

Zero tracks back to Assam



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Chandan Kumar Duarah 28 March 2013 25290 views

It is not the mainland India, but a little happening Golaghat district in Assam in the nooks of the Northeast where the zero (sunya) originated. Ashok Sarma, a language history researcher with the help of Dr H N Dutta, the former Director of Department of Archeology, Government of Assam and Dr Dharmashwar Chutia, a retired professor of Department of Sanskrit, Gauhati University has established that the numerical zero was first discovered and used in written script by a civilization of Assam between 2nd and 3rd century.

The uses of zero happened in Assam long before the birth of both Ayarthabhatta and Brahmagupta, Sarma said. The evidence of the practice of using zero in Assam came to light with the discovery of a stone inscription in Golaghat district and archeologist Dr Dutta confirmed it as a 2nd/3rd century inscription. The digits inscribed on a piece of ancient stone were 2, 3, 1, 0, 7 and 8 respectively and were deciphered by Dr Dharmeshwar Chutia. It is now presumed that the inventor of zero was an Assamese mathematician from the Golaghat area while the popular belief that Aryabhatta was the inventor of the 'zero'. Around 500 A.D, Aryabhatta, the Indian mathematician, devised a number system. The symbol he used for the number zero was also used to represent an unknown element. Brahmagupta, another mathematician, was the first to formalize arithmetic operation representing the zero as 'dot' during A.D.650.

In Assam also the zero was written as dot and the stone inscription represents it accordingly, Ashok Sarma said. Unfortunately, due to lack of extensive research not much is known about the inventor and his time. Sarma claimed that Aryabhatta and Brahmagupta were not the first mathematicians to discover the zero. He also added that the stone inscription could be much older than it was thought. He said that the Rig-Veda culture and the Indus Valley civilization had no influence over the Kamrupi civilization or the civilization that once flourished in the areas around Golaghat. There were trade centres in ancient Kamrup and the land had contact with other countries before it came in contact with "mainland" India. So there is a probability that zero 'moved' from Assam to other parts of India.

Chandan Kumar Duarah

The writer is a former Robert Bosch Fellow, an environmentalist and Guwahati based journalist.

BY CHANDAN KUMAR DUARAH

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