

## Cuttack : Carrying the Heritage of Orissa

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Etymologically, the word Kataka (Cuttack is the anglicised version) means a cantonment / capital city. The history of Cuttack justifies that name. From an uncertain and humble fort township, it has come to occupy centrestage of politico-economic and socio-cultural life of Orissa as its capital city during the course of its long chequered history. The city remained the capital of Orissa under different political regimes such as the Gangas, Suryavamsis, Afghans, Mughals, Marathas, British and lastly that of the State of Orissa, before the capital was shifted to Bhubaneswar during the early fifties of twentieth century.

Thus, the history of Cuttack is almost synonymous with the history of Orissa. It has been central to Orissa's politics, society, economy and culture. In fact, Cuttack, in association with Puri, has been the nodal centres around which evolved and resolved the regional tradition of Orissa. Cuttack was the core of ring of forts, which were the sentinels of Orissan empire and its culture. In economic terms, the city commanded its position as the commercial and trading capital of Orissa—a position it commands as of yet. Thus, the prominence of Cuttack was rooted on the convergence of forces and factors such as its strategic geographical location at the centre of Orissan Empire, junction of passenger and merchandise routes, conglomeration of ruling and

the mercantile classes etc. Each regime has left its imprints on the city during the long course of its growth and progress. Like Rome it was not built in a day.

Historians hotly debate on the city's actual date of foundation. There are an array of sources like literary, folkloristic, mythological, inscriptional and archaeological. But they do not exactly pinpoint the date and time of its foundation. Although several scholars have tried to attribute its foundation to rulers of Kesari dynasty during the 10th century A.D., based on literary, folkloristic and archaeological sources; yet the earliest archaeological evidences of the city structure excavated so far do not go beyond the first quarter of 13th century A.D.—the time of Ganga king Anangabhimadeva-III. Thus, the authentic history of Cuttack starts from the Ganga rulers who ruled between 1112 to 1435 A.D, and made the city their capital. It believed that the first Imperial Ganga ruler Chodagangadeva made the city his capital owing to centrality of its location during the 12th century. The city was known by different names such as Varanasi/Abhinava Varanasi Kataka. It continued to maintain its position as the Rajadhani city during the rule of more illustrious Suryavamsi dynasty, which ruled between 1435 to 1542 A.D. It also remained the capital during the rule of minor dynasties such as Bhoi and the Chalukya ruling

over Orissa between 1542 to 1568 A.D. During the rule of Imperial Gangas and the Suryavamsis, the city reached dizzy heights as there were proliferation of human activities in myriads of fora. It came to acquire an aura of its own as the centre of organised polity and bureaucracy, residence of the ruling and commercial magnets, rich centre of trade and commerce, arts and crafts, culture and religion. Socially, it became heterogeneous. It became an epicentre of cultural and religious efflorescence as manifested in the literary works of poets and writers in the imperial courts of Gangas and Suryavamsis, their grandiose temple building activities, the munificence of its wealthy inhabitants and their religious preferences. The culture and material elements of the period combined to give birth to the regional tradition of Orissa with Cuttack as its focal point.

During the entire pre-Muslim stretch of its history, Cuttack remained basically a feudal capital town serving as a centre of administration, crafts and the market for the countryside. It also performed useful cultural functions as shaping the fashion, taste, artistic and architectural designs, and literary creations; thereby playing the civilisational role as determinant of the contours, direction and the texture of regional tradition of Orissa, of course within the parameters of feudalistic system. In other words, Cuttack remained true representative of a feudal economy of Orissa that reached its mature phase during the subsequent Mughal times.

Cuttack came under long Muslim rule during 1568--1751 A.D. It is divided into three periods: the Afghans (1568-92 A.D), the Mughals (1592-1713 A.D), and the Nazims of Bengal (1713-51 A.D). The Mughal and the Nazims have been clubbed under one period: that of the Mughals, as the Nazims were legally the Mughal Governors of Bengal Province/ Suba and they never openly defied the de jure Mughal authority.

But the Nazims exercised de facto power. The two decades of Afghan rule was a period of pillage and plunder. Nothing significant happened to Cuttack, except losing its sovereign status and the introduction of Muslim elements to its social demography. Likewise, the Nazim era was characterised by incessant warfare between the Nazims and the Marathas for the control of Orissa, thus was hardly significant for Cuttack city. Mughal rule, however, turned out to be quite eventful for the city. Power structure of the Mughals set the pattern for uniform administration for the urban centres and brought Cuttack city into the mainstream of pan-Indian political-economic process. The city lost its earlier sovereign political status and was relegated to headquarters of a peripheral province. In economic terms, the period turned out to be gloomy in comparison to the earlier times; as it witnessed the maturation of the feudal economy and a substantial part of the resources being siphoned off Orissa. Endemic medieval conditions retarded its economic growth. Monopoly of Orissa's coastal trade by the Europeans and their merchant associates such as the Marwaris and the Gujaratis had the ramifying effect of squeezing the natives out of the lucrative trade. All these told on the state of Cuttack town. It manifested moribundity in its growth and expansion. The city, however, fared better than the subsequent Maratha and the British times. Socially, the city became more heterogeneous by accommodating more non-Oriya and Muslim elements to its population. Cultural experiences of the city and its inhabitants became more enriching and creative, barring short spells of 'Islamic bigotry' foisted upon the city by a few fanatic rulers. Many new vistas in socio-cultural experiences of the people were explored. Significant in this connection was the syncretic culture hammered out by its heterogeneous denizens as manifested in the art, craft (the famous silver filigree works),

literature and the architectural achievements (Lalbag palace, Jama Masjids etc.) of the period.

The period of Maratha rule from 1751 to 1803 A.D., proved quite eventful for the city. As before the city was given its legitimate status as the headquarters of Maratha Province of Orissa, and the residence of the Maratha Subedars and their administration. Many significant developments happened at the place; which greatly affected the city in its political, techno-economic, socio-cultural dimensions. Maratha polity, in aspects of city administration, showed considerable continuities with that of the Mughals. The designations and hierarchy of the officials associated with the administration such as subedar, qiladar, faujdar, kotwal, piyadas/chowkidars in descending order remained the same. The protection and patronage offered by the Marathas, and a tedious communication by the medieval standard enabled the city to make its mark as centre of crafts, trade and commerce. Morphologically, the city extended in north and north-easterly directions. Technically, the city remained dependent on animal sources of energy. Industry of the period mainly constituted the handicrafts. Occupationally, the work force in the city presented a mix bag, with continuity of significant sections of peasantry as true representative of an oriental pre-colonial city primarily directed towards politico-administrative and strategic functions. Its prime economic function constituted pooling revenue of the country and sending them off to Nagpur---the capital city of Bhonsles, the overlords of Orissa. Its market role remained secondary. It was piped to second position commercially to Balasore, which surged ahead as an important centre of trade and industry in Orissa owing to its association with the European commerce during the period. Socially, the city became more heterogeneous with the influx of new elements to its population such as the Maratha, Marwari, Berari, Bengali, European etc.

Its material base (as the surplus flew into the city from the countryside) enabled it to be a centre of culture and excellence. Marathas promoted the syncretic tradition of the city by patronising Hinduism, showing catholicity to Islam, donating grants (including land) to bramins and fakirs, recognising and rewarding litterateurs and artists. Catholic religious policy of the Marathas made the city a beehive of religious activities of many hues as evident in building of temples, maths and masjids by the followers of different religions and sects such as Saivaites, Vaisnavites, Saktas and the Muslims, who constituted a sizable section of its population. The city continued its march, albeit in an attenuated way, as the centre of Orissan polity, economy, society and culture.

Thus, with a rich heritage Cuttack entered the next phase of its history: the colonial phase, which spanned from 1803 to 1947. The said period turned out to be the most stormy and eventful in the entire span of its history. The history of colonial Cuttack became integrated with the history of India and the British empire, as entire subcontinent was brought under single administration and its economy got integrated with the British metropolitan political-economy, with epicentre at London. Cuttack became the centre of high intensity culture contact between the colonial and the colonised cultures at the regional level. The changing power-equations, economic relations and the cultural policies concomitant to the colonial rule brought profound political, socio-economic and cultural changes in the city. In some spheres the changes were rapid; in others they came at snails pace with dogged persistence depending on the situational contexts, and the specific forces and the processes of encounters involved. The colonial rule affected physical forms of the city in slow but a unique way, as planning the morphology of an age old city constituted a complicated and different exercise than those where the colonisers started

on a clean slate like Calcutta, Bombay etc. The colonial impact on the city's morphology was conspicuous in the form of residential enclaves and security enclaves called civil lines and cantonments, which came up away from and flanking the city in its three directions: north, north-east and north west for the reasons of health, privacy, racial purity in neighbourhood, administrative convenience etc. Such developments gave its morphology a form called in colonial parlance as dualistic structure: the anglicised part juxtaposing with the indigenous part. The subsequent urban sprawl during the post-independent period and the resultant smudginess notwithstanding; the present day Cuttack does carry the morphological vestiges of that dualistic panorama. The persistence of rural and traditional forms glaring in the remains of pre-existing villages in the form of sahis/ patanas (neighbourhood settlements) and the presence of agriculturists earned for the city the sobriquet of an 'overgrown village'/ 'rurban' township--- a special feature of its urban morphology and urban culture. The broad configuration that the morphology of colonial Cuttack took was that of combination, co-existence, integration and hybridization on many forms: pre-colonial and colonial, traditional and modern, east and west, rural and urban etc.

Compared to slow changes in the sphere Urban Morphology, the transformations in the realm of Urban Polity during the colonial period were faster and sweeping. They came at differential rates. Thus, the changes in the upper echelons of bureaucracy were more swift than those in lower down the ladder. Likewise, the emergence of nationalist politics took time to emerge. The characteristic forms of colonial Urban Polity of Cuttack city evolved in response to different factors such as specifics of the geographical situation, prevailing philosophy and ideology of the ruling class, ingenuity of the actors

involved: colonisers and the colonised, the British emphasis on exploitation of the colony in the interests of the metropole and their obsession with security in an alien land. The city, as before, became headquarters of the British administration in Orissa. It was the hub of political activities in the province as abode of colonial bureaucracy and the native leadership during the period. To the city flocked the traditional gentry (the allies of the colonists) of different hues such as the princely class of native states, the zamindars etc., for power and patronage. There emerged the middle class intelligentsia and the modern mercantile classes who took leadership in several spheres such as socio-economic and political reforms, education, modern Oriya literature, mass communication, drama, music, painting, theatre etc. The notable figures in this context were Gaurisankar Roy, Radhanath Roy, Madhusudan Das, Gopabandhu Das and several others. They organised modern forms of political, socio-cultural and economic associations, and agitational politics to ventilate their grievances and to realise their dreams so on and so forth. To tap the local resources and to associate the natives in some ways with the governance of Local-Selfbodies such as Town Committee in 1869 and Municipality in 1876 were established by the Colonial authorities in the city. As the capital city of British province, Cuttack stood up to its civilisational stature and role as the prime determinant of the regional culture and tradition of modern Orissa, as it did in the historical past.

As in other spheres, economy of the colonial Cuttack was characterised by both change and continuity. In some spheres there were dogged persistence of the pre-colonial forms, in others the changes came but slowly, and in the rest they came with relative rapidity. Influenced by a complex of forces and factors such as the evolving stages of capitalism and the corresponding shifts in technology, ideology and

the praxis of capitalism; incorporation of the city into the metropolitan capitalism through the satellistic primate Calcutta and the consequent double subjection (to metropole: London and its satellistic primate: Calcutta) etc.; the colonial economy of Cuttack acquired a characteristic form of its own with lasting effects (negative and positive) for the posterity.

Cuttack city was subjected to high intensity economic changes as the headquarters of the province and the nodal centre of colonial economic operations in this region. Siphoning off the resources of the state assumed more vigorous and subtle forms. Gradually, fundamentals of the colonial economy started evolving after subverting the traditional economic forms. Economy of the city came to acquire the forms of a colonial city with several distinctive characteristics of its own. Broadly, the city during the period was like a 'rurban' township manifesting many pre-colonial and pre-industrial features of such as industry of craft types, the animal sources of energy etc. The economy of colonial Cuttack was a congeries of agrarian -mercantile-craft based industry with modern trappings in the forms of growth of modern trades, a handful of modern factories of small-scale type, a small number of modern mercantile class and the professional class etc. Occupational structure of the city manifested a

dilated growth of tertiary sector, a noticeable presence of primary sector and an atrophied secondary sector; thereby reflecting its true colonial character. The present day Cuttack city; be in aspects of morphology, polity, society economy and culture; draws significantly from its colonial past and bears its imprints. The city, to a considerable extent, is a by-product of colonialism and its engendered process of Urbanisation. Understanding the process of urbanisation at Cuttack holds key to understanding the process of urbanisation in Orissa in its several aspects such as planning, sanitation, health, neighbourhood, civic laws, local-self governance etc.

The city has undergone radical transformation during the post independent phase of its history. Although the city has been piped to second position, of late, due to significant growth of Bhubaneswar--- the capital city; yet it holds its position as the commercial and the cultural capital of Orissa.

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