

John Faithful Fleet (1847-1917 AD): Ancient Indian Literature and more.

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John Faithful Fleet (**1847-1917**) was the one who established the science of calligraphy in India on a scientific and popular basis. In India, there was a long process of creating inscriptions. In **1837**, **James Prinsep** was the first to point out the widespread discovery of multiple artifacts found at the time, and its proper use in ancient India was particularly important.¹ Further progress has been made since **Sir Alexander Cunningham** took over as Director General of the **Archaeological Survey of India** in **1870**. At his initiative, Fleet joined the special ranks of inscription engravers.² His primary task was to prepare a book based on the research and evaluation of the writings of the Gupta rulers of the early period. Although his journey may seem easy in the early stages, Fleet soon realizes that the task at hand is quite a laborious one. The main reason for this is that data written about previously collected material is not suitable for analytical evaluation. So he tried to re-evaluate all the basic elements as realistically as possible. For this he has to spend a lot of labor and time and has to travel to different parts of the country.³

Unfortunately, we do not have much information about the fleet. A lot of information about his personality and work has been obtained from his friends and associate researchers, from which his complete picture has been revealed to us. Indian theorist **L.D. Barnett** says he was a great personality. He gave more importance to reality in life. His friendly and kind attitude towards everyone is an extraordinary quality of his character. There is no selfishness, self-centeredness or egotism in his character. He cordially invited the newcomers to his jurisdiction and guided them selflessly.⁴ The famous Sanskrit grammar expert **Kielhorn** was attracted to his work Concentrated on engraving.

His fame became a great example to the next generation.⁵ Fleet's research method was extremely subtle and analytical. His next task in collecting the necessary material was to prepare '**Photo- lithographic facsimile**'.⁶ Through which he

wanted to present to the reader an alternative to the actual writing and show the necessary opinions.

In **1865** he was appointed to the post of Indian Civil Service.⁷ He swore an oath of allegiance to her. He then came to Bombay as Associate Revenue Collector and Secretary of the Bombay Presidency. This highly skilled young man had considerable knowledge of Sanskrit language and Indian literature. Under the supervision of Professor **Theodore Goldstucker**, a professor at the University of London, he became highly skilled.⁸ His diligence quickly brought him to the pinnacle of fame. His skillful knowledge of politics, polite behavior and diplomatic thinking made him hold several important positions. In **1868** he was appointed associate revenue collector and **Magistrate of Belgram**, and in **1869** he was temporarily appointed second assistant collector and magistrate of Ratnagiri.⁹ At the same time, he was the associate education supervisor of the southern districts of the Bombay Presidency until **1872**. In **1874**, he became the associate collector and **Magistrate of Fleet Kaladighi**, and later became the second **Associate Collector** and **Magistrate of Kolajapur South Maratha region**.

Fleet's first publication was a presentation of information collected in inscriptions in Pali, Sanskrit and Kannada.¹⁰ At the same time, he solved many political problems of the state of Akelakot. He was the first to seek out the historical secrets of the Bombay Presidency's stone and metal inscriptions. Which were extremely rare. Within a few days of his prowess, constructive historical script engraving began in the history of India. Fletcher's greatest gift as a scriptwriter is- '**Contributions of Sanskrit Inscription to Lexicography**'. The material he uses in it has not been used by any investigator before. He was probably the first to shed light on some of the words and phrases in the inscription that have not been used in any lexical sense before. He established a Sanskrit inscription relationship to added Abul Hods with the Comb inscription.

Then he began extensive analysis of the inscriptions and deciphered many of the inscriptions. He devised a new method of deciphering the inscription which is still followed today.

He deciphered many secret inscriptions. His most memorable work is the '**Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum**', a three-volume inscription on secret inscriptions.¹¹ **Alexander Cunningham** was very enthusiastic about this. Another of his most memorable works in ancient Indian history is the decipherment of the **Mandasora inscription**. The decipherment of his Mandasore inscription helped to solve some of the more complex questions or problems of the Gupta period. It is known from this inscription that Yashodharman overthrew the foreign invader Mihirkul. The period of Mihirkul's invasion of India is also known. His exploration specifies the time or date of the Gupta emperor Kumaragupta and his friends. With the help of Balakrishna Dixit and Koralakshan Chhetri, he proves that the period of the Gupta Empire was the fourth century AD. Therefore, deciphering the Mandasora inscription can be said to be a milestone in ancient Indian chronology or chronology. Then he fixed the chronology called '**Samvatsar**'. His chronology also provided accurate information on the introduction of the long-controversial Guptabda. He deciphered two writings of Yashodharman and Vishnuvardhana, the rulers of Malabar in the last period of the Gupta period. Which marks the beginning of a new chapter in the history of the entire Gupta period. In Fleet's own words, '**Without those discoveries the period of the Early Gupta Supermacy would have still remained the subject argument and doubt**'.¹²

His other important contribution is the decipherment of Samudragupta's Eran writing in Eran (ancient Urinik) in Sagar district of present day Madhya Pradesh. By translating a portion of this text, he showed that Urinik was a province or city where Samudragupta spent his time and that it was his own city.¹³ Again, he uncovered a number of aspects of the Gupta Empire. For example, Fleet estimates that Kumar Gupta's power and influence diminished before the crisis of the Gupta Empire was caused by the invasion of Pusyamitra in **454-55 AD**. Again, he refutes Maxmuller's theory of the revival of Sanskrit literature of the Gupta period. He has very logically shown that Sanskrit literature has never become extinct in India. He further said that after the conquest of some parts of India by the foreign powers like shock, the Kushans themselves gradually became Indian and Indian literature and Sponsored art. In this context the names of Kanishka and the first Rudradaman can be mentioned.

Fleet has published '**Dynamics of the Kanarese Districts in the Bombay Presidency**' for his all the historical information about his calligraphic and literary practice. From this information it has become possible to know various historical facts about Bombay Presidency and places like Madras, Mysore and Hyderabad (**up to 6th-**

16th century AD). He has also shown great interest in discussing Kanishka's tenure.¹⁴ A monthly journal was published under his personal supervision. This journal unveiled a new trend in research and created a link between East and West. Anthropology, anthropology, geography, history, religion, philosophy, folklore, literature, linguistics, etc. are discussed here. His main purpose was to encourage later researchers. His research was closely related not only to politics but also to linguistics, religion, society, administration etc. He lamented the intense reluctance of Indians to retrieve and preserve documents. He called on Indians, especially those who know Sanskrit, to rescue them. He suggested that the professors of Sanskrit College should teach a number of students about calligraphy and archeology. The Indian government tried to implement his proposal.¹⁴ At his request, many Indian scholars embarked on the task of retrieving the inscription. At his instigation, Rev. Father Kethel-Kamb created an English dictionary. He called on the researchers to conduct a thorough examination without believing the word of mouth. He also asked researchers to be vigilant about artificial documents. He further added that geographical and administrative factors need to be included in the accompanying historical documents.

Fleet placed great importance on inscriptions as elements of history. He said that the inscriptions provide information from various sources. According to him, the information we get from the inscription is the result of various experiments and analyzes. It also frees history from various myths and legends. As previously thought, King Vikramaditya ascended the throne in **58 BC**. He introduced '**Vikramaditya Sambat**' to commemorate his ascension to the throne. But the evidence from the inscription proves it wrong. He wrote various articles on Hindu chronology or chronology. He divides the solar year, solar month, season, and year by statistics. Kali Yuga,

Apart from the discussion of Vikramabda, Shoka, etc., he divides **12 years** and **60 years** into one cycle. Not only was Fleet involved in his own affairs, but he was also deeply involved in various aspects of education culture. Fleet had a deep love and respect for those who had made significant contributions to the spread of education culture in India. Referring to Sir Wilkins, John Shore, William Jones, he said that they always spoke of the need to collect inscriptions and to examine them. He highlighted Colebrook's knowledge of various aspects of India. About Oriental Studies **Dr. Schram, Prof. Jacobi, Kielhorn, Mr. Sewell** acknowledges their work.¹⁶ Explaining the importance of inscriptions, he highlights some of the issues that make the path of research easier and wider. He said that many times an inscription may not provide important information. But we have to continue our efforts without stopping. He gave an example by warning the students in calligraphy. The '**Rajabalikatha**', which provides important

information about the Jains, is beautifully described and expresses sharp imagination, but it has no historical significance. Although the events described in the Puranas are very interesting, they have no relevance in history.¹⁷

Fleet was not only a Sanskrit scholar but also an early and medieval form of the Canadian language.¹⁸ Not only was he an excellent calligrapher but he was also a scholar of various subjects. Shyam Shastri, curator of the '**Mysore Oriental Library**', who discovered the manuscript of Kautilya's Arthashastra and translated it into English in **1905**. At his request Fleet wrote the '**introduction**' part. This completed the English translation of Kautilya's Arthashastra. Shyam Shastri praised his writing. Some of his other achievements J. Davidson's secret is found in a letter. Where he mentions that due to his achievements huge sums of money were accumulated in the royal treasury of Bombay Presidency.¹⁹ He represented British India in signing treaties with the Portuguese. He also had considerable interest and scholarship in Indian folk music. Before his death in **1917**, at the age of **69**, he published '**Ballads of the Peasantry with its Music in the Indian Antiquary**'.²⁰

In addition to the books mentioned earlier, he wrote several books. These are, '**Indian Epigraphy: the Inscriptional Bases of Indian Historical Records**', '**A Coin of Huvishka**', '**An Inscription from Besnagar**', '**The day on which Buddha Died**', '**The Standard Height of an Indian Man**', '**The Date of Death of Buddha**', '**The Inscription of the Sohgaura Plate**', '**The Katapaydi system of Expressing Number**'. Apart from these, he wrote some books in the **Second Handbook** category. E.g., '**Mahishamandala and Mahismati**', '**Seals from Harappa, Aryabhata's System of Expressing Numbers**', '**The 256 Night of Asoka**', '**The Tanila Scroll of the year 136**'.

However, not all the information about the Gupta period is completely correct. He opposes the identification of Maharaja Gupta with Chi-li-ki-to (Srigupta). The Fleet, on the other hand, has made allegations against Maharaja Gupta, the first king of the Gupta dynasty, to identify Chi-li-ki-to, as described by John Allan Itsing. Fleet's statement is that according to It Singh, **675** AD. If it is assumed that Srigupta ruled **500** years ago, then it stands at **175** AD.²¹ But if the first Chandragupta's ascension to the throne in **319-20** AD and the introduction of Guptab are assumed, then before that the period of Ghatotkach Gupta and Maharaj Gupta is specified, respectively If it is done, then the first king of that dynasty is somehow AD. No place can be given before the end of the third century. That is, the interval between the period of Maharaja Gupta and the description of It Singh is **100** years or more. While Fleet's objection may seem plausible, it is not. This is because it is important to keep in mind that the details of foreign tourists used for historiography are not unrealistic at all. So there is no doubt

that Chi Li-ki-to described by Maharaja Gupta and Itsing is one or the same. **Secondly**, he opined that glass is identical with Samudragupta.²² He has enough doubts about this comment. Because in recent research, starting from Bratindranath Mukherjee to Ranbir Chakraborty could not come to a definite conclusion. **Third**, Samudragupta defeated Swamidatta of Kortur.²³ Fleet considers the district of Coimbatore to be identical with Kotur. No definite conclusion could be reached on this. **Fourthly**, he identified the motil of Allahabad Prasastir as the motil of Bulandshahr in Uttar Pradesh.²⁴ According to Alan, it would not be appropriate to identify Mattil with Motil as there is no royal seal. Therefore, nothing can be said for sure about the identification of Motil. **Fifthly**, to say '**Daivaputra Shahi Shahanushahi**'

He has identified three rulers,²⁵ of whom are not above criticism. **Sixth**, Chandravarman, mentioned in the Sushuniya text, is considered by the Fleet Gupta emperor to be identical with the first Chandragupta.²⁶ **Seventh**, while explaining the extent of Harshavardhana's empire, Fleet said that Harshav's empire had spread to Nepal and Nepal was a part of his empire. Banavatta once said in the paragraph of Harshacharita that Harsha had conquered a province adjoining the Himalayas. He identified the region with Nepal without any evidence. Levy refuted this argument and showed that it was most likely the Tukhar region.

The Fleet has illuminated many unknown dark aspects of Indian history by discovering many nuances of history. He was wise, prudent and exceptional. Yet his actions are not above criticism. When the Indian government asked for more Indians to engage in calligraphy, he did not listen. He did not have much respect for Indian script officers. According to him, Indians are not very good at this job.²⁷ His attitude reveals a subtle hint of the Europeans at the top and the Indians at the bottom. He remarked that the importance of the inscription among the elements is above all. In his words '**Palaeographic views, numismatics theories and deductions based on art must always be subordinate to the must be regulated by what we can learn in the way of clear facts from the inscriptional records**'.²⁸ He was very emotional about the inscriptions, we know that emotion interfered with the practice of neutral history.

The fleet holds an important place in the history of India, despite its slight flaws. In '**Epigraphia India**', Rice writes that, Fleet's work on engraved inscriptions is a valuable element in the early history of India.²⁹ **Sir Richard Temple** writes in '**Indian Antiquary**' that he opened the door to research on Indian calligraphy. One more thing to note in this case is that no matter how colorful the script is, after its discovery, everyone will be able to read and know it correctly. Sir Alexander Cunningham praised his calligraphy.³⁰ It is possible because of his contribution that we have known the

history of the Gupta period in a new way. However, after that he followed his lead in the study of Indian history, research methods, and calligraphy

Researchers practice is his biggest reward. The trend he started in the field of engraving continues to this day. One of his outstanding contributions to the history of India was the founding of the Bombay Asiatic Society, which has continued to play an important role in parallel with the Calcutta Asiatic Society since that time. The history of ancient India therefore owes a great deal to him.

Indicate the formula

1. John Faithfull Fleet, *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum* Vol. 3, 1st Published 1963, Varanasi, p. 1.
2. Upinder Singh, *The Discovery of Ancient India*, 1st Published 2004, Delhi, p. 126.
3. John Faithfull Fleet, *Ibid*, p. 2.
4. Leela B. Jois & Purnima Srikrishna, *Founders and Guardians of The Asiatic Society of Mumbai*: John Faithfull Fleet, 1st Published 2004.
5. Leela B. Jois & Purnima Srikrishna, *Ibid*, p. 52.
6. John Faithfull Fleet, *Ibid*, p. 2.
7. Charles Allen, *Asoka*, London, 1st Published 2012, p. 286.
8. B.N. Puri, *Ancient Indian Historiography*, Delhi, 1994, p. 170.
9. Upinder Singh, *Ibid*, p. 126.
10. B.N. Puri *Ibid*, p. 172.
11. Upinder Singh, *Alexander Cunningham's Contributions to Indian Archaeology* in Gautam Sengupta and Kaushik Gangopadhyay (ed), *Archeology in India*, 1st Published 2009, Delhi, p. 69.
12. John Faithfull Fleet, *Ibid*, p. 2.
13. Bahadurchand Chhabra & Govind Swamirao Gai (ed), *Corpus Inscriptionam Indicarum*, Vol. 3, New Delhi, 1981, p. 224
14. B.N. Puri *Ibid*, Delhi, 1994, p. 173.
15. Upinder Singh, *The Discovery of Ancient India*, 1st Published 2004, P. 314.

16. Leela B. Jois & Purnima Srikrishna, *Ibid*, p. 44
17. *Ibid*, p. 49.
18. B.N. Puri *Ibid*, Delhi, 1994, p.171.
19. Leela B. Jois & Purnima Srikrishna, *Ibid*, p. 13.
20. Upinder Singh, *Ibid*, p. 314.
21. H.C. Raychaudhuri, *Political History of Ancient India*, New Delhi, 1996, p. 795.
22. Bahadurchand Chhabra & Govind Swamirao Gai (ed), *Ibid*, p. 52n.
23. *Ibid*, p. 213n.
24. *Ibid*, p. 20.
25. *Ibid*, p. 27.
26. Radhagovinda Basak, *The History of North-Eastern India*, Calcutta, 1967, p. 15.
27. Upinder Singh, *Ibid*, p. 314.
28. M.S. Iyengar, John Faithfull Fleet, in G.A. Nateshan (ed), *Eminent Orientalists*, 1938.
29. John Faithfull Fleet, *Indian Antiquary*, Vol. 24. p. 83.
30. Upinder Singh, *Ibid*, p. 126.