

ORISSA AND SOUTH-EAST ASIA : RECENT PERSPECTIVE

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Indian peninsula was the cradle land of a rich civilisation for many centuries. This land was surrounded by the blue water of Indian Ocean in the south and gigantic Himalayas in the North. Time immemorial splendid Indian culture and ethos touch her neighbour particularly South-East Asian Countries. A stream of cultural intercourse led to the planting of age-old Indian civilisation and culture in the South-East Asian Countries. The study of ancient India shows that India had colonised culturally the entire globe. Foremost among the coloniser was Sage Agastya of Vedic age. He was the first to cross the Vindhya Mountain and spread vedic culture beyond the sea. Sage Agastya, a great missionary, his influence can be traced across the seas to the distant lands of Cambodia, Borneo, Java and Sumatra. In the Indo-Japanese hierarchy of Gods highest rank is given to sage Agastya¹. Mouryan Emperor Ashoka dated back in third century B. C. sent his missionaries Sona and Uttara to Subarnabhumi in order to preach the message of Dhamma², which shows Indian cultural contact with the South-East Asian Nation.

Expansion of Indian trader in the far east is corroborated by the Buddhist Jataka and the Kathasarit Sagara, which depict the frequent voyages of Indian trader to Subarna Bhumi.

Boundary of Orissa

In ancient period Orissa boundary underwent changes at different stages. During Pre-Ganga and Gajapati period its boundaries extended as far as Tamruk in Bengal in the North and in the South Risikulya River in Ganjam, whereas in East surrounded by the Ocean and in the west bounded by Sambalpur and Gondwana of present Chhatishgarh State. Later on during Gajapati and some indigenous ruler period its boundaries touched the Godabari River in present Andhra State. Its fluctuation depending on the ability of the ruler³.

There are various reason and circumstances which led to the Indian colonisation by the Orissan Mercantile Community in the South-East Asia may be ascertain in the following lines :-

1. Eastern coast of India from Ganges to the Cape Camorine was studded with numerous sea ports particularly Tamruk Port of Orissa which led to the flourished maritime activity.

2. Across the Bay of Bengal hinter land of Orissa inhabited by prosperous people full of spices and valuable mineral produce in plenty in the hinter land of Orissa. So the trader lure to establish trade link with these countries. Ptolmy in second century A. D. referred some trading marts in Malaya, Java and Sumatra⁴.

3. Many adventurous Oriya trader migrated these land and settle permanently.

People of Orissa have been spoken off as brave and adventurous in the Sanskrit Literature. Because of their maritime adventure it is yet to be ascertain when the people of Orissa began their maritime activity. Trade intercourse between Orissa and some Asiatic Countries is indicated by the Buddhist Jataka stories the story book Brihat-Katha and Koutilyas Arthasastra which referred India's maritime trade with Asiatic Countries. Through the sea port of Orissa, namely, Tamralipti, Paluna and Pithunda and few minor ports Chilatalo as mention by Huen-Tsang identified Kurma near Konark and Manikpatna⁵. Second Century Buddhist text Niddesa elaborated the life story of an adventurous and his various difficulties⁶.

From the above information we certainly underlines that the people of Orissa were initiator maritime activity with the people of viz. Java, Sumatra, Bali, Borneo or the present South-East Asia.

In Orissa the history of her maritime activity and cultural expansion had been completely forgotten, though some stories of sea voyages still cling to the folk lore of Orissa. Like the popular stories of Merchant (Sadhava) who went on sea voyages with their flotilla (Boitas) and returned home with treasures. There are also certain customs peculiar to Orissa, which appear to be reminiscent of ancient sea voyages. On the full-moon day of Kartika (October-November) while taking their bath in rivers or in tanks in the morning, all Oriyas men and women have even now the custom of floating miniature boats made of the barks of the plantain trees or of the paper with lamps burning inside them.

Activity with the South-East Asia

Indian established contact with the South-East Asia through the coast of Orissa due to its proximity to the eastern coast. Modern Takua-Pa was the first stage of the Oriya trader from this some followed all sea route along the coast then passed across the narrow isthmus of Kra and proceeded further deep by land to Siam, Cambodia and Annam.

Java—Java was a prosperous kingdom ruled by Purna Varman in 5th century A. D. In 8th century A. D. one powerful king Sailendra conquered Malaya Peninsula Java, Sumatra, Bali, Borneo. They were Buddhist and maintain diplomatic relation with Pala and Chola emperor of India. They were great builder famous Barabudur in Java is an undying monument⁷.

Burma & China—Oriya trader migrated Burma and settle there permanently with the growth of trade settlement multiplied. Oriya immigrant change even the name of some parts of Burma also. The Brahmanical elements was imported from Orissa. The ancient name attributed to old Prom is Srikshetra, so often mention in the mon records as Sikset or Srikset. Likewise the old name Pegu is Ussa which is but a form of Odra or Orissa which indicate Pegu was colonised by Oriya immigrant⁸. From the above information the earliest colonisation of the South-East Asia probably made from Orissa.

Dr. Nihar Ranjan Ray in his books “Brahmanical Gods in Burma” categorically elaborated the indebtedness of the Burmese art to the Orissan art. Maritime trade between the two brought innumerable monument to Burma from Orissa.

Far China was also not remain aloof from trade connection with Orissa. The Chinese emperor Te-tsang in 795 A. D. received an autographed manuscript of the Buddhist work Gondavyuha a part of Avatamasaha from the Bhoumakara King of Orissa⁹. Cultural expansion of Orissa in Burma and China can easily be imagined from the above observation.

In recent year Prof. K. S. Behera has edited a valuable book on maritime heritage of India, which deals mostly with the sea trade of Orissa. The sea trade and cultural links with the outside World, especially with South-East Asia. The author has mention in detail the ordinary and reversed clinker built boats found in coastal Orissa which shows the ancient maritime trade of Orissa with the South-East Asia.

A. P. Pattnaik in his book “The Early Voyages of the East”, the rise in maritime trade of the Kalinga in ancient India has elaborately discussed. In each chapter of the book the author has brought in many new facts, which so far had escaped the notice of scholar. In detail elaborated the Kalinga trade link with the South-East Asia.

J. P. Singh Deo a free lance Archaeologist has dealt a complete chapter, named “Trade & Commerce of Ancient Period in Western Orissa”. According to the same author the Sevivaya Jataka places a city of the Andhra on the river Telavaha which indentified as modern Tel in Kalahandi district of Orissa. The famous sea ports through which Kalinga carried on her overseas trade, namely, Tamralipti, Paluna and Pithunda were presumably connected with the arteries of roads within the hinterland of Orissa.

Conclusion

A steady trade intercourse between Orissa and South-East Asia, a new type of civilisation which is definitely of the Indian origin prevailed there. It is difficult to ascertain the exact share of the Orissa. But here it is worthwhile to underline some of the major influence of the Orissan people.

Hinduism and Buddhism, the two great religion of India flourished their Gods like Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva were being worshipped. Sacred text of Hinduism and Buddhism were also studied. At present Islam has predominated religion in South-East Asia. Despite the fact that, Islam is the main religion of the region. The Indian name and epithet were being used by the people in General. Example Like–present President of Indonesia Meghawati Sukanuputri although she a is Muslim but maintaining the Indian name. Garuda is the name of Indonesian Airlines. All Indian pantheon taken in South- East Asia as sacrosanct.

All those above information show a great legacy of Orissa maritime activity in South-East Asia. Culturally Orissa had its unique and remarkable contribution in the South-East Asia. It brought new ideas and achievements.

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