Tamralipta : The Ancient Port in Odisha

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Geographical situation of Tamralipta, Suham or Suram, Lata, Varahi temple, Chaurasi, Radha, and Bharukachchha or Baroch, and Gangaridae etc., points to one compact region, and their ancient history is intimately connected with each other.

According to *Dasakumaracharita*(6th AD), Tamralipta was in Suham or Suram, or Sumha, kingdom, and temple of Bindubasini was situated there. Noted historian Smith has rightly observed that Tamralipta was capital of Suham kingdom in 6th c AD, and it was a part of the Magadha under the Mauryas. In *Mahabharata*, and *Matsya*, Suhma or Suram, and Tamralipta were shown as two different places. Here Suram has also been mentioned as a port where Tapassu and Bhallika, the two merchant brothers of Kalinga, arrived. In *Brihad Samhita*, Suram is placed between Banga and Kalinga. Some historians identified it with Radha, and others identified Radha with Lata (or Lada of Jain, or Lala).

Behind naming of this Suham or Suram, reference can be made to Ceylonese Chronicles. In order to divert the attention of the Bodhisattva, King Sudhodana made a seven storeyed beautiful palace for him, and provided all sorts of comfort and amusement here for the Prince to divert his attention. The name of this building was Suram, meaning ‘beautiful, and from this name of the palace came the name of the kingdom. The Buddha delivered the *Janapada Kalyani Sutta* in a forest of Sumbha, or Suram country, and Desaka town was near to it.

The historical relationship between the kingdom of Lata, Suram, and Tamralipta can be traced in Buddhist literature as well as in puranic contents. Tamralipta was on the mouth of the Ganges, and was formed by the united streams of the Silavati and Dvarikeswari rivers. It was the capital of Mayurdhvaja, and his son Tamradhvaja who fought against Arjuna. According to Jaimini-Bharata, Mayurdhvaja’s capital was on the banks of the river Nerbuda; and reference has been made there on Ratnapura, another name of Tamralipta, some say. *Kathasaritasagara* mentions Tamralipta as a maritime port, and also as an emporium of commerce from 4th c AD to 12th c AD.

Lata is mentioned in Ptolemy’s Geography, as Larike; and Asokan Dhauli Inscriptions mention Lata as Lathika. And Girinar Inscriptions take Lata as Rastika or Ristika. What is most important here is that Broach or Barygaza of Greeks, or Bharukachcha was the chief city of Lata. And importance of this place can also be traced in Buddhist and Puranic sources. Here Raja Bali performed a sacrifice on the advice of
Sukracharya after being deprived of his kingdom by Vishnu in his Vamana Avatar. Olladesa has been described as identical with Lata, and the Nagara Brahmins of this kingdom are said to have Nagari characters. According to Ptolemy, and other Puranas, it is situated between the river Mahi, and river Kim. Its name is also mentioned in Kamasutra of Vatsyayana. The source of the river Chandrabhaga which was known as Lohitya, and was also known to writers of the ancient texts of a river and of a sarovara in the same name, and was famous in the age of the Ramayana, belonged to this Lata kingdom.

According to Kathasaritasagara, Raja Satavahana of Pratisthana was a resident of Bharukachchha. And its other name prior to Buddha, perhaps, was Bhrugupura, indicating that Sage Bhrugu, who was contemporary to, and was the first teacher of the Buddha, might be living here. After leaving the palace, Surama, in the midnight through its south gate, the Bodisatta along with Charioteer Chandaka, and horse Kanthak, in his renunciation went to Anupiya, the mango grove of the Mallas, where he met Sage Bhrugu, the place being not too far away from Kapilavastu. But this Bharukachcha was no other than the Bharu kingdom of Supparaka Jataka. During the time of the Buddha, it was also known as Bhandagrama which was visited by the Buddha before his last journey to Kusinagara. The kingdom was also a port town, according to Buddhist sources.

Fa-hien, the 5th century AD Chinese Pilgrim, visited Tamralipti. He came to this port town from Champa after travelling 50 yojanas in an easterly direction.

Huien Tsang, the 7th century Chinese Pilgrim, came to Bharakachcha from Mo-ho-la-cha (Maharashtra) after travelling in a north-west direction for about 2400 or 2500 li, and crossing the river Nai-mo-to, reached Po-lu-kie-che-po (Bharukachcha). The Pilgrim also mentions that it is Bhrigukshtera, or the traditional residence of Sage Bhrugurishhi. From Bharukachcha, the pilgrim went on towards Malava (Mo-la-po).

The Pilgrim Huien Tsang arrived at Tamralipti (Tan-mo-li-ti) after going 900 li from Samatata (San-mo-ta-cha). This 7th century Chinese Pilgrim says that there was a Varahi temple in the country where the Tamralipta port had then existed. I-ching, another 7th century Chinese Pilgrim also visited Tamralipta, and resided in its Varahi monastery. He says that Tamralipta was 60 or 70 yojanas east from Nalanda. In between Tamralipta, and Bharukachcha, the Pilgrim Huien Tsang visited places like: Karnasuvarna. Udra, Kanyodha, Kalinga, Kosala, An-to-lo, Dhanakataka, Chola, Dravida, Malakuta, Sinhala, Konakapura, and Maharashtra. It is not at all difficult to observe that names of towns and cities or villages are completely different from names of countries and kingdoms. Taking names of countries like Kosala, Kalinga and Magadha offers no meaning to identification of places when cities and towns visited by the Pilgrim comes intermittently under different country heads, and at times keeping no order of their geographical boundaries. Moreover, Kosala, Kalinga and Magadha etc are countries, and there were cities, towns and villages under them with defined boundaries. When the translated account of the Pilgrim deals with a separate chapter on Magadha, similar account is not seen in case of Kosala, and Kalinga, or on any other Maha Janapadas. This makes more confusion, and identification of places, thus suffers from various irregularities. Scholars, however, failed to notice its broad impact on regional historical accounts.

One sees that Lata has been identified with Gujarat, and Bharukachcha with another of
its city; if Tamluk is identified with one of the region of Bengal, and Madhupur in UP, Dwarka in Gujarat, and Malla country in Punjab, what happens to history when Pilgrim’s Varahi temple is covered under Magadha or in Bihar chapter of Pilgrim’s account? Identification of places always demands that all the places visited by the Chinese Pilgrims must be looked for within the boundary of ‘Madhyadesha’, or the ‘Middle Country’ whose defined geographical boundary is preserved in the Ceylonese Chronicles. Fa-hien remained six years in “Madhyadesha”, and his place of visit must, thus, be looked inside that geographical boundary alone. And the river Silavati or Salavati, or Saravati, linked with Tamralipta, forms the southern boundary of the ‘Madhyadesha’. And river Mahi, and Chandrabhaga, were very close to southern sea shore. How they can be located elsewhere, and far away from the coastal area. What the western scholars have done that they drew two parallel lines on the political map of India, and named the region as the “Middle Country” which later became the “Mid India”, dumping this holy land and its identification into oblivion. This mistake caused the wrong shifting of places from one region to another region. Fergusson gives reasons for having dissenting views from the common opinion that Tamulk is the modern representative of Tamralipti. But he Rajendra Lal Gupta’s identification again was accepted without taking into historical consideration of Lata, and Suham. Cunningham assigned Balabhi and Bharoch to Western India forming a part of Saurashtra. But also agrees that these places belong to the Dakhanos or to the Dakhinapatha. This term “Dakshina”, is named to the route that the Bodhisattva took when he fled on renunciation through the south gate of the Surama palace. Another concept arose for this land that lay to the east of the Sarayu river, and this was also called the Eastern India, and afterwards this became synonymous with South Kosala and North Kosala.

According to H A Giles, “the narratives (of Hiuen Tsang) is continuous, without break and without punctuation”. Identification of places visited by the Pilgrims as one notices in “Ancient Geography of India”, written by Cunningham, takes all the places out of “Madhyadesha”, and, thus, many confusion occurs, persists, and hounds the academics as before.

King Vijaya, the first king of Ceylon, went to Ceylon through this port, but it is also stated elsewhere that he was a resident of Radha. According to Ceylonese Chronicles, King Vijaya before starting on his sea voyage to Ceylon, he always was staying for three months at Madhupur. Records of Sri Lankan Government, basing on facts preserved in their Vamsa Gathas, clearly state in their text books, that King Vijaya migrated from Kalinga; and the day he reached there, the Buddha died “here”. The Ceylonese Chronicles mention some other names of port towns, along with one Talada, and it may be interesting to see that all these ports can be searched for on a particular coastal belt, not far from each other, and also not far away from Tamralipta itself.

King Asoka sent the Bodhi Tree to Ceylon through Tamralipti port. It was a fourteen days’ journey to Ceylon from Tamralipti, out of which seven days’ journey was spent from Pataliputra to Tamralipti on road. These are the information we have in history, that provides ample opportunities for scholars to look out where really was this Tamralipti port.

Vanga, Samatata, Suham, Tamralipta, Gauda, and Pundravardhana, all these famous places in history belonged to one compact geographical and historical settlement. One place cannot be separated from another in principle keeping in mind their continuous road link.
existence; and they all being not far away from each other. And this gives rise to the “concept” and “existence” of “Village Kingdoms” and “City Kingdoms” of ancient India.

The Lataharana temple and the Lata Matha on the bank of the river Prachi Saraswati, and the river Devi near the village Bhandaghara near Kakatapur in Puri district, point to the correct position of the Tamralipta port. There are two villages in the same name Bhandaghara, on both sides of the river; and village Bazpur, to the east of this place and just within less than half-a-kilometer is the Barygaza of Ptolemy; and the Varahi temple at Chaurasi represents the Varahi temple of the Chinese Pilgrims. Suham is the present Sri Ramchandrapur, near it. The Radha village near Sun temple at Konarka which is just within fifteen kilometers from here, and towards east, satisfies all conditions of the Gangaridae kingdom of history. This road to Konarka that passes through village Sama, covers the Samatata of the Pilgrims’ account. The name of the place, the name of the kingdom, and the name of the river, all bearing the name of Ganga, together define the existence of the Gangaridae kingdom. One can look for everything there with Gangaram village near the Sun Temple, and Sri Kanthapur will fulfill the quest for other conditions that a scholar needs for establishment of truth. For existence of villages in the name of Vanga or Banga near the eastern sea shore, i.e. not far away from the Sun Temple, one can verify the following names : Banga- lo in Kakatapur Block, Banguri gaon, also in Kakatapur Block; Bangurisha – Melaka and Bangurisha Sasana in Nimapara Block. There are villages in the name of Banga in Delanga Block, Bangura in Satyabadi Block, and Banguraba in Puri Sadar Block. But those near Kakatpur, and close to sea shore defines the real Vanga. The existence of Tamralipta between Kalinga and Vanga, refers to the port at Bhandaghara and Lataharana area of Kakatapur Block. One can also see the site of a dried up river port near the village Sri Ramachandrapur and Mulagarh connecting the southern sea and the river Saraswati. All the villages near the Sun Temple including the village Kulinga, Madhupura, Junei, Banakhandi, Jantana, Mahala, Marda and Sarada etc., and a host of other names have significant contribution to Buddhist history, and they collectively stand today to answer the Pilgrims’ account on their visit to “Madhyadesha”. Pilgrim’s Karnasuvama represents Suvamapur; Udra represents Ora; Kanyodha, the Kundiya; Kalinga, the Kulinga; An-to-lo, the Ananta/ Antarkula/ the Antarvedi; Dhanakataka, the Dhanahara; Chola, the Cheruli; Dravida, the Durgapur/ Desthali/ the Desunthi; Saurasthra, the Sorreya (of Revata); Maharashtra, the Marda and the Mahala. And the list continues to cover all the places that the Pilgrims visited in the “Madhyadesha”.

The scholars are welcome to visit these places compacted in a small geographical area near the dried-up Chandrabhaga, and the present Prachi Saraswati river to feel what exactly Ptolemy says in his Geography. Maps of Ptolemy, and understanding of his degrees are most important today which the western scholars outrightly rejected for identification of places in ancient India. Meghasthenes, Curtius, Strabo, Pliny, pilgrims from China or Alberuni, they all describe one and the same geographical land mass, but in different times of history. Scholars now can come for excavation, at any place they like in the above mentioned areas, and feel the truth. The inheritance belongs to all of us, not limited to any particular region of India.

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