

Maraguda Valley Excavations A Study of Socio-Religious Scenario

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Maraguda Valley (82.28'E and 20.43'N) nestles amidst the graceful spurs of Sunabeda Plateau in Nawapara District of Orissa. The spectrum of hill range is romantic as also the recent explorations and excavations of the exuberent city ruins with unprecedented socio-religious connotation of early Indian city civilization. Of late, the site has been identified as the capital city of South Kosala of hoary fame. Situated at the historical and cultural junction of Magadha, Madhya Pradesh, Deccan and Orissa, the city has been a place of absorbing interest and paramount historical importance through the ages. Recent archaeological operations have brought to light startling information about the prosperous classic metropolis. The famous Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang who visited the bustling city during the 1st half of the 7th century A.D. describes it as spreading over 40 li or 10-15 km. circuit area having excellent religious institutions, magnificent residential apartments, massive fortification and efflorescent palace complex, as the majestic imperial metropolis with acropolis and seat of cultural culmination of Kosala kingdom.

Historical Perspective :

Since the pre-historic days Maraguda valley has been the cradle of human activities

and achievements as testified by the discovery of numerous and diverse implement types of lithic cultures and evidence of domestication of animals and plants. During the Puranic period the region was known to have been part of Nisadha Kingdom of the epic fame. In the Mahabharata and Ramayana it was known as Kantara which later on finds mention in the historical record of Allahabad pillar inscription of Samudragupta. Mahabharata has not specified the location of Nisadha but has referred to its capital Giriprastha which seems to have been the Maraguda valley region. We find the area mentioned as Atabika territory in the rock edict of Ashok. In the Hatigumpha inscription of Kharavela this part was called Vidhyadharadhivasa and was famous as a military recruiting centre. In the Satavahana record, it finds mention as Mahabana. It formed part of Asmaka Mahajanapada in the early Buddhist list of Sodasamahajanapadas of Anguttaranikaya. In the Seravanijja Jataka the place was famous as a brisk trade centre. During the mythological period it was part of Dandakaranya, Daruvana and Tapovana. Many Saivacharya and sages of hoary fame hailed from Tapovana of this part. Subsequently the region came to be known as Kosala Kingdom in the early historical period. With the rise of the illustrious and mighty Nala rulers in the

3rd century A.D. Maraguda valley emerged as the classic capital city of Kosala and thrived for centuries with prosperity.

The valley was fortunate in having a wonderful landscape of hills and dales quite befitting to nourish a rich civilisation as revealed by recent excavations corroborated by Hiuen Tsang's travel account. Many scholars have identified the site as capital city of Kosala Kingdom referred to by Hiuen Tsang. Of late, painstaking researches have further testified its identification. Hiuen Tsang who extensively travelled in India from 630-645 A.D. narrates that from Kalinga, he went north-west by hills and woods for about 1800 li to reach Kosala country which was 6000 li in circuit, surrounded by marshes and mountains with its capital city 40 li or 10 kms. in circuit. The soil of the country was rich and fertile, the towns and villages were closed together, the people were prosperous, tall of stature and black in colour and the ruling king was a Kshatriya by birth. He further refers to Po-Lo-Mo-Lo-Ki-Li or Gandhurdan hill 300 li to the south-west of capital city. In the light of the reference of the Chinese pilgrim, Maraguda valley has been identified as the capital city of Kosala country. The Nala king Viruparaja was very probably ruling at the time of his visit.

Saiva Siddhanta and Tantricism :

Maraguda valley witnessed the outburst of great religious activities as Saivism and Saktism were known to have flourished greatly. Excavation carried on at Trisul mound has brought to light a gigantic Saiva religious complex. It was an unique monastery consisting of temples, residential apartments, recreation ground with parks and orchards, built in 5 tier projections. Saivacharyas were coming from far and wide and residing here to make

discourse on various aspects of religion. Saivism assumed new dimension with the introduction of Saktism into its fold. From a stone seal inscription of 5th century A.D. it was known that one Dhimatisvara was the chief Saivacharya or Chancellor of the monastery. Excavation have also revealed two early temple complex. In one, inside the garbhagriha was found enshrined a Saktipitha around which a pradakshinapatha had been built. In the sanctum of another brick temple we find the image of Goddess Durga in situ, four feet high. The deity is two armed and stands in alidha or archer's pose on a rampant lion. There is an inscription on the pedestal in the script of 5th century A.D. which reads "Mahesvari Bhavada". The discovery of a number of other Yogini images further indicates that Saivism proliferated at an astonishing tempo with marked bias to Saktism. The temple building activities of South Kosala began at Maraguda Valley at this juncture. It was also famous as the centre of Mattamayura or Saiva-Siddhanta school of Saivism. The amalgamation of Saivism with Saktism at Maraguda gave rise to the composite tantricism that had revolutionary reflections in art and tectonic forms and enchanting echo in social and cultural order. The concept of worship of Linga on Saktipitha was in vogue at this period. Purusa and Prakruti, Siva and Sakti were thus conceived as inseparable and worshipped together.

Artistic Excellence :

Apart from the cult icons we find many secular sculptural representations especially of the damsels pulsating with the sap of life and vigour. The pantheon gradually spread and adorned niches and facades of temples in the slender form of Alasakanya, Apsara and

Surasundari resplendent with all conceivable seductive postures and coquettish gesture rendering life to the artistic creations.

The art and architectural heritage of Maraguda valley is imposing. Keeping pace with the theoretical concept of the multiplication of gods and goddesses of the various pantheon, the artists and sculptors reflected them in the medium of stone carving and creations. The economic prosperity of the city offered a most conducive atmosphere for prolific attainment of the excellent artistic traditions of South Kosala. Among the secular sculptures, the figure of a dancing girl, hastily tying glistening ornaments-nupura, while the drummers and pipers waiting near-by is exceptionally interesting testifying to the prevalence of the folk dance diction in early city life. The discovery of another female figure holding in one hand a mirror and applying vermilion in the other, speaks of the popularity of the beauty culture in the life of the ancient city-dwellers.

With the imposing fortification, magnificent Ranimahal, spacious court hall and the gigantic Saiva Vihara Complex, Maraguda valley was known to have been a wonderful capital city of South Kosala. Shortly, the site is going to be submerged in the Upper Zonk Irrigation Project and therefore now there is a great need to preserve its variegated rich cultural past whose importance is inestimable representing achievements going back to dawn of civilisation.

Recent Explorations :

The author has made extensive exploration and now a large number of mounds and brick ruins have been identified over twenty km radius area and it seems Maraguda valley was one of the biggest cities of ancient

India like that of Hastinapur, Vaisali, Pataliputra, Taxila, Kalinganagar and Sisupalgarh, etc., every way being comparable to Greek, Roman or West Asian cities of 2000 years ago. Hiuen Tsang known to have visited the town in early part of 7th century A.D. and has left graphic account about it. Huge ruins have been discovered at various stages of decay throughout the valley. They need further survey, study, excavation and documentation. The extent of the brick and stone ruins thus gives the impression that Maraguda valley literally 'Dead Fort' was a brisk city of South Kosala in ancient time.

List of Site and Mound Complexes Explored :

1. Chandi Temple Mound, 2. Bairbhadi Complex, 3. Nakti Kachhar Complex, 4. Bag Kachhar Complex, 5. Girivarnala Valley, 6. Jhalap Complex, 7. Deol Dangar Complex, 8. Bhedomal Chatan Complex, 9. Chheliagarh Complex, 10. Hatigorra Complex, 11. Trisul Hill Complex, 12. Manikgarh Complex, 13. Godhas Valley Complex, 14. Jalki Complex, 15. Lorra Complex, 16. Daniraja Mound Complex, 17. Bepari Mahal Complex, 18. Raital Sagar Complex, 19. Ranimahal Complex, 20. Chingra Kachhar Citadel Complex, 21. Chandan Mahal Complex, 22. Bhunjia Mahal Complex, 23. Ranimunda Complex, 24. Patrani Mahal Complex, 25. Ghasiamunda Complex, 26. Tej Mahal Complex, 27. Tank and Temple Complex, 28. Ramparts and Moat Complex, 29. Bhandara Mahal Complex, 30. Bhim Mahal Complex, 31. Phulwari Mahal Complex, 32. Daku Kachhar Complex.

Excavations :

In the first phase, the archaeological spade work began at Daniraja temple mound

complex in Tikrapada and at Bepari Mahal in Maraguda village area. The initial results are far-reaching. A burnt brick temple of early Kosalian architectural pattern was dug out. It consists of a sanctum a vestibule, outer chamber and an entrance in vertical plan. Traces of the Pradakshinapatha around the sanctum and kakshasana projections on both sides of the middle chamber exposed. The operation thus revealed the nature of early Kosalian type of temple architecture. The Bepari Mahal, a 8 metre high mound at the foot of Chandi hill was excavated. A massive brick structure was unearthed. The idiom of construction indicated that perhaps it was a Watch Tower-cum-Treasure House. The foundation of the building was found at a depth of 6.5 metre. The diction and dimension of the structure is quite baffling and warrants further exposure and examination.

Gopal Mahal is a small mound on the upper bank of Raital Sagar. The excavation revealed a one room temple to have been built on a brick platform. It was known to have been the seat of Pataleswar Siva as is evident from phalus emblem together with the Yonipitha found in situ at a depth of 1 M.

In the next phase excavation work was carried on in Chingra Kachhar Complex. It is the citadel area of the ancient township on the right bank of zonk river. Over 2 kms. square area, brick ruins are found. The exploration enabled us to identify the contour of the inner township. A city in planned manner has grown here in hoary past in an improved pattern than the Harrapan and Indus Civilisation with habitations in alignment and with wells, roads, lanes, bylanes, thorough fares, circular hall, temple and boundary walls. Trial excavations were carried on at selected sites. A planned citadel area or inner town of Maraguda city

civilisation was thus exposed and its nature ascertained. Work is going on to ascertain further details such as cultural sequence and chronological horizon. The ramparts and fortification walls were also exposed. Traces of an internal moat is also met with. Thus the planning and layout of the fortified capital city of South Kosala kingdom was known from the operations corroborating the ancient text that speaks of the nature of Indian capital city construction strikingly the modicum of Hellenistic town planner viz. considerable space of level ground to design layout, backing or a lofty defensive hill, presence of stream found spick and span, the royal palace is gleamed against the rugged hills. The complex is now seen as rows of houses bereft of tectanic and tectiforms with kilometre of monotonous heaps of burnt bricks.

Excavations were carried on at another promising site called Chandan Mahal. A large rectangular temple-cum-residential complex was unearthed. The Sivalinga, Vrisabha emblem, Padukanala, Saktipitha made of granite were found. An epigraph carved out in a fine-grained stone has been discovered. It reads guna, lepa, dve. It seems to be fraction of a Tantric Dharani. In the Bag Kachhar area, a single chambered temple built on stone platform was also excavated. In order to ascertain the nature of the structure excavations were also carried on at Rani Mahal and the Darbar hall and corridors were exposed. The Trisul Hill was explored and cleaned for documentation of the temple and monastery complex. The Monastery Mahal locally called Tej Mahal was excavated in Maraguda area. It was an interesting squarish structure belonging to Saiva pantheon.

A trench in vertical plan over the Buddhist mound complex has been laid out and

excavation begun. It seems to have been a bastion. However, details are yet to be ascertained. Trial excavations have also been taken up at other sites such as Ranimunda site and Jhalap site, etc., in order to know the stratigraphy and soil deposit of Maraguda Valley. Excavation on top of Deoldongar has brought to light a massive circular stupa 3m. high made of burnt brick having octagonal internal plan. Smaller temples and residential appartment of monks and nuns found bedded all around the slope of the hill.

Houses of common man seems to have been made being supported by wood and bamboo post. Plaster mixed with husk and cowdung have been applied in the interwoven bamboo screen. Large number of Iron nails of various sizes used in these buildings have been recovered during excavations. People seems to have high civic and hygenic sense. The large public bath, Raital Sagar still exists in diminishing form.

List of Mounds, Sites and Structures Excavated :

Excavation of some important mounds has been carried on all over the valley and the following structures have been exposed. The following mounds are excavated :

Daniraja Mound No.1 on hilltop yielded a Siva Temple. At mound No.2 a Shakti temple has been excavated. Excavation at Bepari Mahal has brought to light a Watch Tower-cum-Treasure House. Excavation of Gopal Mahal yielded a sanctum of Pataleswar Siva on brick platform, Excavation of Chingra Kachhar Complex, and Chandan Mahal has yielded a huge temple-cum-residential complex, Trisul hill has been cleaned, partially excavated and documented.

Antiquities : Their socio-religious relevance:

Important antiquities are -

1. Sculptures, 2. Epigraph, 3. Mahendraditya Gold Coins, 4. Kalachuri Copper Coins, 5. Panchmarked Coins, 6. Saktipitha, 7. Sivalinga, 8. Carved Stone Slabs, 9. Iron Implements / iron nails and 10. Semi precious stone beads and fragmentary architectural members together with large variety of pottery such as redware, greyware, buffware, black and redware, and glazedware, etc., resembling arretine ware have been found out at Daniraja temple mound at the lowest level assignable to early Christian century, thus taking back the antiquity of the site to first century A.D. The shapes are mostly vases, goblets, cups, bowls, dishes, dishes on stand, handi, lamp stand, carrinated vessels and turfs. Interestingly, variety of hand made pottery have been found. The clay have been levigated with ricehusk and cowdung. The texture of the wheel turned pottery is fine. Study of these excavated antiquities speak of settlement pattern, technological achievement, agriculture, construction of houses, domestication of animal, fishing, hunting, iron technology, metallurgy, coinage, beauty and aesthetic culture and general life style of people, their pass time, food and drink and religious, social and economic system.

As gleaned from findings of Maraguda Valley, it was one of the flourshing cities of ancient India. There was excellent planning and layout of metropolis. There was citadel or residential area for the kings and his courtiers and outertown for the general public. Double fortifications, one around the royal residence and other around the entire township with Watch Tower and gateways at four cardinal points are found. Behind the exposed royal

palace Rani mahal, the extent of residence of nobles, courtiers and high military officials were explored. Each sub-complex seems to have had circular boundary walls. Places of worship, tanks and wells have also been found in the inner town area. For the queens, there were separate tanks as known from dry tanks that have been named after them. In the outertown, the general public were known to have been residing in planned sectors. This complex was also having separate places of worship, tanks and wells for drinking and irrigation purposes. Another salient feature of the township was the construction of religious complexes in hilly plateau area and monastic establishments in plain area. Interestingly, there was business complex for the traders and merchants and now the sector called Bepari Mahal seems to bear the reminiscence of the habitation of this class of people. Separate areas were known to have been earmarked for

the elephant forces and the cavalry. The place names Hatigorra and Ghasia Munda bear testimony to that. Maraguda was known to have been a thriving planned city of ancient South Kosala Kingdom with busy political, cultural and trade activities. People were leading prosperous and vibrant city life. The explored vestiges corroborated by the account of Hiuen Tsang are the mute but eloquent testimony to the heyday of this city. Thus with the exuberance of religious institutions, *satras* and monasteries, residential sectors for the rulers, ruled and the *sarai* for caravan traders, palaces and fortification, orchards and gardens, Maraguda was known to have been a wonderful city of opulence as the eternal seat of administration of South Kosala Kingdom.

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Excavations at Maraguda Valley of Nawapara District