

DISCOVERY OF NEW HORSE-RIDER VARIETY OF KUMARAGUPTA GOLD COINS AT SRIJANG (DIST-BALASORE) AND ITS HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

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Balasore is a glorious land of hoary antiquity. It is located between 20'44" N and 21'56" N Latitudes and 86' longitudes on the right bank of the Burhabalanga river. The ancient history of Balasore and the derivation of its name is shrouded in controversy and mystery. It is generally believed that 'Balasore is named after Banaswar Siva and during Moghul period it was known as Bala-e-sore, i.e., a town on the sandy shore. However, archaeologically these speculations do not appear to be correct. Through ages, Balasore seems to have been a trading port-metropolis as reflected in various early foreign geographical accounts. The Balanga or Burhabalanga river, the old twister, which meanders beside the township as its life line, seems to have strong bearing on the origin and nomenclature of the place. This tidal river was a blessing for maritime activities and since the earliest time Balasore appears to have developed into a trading terminus being named after the Balanga river and described as "Balanga or Balongka metropolis" by Greek geographer Ptolemy in the 2nd century A.D. Thus it is very probable that Balasore is derived from 'Balanga or Balaongka' metropolis after the Balanga river. The importance of this river in the life of Balasore town is also reflected in the worship of "Balangi" river deity. The Goddess is now found enshrined in a small temple at Manikkham at the periphery of Danish settlement site Dinamardinga of Balasore town. It is said that the river now 3/4 kms. away from the place, originally extended right up to the seat of the Balangi deity.

At present the shallow depression gives the impression of the ancient river bed. Recent archaeological explorations in and around Balasore town further disposed towards such a contention. In early Buddhist literature also there is copious reference to hectic trade activities in Balasore area as early as 6th Century B.C. Tappasu and Bhallika two merchant brothers of this region while moving with their trade Caravan offered food to Buddha and became his 1st disciples.

Amidst this historical backdrop, the present discovery of two horse rider type of Kumaragupta gold coins at Srijang, located at distance of about *Seventeen Kilometres* to the South of Balasore assumes special significance. There is a big mound at the centre of the village. It is locally called 'Kanthi' Two proto-Oriya inscriptions one at Achuta Sagar and the other one at Mallika Sagar datable to 15th century A.D. speak of the historicity of Srijang in glowing terms.

These two Proto-Oriya Inscriptions describes the excavation of two tanks namely Achyutasagar and Mallika Sagar for Pitrutarpana by the King and the Queen of the line of ruler Daitari Biswal. The name of Mansingh, the general of Emperor Akbar finds conspicuous mention in the inscription of Malika Sagar. Hence, the association of this kingdom with Mughal empire is a significant aspect. To add to this the find of several Mughal coins in Balasore district amply testifies to the trade relation of Srijang kingdom with the Mughal empire.

The recent survey and explorations of Orissa State Museum at this site reveal that the ancient trading metropolis extended over 5/6 kms. area on the bank of tidal river Kantiachara. This suggestion is amply corroborated by the find of various types of early pottery specimens and coins. The ancient river bank is also observed as extending with sufficient elevation over this part. In the exposed sections we find pottery and other habitational deposits of different periods. The river has now receded 3/4 kms. and formed a low depressed land. In early times the river appeared to have been very wide with the right bank touching the present township area. An observation and study of the exposed sections revealed 5 layers of paved floor levels with structural remains and pottery deposits. In the lowest level the foundation of a brick structure was traced out along with rouletted and basket impressions ware of Roman imitation ascribable between 2nd Century B.C. to 2nd Century A.D. This serendipity testifies to the unbroken occupation of the site at 5 different periods right from 2nd Century B.C. to the present day. It is interesting to note that basket impression pot sherds with identical texture, sections and fabrics are also traced along the section. The smooth surfaced, thin sectioned well burnt rouletted ware with metallic strength appears to have semblance with the Mediterranean specimen of early Christian Centuries. Sherds of large troughs, storage jars, dishes and goblets with simple and primitive finger tip designs are also found.

Celadon ware is also found on the surface and at various levels of the exposed sections in the old habitational area in mixed deposits and disturbed trenches. The ware is greyish white in section with dull pink underside and greenish glazed surface. This ware is known to have been manufactured in China as early as 7th Century A.D. It is interesting to note that this ware had extensive market during its life over Asia and parts of Africa. Other antiquities such as semi-precious stone beads of chalcedony banded agate, carnelian, quartz and jasper of various colour shades are also reported on the surface and sections along with bangles. The unfinished and fragmentary pieces point to the existence of bead making industry and its exportation. Ptolemy has also referred to Diamond and other semi-precious stone availability in the *Kadamas* river identified with *Kantiachara* and its trade with outside world.

Varieties of coins of different periods have also been reported from Balasore. A Punch-marked coin ascribed to early Christian Century has been discovered at Olandaz Sahi which takes back the currency history to a remote past. Punch marked coins have not been reported from Balasore previously. Puri Kusan coins with one containing an inscription "Tanka" in the character of 4th/5th Century have also been found earlier in

Balasore. Copper coins of Nala dynasty containing the legend 'Sri Nanda' in boxheaded character of Central Indian variety of 5th/6th Century A.D. have also been discovered in Balasore district. The Nalas were known to have ruled in ancient Kosala region and so the coins seem to have reached Balasore through inland trade. The ancient trade route from Central and Northern India was known to have been connected with Balasore maritime port terminus. Coins of later dynasties are also found in this region.

Indo-Muslim coins of various shape and size are found in large number. A hoard of 64 interesting Silver coins of the Moghuls have been found at Darkhuli a boarder village of Balasore which seemed to have been minted at the local mint of Raibania. Coins of similar fabric and legend have also been traced out during the coarse of exploration from old Balasore area. Due to the suitable location of Balasore for maritime purpose, the early Europeans had their trading stations. The find of Portuguese coins, Dutch coins, English coins in association with other relics along with coins of Ceylon and middle East region amply testify the prosperity and continuance of the glorious maritime heritage of Balasore through the ages.

Vestiges of the major religious movements such as Buddhism, Jainism, Saivism, Vaishnavism and Saktism have also been traced out in Balasore. Through its port, the varied cultures seemed to have diffused to South East Asia as is evident from imprints of Orissan cultural traces in those part and their allusion in the early foreign accounts.

These two Gold Coins of Kumara Gupta have been reported **for the first time in India**. This discovery of coins indicates that Orissa was part of Gupta empire in 5th/6th Century A.D.. This fact is corroborated by inscriptional evidence found from copper plate grants issued by Prithivi Vighraha and Loka Vighraha of Vighraha dynasty which were dated in Gupta era 280 i.e. 570 and Gupta era 280 that is 600 A.D.. The Sumandal copper plate grant of Maharaja Madhava Varman of Sailodbhab dynasty also refers to Gupta era 300 i.e. 620 A.D.. Interestingly, several sculptures marked with excellent, classical Gupta art tradition have been discovered from Sitabinji, Asanpath, Ayodhya and other parts of Orissa.

At present these coins are in the possession of one Arabinda Das Mohapatra of Srijang. On the obverse, Kumaragupta is found riding on a fully caparisoned horse. The legend 'Kumaragupta' is mentioned in typical Gupta Brahmi character datable to 5th century A.D.

In one coin he has been heavily dressed up with war attires with a crown. In the other one, he is seen bare bodied in a jovial mood. The impress of the superb artistic excellence and exuberant execution of Gupta epoch is amply discernible on these coins.

In the annals of numismatics the gold coinage system of Imperial Guptas occupies a conspicuous place. Orissa State Museum has in its possession the Archery type coin of Chandragupta II, Chandragupta-Kumaradevi type and lyrist type of gold coins of Samudragupta. These gold coins were mostly meant for inland and maritime foreign trade for which Balasore and Srijang were the chief port metropolis.



Samudragupta Lyrist type coin in the collection of Orissa State Museum



Samudragupta Archer type coin in the collection of Orissa State Museum



Kumargupta Horse-rider type coin found from Srijang



Chandragupta Archer type coin in the collection of Orissa State Museum



Kumargupta Horse-rider type coin found from Srijang



SRIJANG INSCRIPTION