noticed two temples in the village of Kangho(modern Kahaum). Cunningham (*op.cit.*, pp. 94-95) observed- "Both of the temples described by Buchanan are now in ruins; and as they are not mentioned by Mr. Liston in 1837, they must have fallen before his visit. Buchanan describes them as pyramidal in form, with two apartments, one over the other, as in the great temple at Buddha-Gaya. Inside he found only two fragments of images, of which one showed the feet of a standing figure with a female votary seated one side. I made an excavation in the northern ruin, and found that the temple had consisted of a room 9 feet square with walls only 1 foot 9 inches in thickness. The building, therefore, was only 12 feet 6 inches square on the outside. In the slight sketch of this temple given by Buchanan, no dimensions are noted, but the height of the building is twice and a half its width, or about 30 feet, according to the measurement obtained by my excavation. On the ruin of the southern temple, I found a naked standing figure of life-size, similar to that on the base of the pillar. Immediately to the north of the pillar, and on the highest point of the mound, there are traces of the brick walls of some buildings; and to the south-east, there is an old well which has been lately filled up. Buchanan describes the pillar as having originally 'stood in a small quadrangular area, surrounded by a brick wall, and probably by some small chambers.' I presume that the pillar must have been placed opposite the entrance of the temple, in which the *Panchendra* or five images of Indra were enshrined. It is probable that there were several temples and other buildings crowded around the pillar, otherwise it will be difficult to account for the great size of the mound, which, though not more than 6 feet in height above the fields, extends from west to east upwards of 1,200 feet, with an average breadth of 400 feet." Bhagwanlal Indrajī (*op.cit.*, p. 126) also noted- "The pillar we know from the sculptures on it to be Jaina, and though there are no temples near it now, there are traces of brick foundations in the

ground about 25 feet distant from the pillar on the north, on which must have stood a Jain temple in former times. Besides this, there are ruins of two temples on the east side of the pillar, at a distance of about 200 yards, which were standing in the time of Buchanan. In one of these ruins there is still a Jaina image of Pārśvanāth in Kāyotsarga Moodrā.”

- [12] D.R. Bhandarkar, *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum* III, ASI, New Delhi, 1981, pp. 231-234. The records on the pedestals of the three images states that the images of Arhats Chandraprabha(A), Pushpadanta(B) and [Padma]prabha(C), respectively, were caused to be made by Mahārājādhirāja Rāmagupta and this act was done at the instance of Chella-kshamaṇa, son of Golakyāntī and disciple of Āchārya Sarppasena-kshamaṇa and the grand-disciple of the Jaina teacher who is described as *pāṇipātrika-Chandraksham-āchārya-kshamaṇa-sramaṇa*. (*Ibid.*, p. 232)
- [13] J.F. Fleet, *op.cit.*, pp. 258-260. The object of the inscription is to record the installation of an image of the Jina Pārśva, richly endowed with (the embellishments of) the expanded hoods of a snake and an attendant female divinity.
- [14] D.R. Bhandarkar, *op.cit.*, pp. 272-273. The object of it is to record the putting up of the image of a Jina by Śāmāḍhyā, who was a lapidary.
- [15] J.F. Fleet, *op.cit.*, p. 67. Madra’s genealogical tracing commences with Somila, who was the father of the great-souled Bhaṭṭisoma. Bhaṭṭisoma’s son Rudrasoma, also known by his other appellation Vyāghra, was the father of Madra.
- [16] D.R. Bhandarkar, *op.cit.*, p. 84
- [17] J. Prinsep, *op.cit.*, pp. 37-38. His translation (*Ibid.*, p. 37) of the opening verse is as follows- “In the month of *Jyaistha*, in the year one hundred and thirty-three after the decease of Skanda Gupta, the chief of a hundred kings, resembling Indra in his rule, possessed of the chiefest of riches, enjoying far-spread reputation, born of the royal race of the Guptas, whose earthly throne was shaken by the wind of the bowing heads of a hundred kings.” Prinsep, on the basis of his faulty translation, got his interpretation and exposition categorically wrong- “The death of this prince is here employed as an epoch in a somewhat enigmatical way.... It does not appear who succeeded him, or whether the Gupta dynasty there terminated; but I think it is open to conjecture that the whole power was usurped by the minister’s family, because we find Tila Bhatti, a chief magistrate, erecting the Allahabad pillar, and we here find another of the same name, the opulent Bhatti Soma, at the head of a new race, not be sure arrogating to themselves the title of *rāja*, but possessing wealth and power and erecting pillars in their own name.” (*Ibid.*, p. 38)

- [18] A. Cunningham, *The Bhilsa Topes*, Smith, Elder and Co., London, 1854, p.144
- [19] *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. 24, 1855, p. 385n
- [20] *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. VI, 1860, p. 530. Hall criticised Prinsep and offered his own 'faulty' interpretation- "The reading in modern characters, given by Mr. Prinsep, of the hemistich which contains the date, is neither in his facsimile of the original, nor is it grammatical. To bring out his 'thirty-three', he must have thought that he found *trinsaddrigeka*, which is inadmissible Sanskrit. Nor is there, in the Sanskrit, *śānteḥ*, the fifth case of a substantive; but *śānte*, the seventh case of a past participle. There is, then, nothing here recorded concerning the death of Skanda Gupta, as Mr. Prinsep supposes. Being neither the first ruler of the Gupta dynasty, nor the last, nor of special note, it would be extraordinary indeed if time had been computed from his decease. Moreover, if he and his kingdom had so long passed away, it seems preposterous that they should be mentioned, and in so eulogistic a strain; especially as there is not, on this hypothesis, even a subordinate allusion to the reigning monarch. Indubitably, Skanda was on the throne when this memorial was written. The term *śānta*, which is applied to his government, has, with other meanings, those of 'serene,' 'tranquil,' 'unperturbed,' 'flourishing.' In bearing these significations, in addition to that of 'discontinued' or 'extinguished,' it may be compared with *nirvāṇa*. Whatever be the era here followed, it appears to have been too well understood, at the time, to call for explicit specification." His translation of the opening verse was -"The month of Jyeshṭha having arrived, in the one hundred and forty-first year; the empire of Skandagupta- the floor of whose hall of audience was swept by breezes from the bowing of the heads of hundred of kings; sprung from the line of the Guptas; of wide-extended fame; opulent beyond all others; comparable with Śakra; lord of hundreds of monarchs- being quiescent."
- [21] *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol XXX, 1862, p. 3n On collation of the wording of Hastin's grants and Al Birūnī's statement about the Gupta-kāl with that of the Kahaum pillar and equating the extinction of the Gupta empire with Skandagupta's death, he altered his rendering as- "The month of Jyeshṭha being current, the empire of Skanda Gupta—the floor of whose audience chamber had been swept by gusts from the bowing of the heads of kings by hundreds ; sprung from the line of the Guptas ; of wide extended fame; opulent beyond all others; comparable with Śakra; lord of hundreds of monarchs—being extinct for the hundred and forty-first year."
- [22] *Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. VIII, 1863/66, p. 246

- [23] *Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol XLIII, 1874, pp. 368-372. “The word(*śānte*) stands just before *varshe*, and by the ordinary rule of Sanskrit construction it should be interpreted along with that which is proximate to it, and not taken over to *rājye*, which is removed from it by the intervention of several other words in a different case. Doubtless the exigencies of metre often lead to the reversion of the natural order or connexion of words in a sentence, but where both a distant and a near connexion are possible, the most appropriate course is to adopt that which is most natural, unless the context shows this to be inadmissible. This is the course which Sanskrit exegesists usually follow, and I see no reason to depart from it in explaining the stanza under notice. In it the words *śānte*, *varshe*, *trīṣaddaśaikottara-śatatame*, *jaishṭhyamāsi* and *prapanne* stand in regular succession, and I have no hesitation in taking them to be intimately connected in sense. The meaning they together yield is ‘the year one hundred and forty- one having been over, and the month of Jaishṭhya having arrived,’ or ‘on the close of the year one hundred and forty-one, the month of Jaishṭhya having arrived,’ and this instead of being opposed to the context offers a much more natural and consistent sense than the version given by Mr. Hall.... The word *rājye* in the inscription is in the locative case, showing the locale of the occurrence, whereas *śānte* and *prapanne* are in the locative case-absolute according to the rule of Pāṇini which says “that which through its own verb governs another takes the locative case.” For determining the tense of such cases-absolute, the great logician Gadādhara lays down the following rule in his *Dvītiyādivyutpatti-vāda*: ‘The relation of a verb in the seventh declension with another implies the same or some other time : Thereof the present participle affix (*krit*) implies the same time [i.e. the action of the two verbs takes place simultaneously]. Where the participle affix is of the past tense, the time of the second verb is subsequent to that of the first; thus : on your going to the earth to conquer it, he attacked this city, &c. In the case of future participles the time of the first verb succeeds that of the other.’ Applying this rule to the two participles of the stanza under notice, we have *śānte* preceding *prapanne*, and the ‘extinction’ or close of the ‘year’ (*varshe*) must take place before the ‘arrival’ (*prapanne*) ‘of the month of Jaishṭhya.’ If we take *śānte* to refer to *rājye* the meaning would be ‘the kingdom having become extinct and the month of Jaishṭhya arriving,’ leaving the *varshe* grammatically unconnected with the rest, or serving as a locative, which is absurd.” He reproduced Hall’s reading and translation modified according to the above remarks- “In the empire of Skanda Gupta, — the floor of whose audience chamber is swept by gusts from the bowing of heads of kings by hundreds ; who is sprang from the

line of the Guptas ; of wide extended fame ; opulent beyond all others ; comparable with Śakra ; lord of hundreds of monarchs ; — the year one hundred and forty-one having passed away, and the month of Jaishṭhya arriving," &c.

- [24] *Indian Antiquary*, Vol X, 1881, pp. 125-126
- [25] *Ibid.*, p. 126
- [26] J.F. Fleet, *op.cit.*, p. 67n
- [27] *Ibid.*, p. 67. Text of the opening verse - 1 Yasy=opasthāna-bhūmir=nṛipati-śata-śiraḥ-pāta-vāt-āvadhūtā 2 Guptānām vanśa-jasya praviṣṭita-yaśasas=tasya sarvv-ottam-arddheḥ 3 rājye Śakr-opamasya kshitipa-śata-pateḥ Skandaguptasya śānte 4 Varshe ttrinśad-daś-aik-ottaraka-śatatame Jyeshṭha-māsi prapanne I(II)
- [28] For a detailed exposition on the Bhitari Pillar Inscription of Skandagupta, *vide* J. Oberoi, 'Bhitari Stone Pillar Inscription of Skandagupta: Reading between the Lines' in *International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, Vol. 5, No. 3, Research India Publications, Delhi, 2015, pp. 271-280.
- [29] *Ibid.*, p. 55. Divekar (*Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute*, I, pp. 99 ff) and, after him, D.R. Bhandarkar (D.R. Bhandarkar, *op.cit.*, p. 80) read *yuddhy=amitrāmś* (enemies in war) instead of 'Pushyamitrāmś'. J. Agrawal (*Researches In Indian Epigraphy and Numismatics*, Sundeep Prakashan, Delhi, p. 43) cogently pointed out- "While the first syllable may be *pu* or *yu*, the next syllable cannot be *dhya*. Over the subscript *y* there are clear traces of a square form. It is not cylindrical, in shape, as would be the form of *dh*. It can only be *p* or *ṣ*. But as *p* makes an impossible word *pupya* the choice is evidently restricted to *ṣ* and we get *puṣya*." For the complete debate and plausibility of the reading *Pushyamitran* refer- J. Oberoi, *op.cit.*, pp. 274
- [30] J.F. Fleet, *op.cit.*, pp. 53-54
- [31] *Ibid.*, p. 55
- [32] *Ibid.*, p. 56
- [33] A. Agrawal, *Rise and Fall of the Imperial Guptas*, p.212.
- [34] 'He, being alarmed when he observed the whole of this world (to be ever) passing through a succession of changes....' (J.F. Fleet, *op.cit.*, p. 68)
- [35] J. Allan, *Catalogue of the Coins of the Gupta Dynasties and of Sasanka*, King of Gauda, British Museum, London, 1914, p. Xlviii
- [36] D.C. Sircar, *Select Inscriptions*, Vol I, 2nd ed., University of Calcutta, Calcutta, 1965, pp. 316, n.6
- [37] D.R. Bhandarkar, *Ibid.*, p. 302

- [38] *Ibid.*, pp. 310-311. The Gadhwā Stone Inscription of year 148(Gupta era) also uses a pretty similar expression (J.F. Fleet, *op.cit.*, p. 268). The inscription, most probably, belongs to the reign of Skandagupta.
- [39] It is safe to presume that once Skandagupta was victorious in establishing peace, no indications of political unrest or distress among the subjects are seen till the end of his rule in 467 AD.
- [40] K.K. Thaplyal, *The Imperial Guptas*, Aryan Books International, New Delhi, p. 264- 265. His heavyweight coins have been found from Bihar and Bengal (B.P. Sinha, *The Decline of the Kingdom of Magadha*, Motilal Banarsidass, Patna, 1954, pp. 52). His copious silver coinage of the western variety points towards his rule over the western dominions of his empire (A.S. Altekar, *Coinage of the Gupta Empire*, Numismatic Society of India/Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, 1957, p. 250) Furthermore, Skandagupta's identification with Guha of *Vāyu* and *Vishṇu purāṇas* further extends his territory for *Vāyu purāṇa* mentions that 'Guha will protect all these territories, namely Kaliṅgas, Mahishkas and the inhabitant of the Mahendra mountains' while *Vishṇu purāṇa* reveals that 'Devarakshita (possibly Chandragupta II) will extend his protection to Kosala, Oḍra, Tāmralipti and Puri on the sea, Mahendra (possibly Kumāragupta I) to Kaliṅga and Mahisha and Guha to (all this) area' (F.E. Pargiter, *Dynasties of the Kāli Age*, Oxford University Press, London, 1913, p. 54).
- [41] J.F. Fleet, *op.cit.*, p. 53
- [42] B.P. Sinha, *op.cit.*, pp. 44
- [43] K.K. Thaplyal, *op.cit.*, p. 252. We have shown that neither Skandagupta's legitimacy nor his competency can even be slightly doubted *vide* J. Oberoi, 'Bhitari Stone Pillar Inscription of Skandagupta: Reading between the Lines' in International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences, Vol. 5, No. 3, Research India Publications, Delhi, 2015, pp. 271-280.
- [44] J.F. Fleet, *op.cit.*, p. 55

