**NĀNĀGHAT : A NAME-STUDY**

**Vishvanath Khaire**

**0. Synopsis**

Nānāghāṭ is the name of a pass, on the historic trade route to Kalyāṇ, which is famous for the Sātavāhana inscriptions there. Informed guesses have been made about the origin of this name. This Paper examines the proposals with reference to the ‘PLACENAMES’ system proposed by the Author and suggests a tree - name as the root of the place-name and points at the possible linguistic conclusions.

**1. Introduction**

The Western Ghats in Pune District are repository to a large number of spaces, structures and sculptures inscribed in rock. They carry on them a variety of ancient inscriptions also, which often include a number of place-names. Over a hundred years back, Burgess, the compiler of these inscriptions, was struck by the similarity of the recorded place-names with the names that are still current in the local language, that is, Marathi. In fact, it was these similarities that led epigraphists to the study of place-names in depth.

The number of place-names thus inscribed in rock is naturally quite small compared to the thousands of them that have been current through the ages. For such unrecorded names, scholarship continues to make guesses and suggestions. Interestingly, the names of the sites of inscriptions themselves are often uninscribed whence they give rise to speculation.

Nānāghāṭ is one such name - that of a pass on an ancient trade - route, in which two-thousand year old sculptures and inscriptions are to be seen in remains. Both the pass and the name are in use even at present. A recent comment relating to the name is as follows. The Nanaghat, the ancient trade route, has played an important role in the economic activities, of the Sātavāhana period. The Ghat was actually the culture channel from which the Sātavāhanas had contacts with the Western world. It is interesting to note that Nana, the important coin-device of the Kuṣānas, in the course of time, became the general term ‘Nane’ for coin in India. Naneghat provides more supporting evidence to this proposition. The word Nanaghat locally means the hilly path of money transaction. One has restored there a big stonepot which was meant for tax collection. The two habitations at the foot of ghat even today are known as Pradhānapāḍā (main centre) and vaisāghara i.e. traders habitation.1

(Shobhana Gokhale ‘New Numismatic Evidences of International Trade during the Sātavāhana period’. XI th Int. Numismatic Congress, Brussels 1991).

In a way, this comment takes back the current name of the pass to the beginning of the Christian era, mainly on the basis of proposed etymologies.

The PLACENAMES system proposed by the Author lists the large number of factors that have to be considered in any analysis relating to the names of places. In what follows, the name nānāghāṭ is studied in the framework of the system. Data and information are detailed under various two-digit-numbered heads and subheads with brief explanations where necessary.

**2. System Analysis**

0. Place

00. Name(s) : nānāghāṭ, nāṇeghāṭ Both Marathi.

01. State : Maharashtra

02. District : Pune. Taluka – Junnar. Nearest prominent place : Junnar.

03. Magnitude: Mountain pass, about 5 to 2 m wide and 75m long.

04. Coordinates: approx. 73.7 E, 19.3 N Mountain top alt. 830m

05. Past Name(s): Not known.

06. Related places : ‘Grāma-sūci’ (Index of Villages/towns) by N G Apte gives the following

list of names with nāna, nānā etc. Prefix nāna : 6. nānā : 3. nānī : 7.

nāne : 1. nāṇe : 11

Total : 28.

07. Main Function: Communication through Western Ghat.

08. Earlier studies: Shobhana Gokhale : XI the Int. Numismatic Congress Brussels 1991. P.308

09. Conclusion: The names nānāghāṭ and nāneghāṭ differ only in na and ṇa, which latter occurs in the speech of the upper classes. Primacy will be given to the name nāna- which reflects the original name better.

**0. Language**

10. Meaning(s) : The obvious meaning of nānāghāṭ is ‘a mountain pass (climb or road) related to nānā’. Dictionary meanings of nānā are : (Hindi : maternal grandfather). A respectful term for a person (originally for nārāyaṇa),

A tree – Lagerstroemia parviflora.

many, several, various.

nāṇe : coin. nāṇā : the name of a timber tree.

11. Current Speech : Marathi

12. Sub-names : Very close by, is another pass by the name ‘gunāghāṭ’ or ‘goṇaghāṭ’

which is more difficult and not much in use. There is also a prominence of about 45m height that is called ‘nānācā aṇgaṭhā’ meaning ‘Nana’s thumb’.

13. Etymology : Popular etymology appears to relate the name to a personage called ‘nānā’.

14. Gazeteer : ‘Gazeteer of the Bombay Presidency : Poona: Vol. XVIII Part III’ pp. 218-224 give all information about the pass and inscriptions.

15. Diachronic Variation : Not known.

16. Related Names : There is a place called nāṇe in the same region and district, which is a village and after which a valley or river basin (called māval) is named among the twelve so called māval’s. It has no connection with trade (route or collection). The various other names in different districts listed in 06 indicate that there is a common meaning for nānā, different from that of a person’s name.

17. Functional Relation: The name nānā or nāṇe does not appear to be functionally related to be functionally related to trade (route). ghāt is a descriptive suffix, with its common meaning in the language.

18. Earlier Analyses: The analysis in 08 calls for consideration of the following points : 1) The name in local speech appears to be nānā of which the variation in elite brahmanic speech was nāṇe. (Word for water is pānī in rural and pāṇī in elite speech.)

18. 2) Similar names in other localities are not related to trade of coinage.

19. Conclusion: we have to look for the correct significance of the name-word nānā.

**2. Anthropology**

20. People : Uninhabited

21. Groupings : Do not matter.

22. Ethnic Group : Not applicable.

23. Traditions : None.

24.

25. Historical : Nil

26. Related Examples : Not applicable.

27.

28. Earlier Analyses : Name has been related to Roman trade with the Sātavāhana rule.

29. Conclusion : The name does not appear to have any relation with authropological factors.

**3. Culture**

30. Religions : The Sātavāhana rulers of the region prided on their vedic sacrifices.

Present dominant religion : Hindu.

31. Festivals : At temple of the presiding deity of the river Kukdi.

32. Arts : -

33. Specialty : -

34. Monuments : Hero stones of bygone ages.

35. Traditions : It would appear that the popular name has been refined in brahmanic speech, changing the meaning.

36. Related Examples : -

37.

38. Earlier analyses : -

39. Conclusion : Not being inhabited, the name does not bear special relationship with cultural factors.

**4. Environment**

40. Topography : Totally hilly. Escarpments. Dividing line between the Deccan plateau and coastal strip of the Konkan. The ancient harbor of Kalyan, within easy reach. Nearby village has the name ‘ghātaghat’ (hamlet of the ghat). Comparatively easier of the two passes.

41. Flora and Fauna : See 10. Nānā, nāṇā is (or are) the name(s) of tree(s) growing in the region. Some of the māval’s or valleys named after trees plants are :

Rohiḍa : from rohiḍā – Suretenia febrifuga

Hiraḍas : from hiraḍā – Terminalia chebula

Gunjaṇa : from gunj – Abrus precatiorius

Pavana : from pavna – Sehima sulcatum (a grass)

* Sehima nervosum (a grass )

The name of village on the trade route down the incline is vāvali. This is the name of a fodder plant Holoptelia integrifolia.

42. Soil and Sky : Nil

43. Special Feature : There are two forts nearby and the solitary promontory called ‘Nana’s Thumb’ – which has relation to the pass’s name.

44. Astronomy : nil

45. History : See 5. Narrative.

46. Related Examples : See 41.

47. Language : The names relating to flora and fauna are Marathi.

48. Earlier Analyses : They have not considered flora names.

49. Conclusion : A strong contender for the origin of the name nānāghāṭ is the tree nānā as

it is called in Marathi.

**5. Narrative**

50. History : Among others, the name ‘nānẹ māval’ has occurred in the historical

records edited by the late V. K. Rajwade, in 16 volumes.

51. Oral History : Folklore recorded in the Gazeteer speaks of two brothers Nānā and Gunā

who set on making the two routes through passes, and of whom Nānā

succeeded, and whose name was therefore given to the ghat.

52. Foreign Records : Ptolemy mentions ‘Nanaguna’ thrice as the name of a river, of which the

source is mentioned far east and the mouth far south. The mention of ‘where the hill is cleft’ assures the reference to Nanaghat inspite of defective geography. In 1673, Fryer referred to the ghat and its cisterns.

53. Special Feature : The ghat was in use during the Peshwa regime and some paving in the

ghat is ascribed to Nana Phadanavis. (Nana is such a common name after

all.)

54.

55. Diachromic change : From Ptolemy to the present, the name seems to have continued

unchanged.

56. Related Examples : On 1673, the British surgeon Fryer climbed by the Ahupe ghat south of

Nanaghat – much steeper than the latter.

57. Secondary places : -

58. Earlier Analysis : Does not refer to these records.

59. Conclusion : The name nānāghāṭ (and not nāṇeghāṭ) is the original and ancient name

of the place.

**6. Archaeology**

60. Remains : A platform about 7m x 5m with a great jar hewn out of rock, supposed to

be the toll-jar. Nearby, three rock-cut cisterns in pool-style. Near end of pass, lines of caves on both sides, with water cisterns. A rough cave about 8m x 2.5m with cistern. Long inscription of the yajna’s performed by Satavahana kings. Damaged figures with names on a wall panel. Number of cisterns inside. On the zigzag path down, number of cisterns here & there.

61. Interpretations : Only one cistern at the top considered to be a toll-jar on the flourishing

trade route. From this, the name of the ghat is assumed to have been

nāṇeghāṭ.

62.

63. Antiquity : The place is recorded in the beginning of the Christi era but must have

existed as a pass since millennia.

64.

65. Layers : May be the caves belong to Buddhist or prior age.

66. Related Examples : -

67.

68. Earlier Analyses : See 61 and o8.

69. Conclusion : Correlation of the ‘toll-jar’ with the mane of the pass involves a circular

argument.

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**7. Mythology**

70. Folklore : The nānā-gunā story, see 51.

71. Compiled Mythology

72. Compiled Mythology, Puranic and Vedic : nil

73. Special Features : The names nānā and gunā are ancient.

74. Etymology : nānā is dealt with above. Guṇā (popularly gunā) has the following

dictionary meanings : axle, the mason’s right angle. Perhaps the steep slope of the other pass suggested this as the name for rhyming with nānā. Its variation goṇā would mean ‘sack’ which is easily associated with a trade route.

75. Diachronic change : nānā to nāṇe and the semantic change thereby.

76. Related Examples : Twin names for persons and places abound in folklore.

77. Myth vs Reality : The folklore has not super naturalized into religious myth. It has

remained on the mundane plane of path-making.

78. Earlier Analyses : do not consider the story.

79. Conclusion : The folklore is a sort of origin-myth in which the then existing common

nouns have been personified and the origin of the path through the pass is sought to be explained with them as the makers.

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**8. Epigraphy**

80. After 700 AC : Not known.

81. 700 AC to 700 BC : Brahmi inscription in Sanskritic language.

82. Prehistoric : nil

83. Special Features : Proclamatory inscriptions at a frequented place, which do not mention the

name of the place.

84. Etymology : -

85. Diachronic Variation : -

86. Related Examples : -

87. Evaluation : None, in the absence of mention of place-name.

88. Earlier Analyses : -

89. Conclusion : We do not receive any help from epigraphy.

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**9. Summary**

90. Place Name : nānā is the most likely original name of the pass. It has continued

unchanged (except for elitist changes) up to the present

91. Language : It can be most meaningfully understood from Marathi which has been the

language of the region for a millennium, and its forerunners in popular

speech rather than in written languages.

92. Anthropology : does not provide any clue.

93. Culture : Indian culture is carved in the place. The cisterns are part of rock-carved

monasteries much before the trading with the Romans.

94. Environment : The descriptive part ‘ghāṭ’ means pass, mountain road etc which fits the

nature of the place. The nominal nānā is the name of a useful tree. Like many other nominals in the region, this would have provided the original name. This is in keeping with the antiquity of the name, for in that era places would most easily named after the characteristic flora.

95. Narrative : Historical references reinforce continuity of the ancient name, which has

not changed during the historical times.

96. Archaeology : The inscriptions and images prove the importance of the pass as the main

channel of communication between the plateau and the seaside tract, and

abroad.

97. Mythology : has not obliterated the name, nor changed its sound or content.

98. Epigraphy : As the inscriptions do not make allusion to the place epigraphy does not

help in the analysis.

99. Summary : The place-name nānāghaṭ is related to the tree nānā, of which the botanical name L. parviflora refers to the ‘small flower’ of the tree.

Semantically, nānā is signifier for smallness, which with slight variation in the second na, gives us the word nāṇaka: coin, i.e. a small replica of a figure as a stamp on a piece of metal etc.

Nānā meaning mother’s father in Hindi also points to the smallness or juniority of the respected person. In Sanskrit, nānā has the meaning of ‘many’. It is easily seen that ‘many’ is complementary to ‘small’; a thing becomes many when made into smalls and vice versa.

nānā is really related to Prakrit laṇha, Hindi nanhā, Gujarati nānā, Marathi lahānā, the last with the common change of l to n. All these have been shown by Turner to arise from Sanskrit slakṣṇa (soft, tender, thin, small lex.) This is a forced connection.

The words can be properly related to:

Tamil iḷa young; iḷaku send forth tender shoots Kannada eḷaku young age

Sanskrit laghu small

Tamil nanai flower-bud Kannada nane id.

Telugu nana flower

Tamil nanni that which is small Te. Nanna short

So while the name could be related to nānā the tree, it could also mean to be a short ghat.

Contrary to accepted linguistic families, this name current from antiquity, testifies to the popular dialects which have grown independently of Sanskrit.

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