

# Exploring Maritime Silk Route and Ancient Odisha : Recent Researches

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According to Odishan folklore, the *Sadhavas* or merchants, from Kalinga who routinely embarked on voyages in the Bay of Bengal to South East Asia and Sri Lanka were from an affluent class, made prosperous by the commerce from beginning of historical period. There is a strong ecological and historical reason behind it. It is because, Odisha being a coastal state, its people ventured into sea voyage from its earliest period and the legacy is seen in every aspect of life style be it *Bali yatra* or *Khudurukuni Osha* or worship of Tara or representation of boat motif in art and literature and many more. Between c.500 BCE and c.350 CE, South Asia underwent most profound transformation. For the second time, the shift from village-based agrarian society to a complex urban civilization built around large integrated estates over a geographical area. This 'change' occurred within the context of Buddhism and changing socio-political and economic framework. The shift from village to state society and led to the establishment of a network internal and overseas trade routes and allowed rapid interregional distribution of ideas and artefacts through the growth of communication and the increased mobility of people<sup>1</sup>. The Buddhist scriptures (Pali texts) describe the society which reflects the presence of a very influential mercantile

community organised in guilds. It is evidently, a period of expanding material culture, with far and wide trade relations and populous towns and cities existed in the Ganga Valley<sup>2</sup>. Great roads with travellers' rest houses and occasional hospitals covered north India and connected distant parts of the country particularly under Mauryas in 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE. Trade flourished not only in the country itself but between India and foreign countries. There was a colony of Indian merchants living at Memphis in Egypt in about the fifth century BCE. as evident from the discovery of modelled heads of Indians. Probably, there was also trade between India and the islands of South-East Asia. Overseas trade involved shipping and it is clear that ships were built in India both for the inland waterways and for ocean traffic. There are references in the Epics for shipping duties being paid by 'merchants coming from far off places. The 'Milinda' (Milinda- first century CE, is the Greeco -Bactrian king of North India who became an ardent Buddhist), refers that : 'As a ship owner who has become wealthy by constantly levying freight in some sea-port towns will be able to traverse the high seas, and go to Vanga (Bengal) or Takkola, or China or Sovira, or Surat or Alexandria or the Coromandel which also included the Kalinga coast or further India, or any other

place where ships congregate.<sup>3</sup> Infact, recently in the year 2020, a Kushan gold coin of Huviska of Naana series is retrieved from Radhanagar Buddhist Excavated site which proves this fact.

It is a fact that Buddhism is the religion that travelled in the Silk Routes connecting China and Central Asia in Pamir, Hindukush and beyond by Sea through the ports of Eastern India to the Southeast Asia from the beginning of historical period and we have the material remains that comes from every part of Indo-China and Indo-Asia. Buddhism played a vital role up to 10<sup>th</sup> century CE for connecting cultures and there was an intimate encounter particularly in the east coast for which we are getting early Buddhist sites and settlements on the coast. The Buddhist and Port sites stretching from lower Ganga, precisely from Tamruk through Odisha costal sites Jayrampur, Ayodhya, Solampur, Radhanagar, Lalitgiri, Udaygiri, Dhauli, Aragarh, Jaugarh, Palur, Manikapatana, Kalingapatnam, Thotlakonda, Bhavikonda, Bojjannakonda and Gitupalli up to Godavari river. Some of the sites like Tamruk or Tamralipti, Palur, Brahmavana, Jaugada, Kalingapatnam, Thotlakonda were served as port settlements<sup>3b</sup> (Patnaik, 2021). This aspect has been studied by Odishan Institute of Maritime and South East Asian Studies, in the recent years and more work is under progress.

The Southeast Asian countries particularly Sumatra (Srivijaya), Java, Bali, Khemars of Angkor (Cambodia) and the empires of Burma (Myanmar) had their deep penetration into the Eastern Indian States like, Bihar, West Bengal, Odisha, Andhra and Tamil Nadu. Many scholars in the past have shed light on this aspect but none have focused concomitantly taking archaeological evidences into account. More and

more new research from both the areas are coming up, particularly, from archaeological field work in the recent times. From the dry zone of Burma to the snow covered mountains of the Indonesian province of Papua and from the rolling pastoral grasslands of north-western Vietnam to the steep terraced rice lands of the Philippine Islands, Southeast Asia is a conglomeration of geographical and agricultural contrasts. The story of settlements, the evolution of civilization and the synchronized religious, social activities had indelible imprints on the aspects from early times. The spread of Indian cultural elements in various parts of Asia reveals the extensive strong connectivity that existed in the historical period. At least, from the beginning of Common Era, we have good evidence of the spread of Indian cultural and religious influences to Southeast Asia, first Buddhism and from fourth or fifth centuries Brahmanical-Hinduism. There is evidence of an increasing use of Indian Hindu and Buddhist religious ideas, monuments and icons and Indian scripts and languages which could be very well seen from the standing monuments of Cambodia such as Beyon Temple, Angokar Wat etc.

Odisha in ancient times had 600 kms long coastline to the west of Bay of Bengal. Some historians have suggested that the Kalinga War of 261 BCE vanquished the independent kingdom of Kalinga (ancient Odisha) on Bay of Bengal coast, led a sizable exodus of the surviving Kalinga people to the eastern lands across sea. Although, the authenticity of this exodus is still to be confirmed historically but there is a greater evidence of commercial voyages and emigration of Kalinga people, whose point of origin includes what is today's Odisha as well as northern Andhra Pradesh (part of ancient Kalinga), to Southeast Asia, and their cultural and economic presence

especially in what are today Burma (Myanmar), Malaysia (where they are known as 'klings'), Cambodia and Indonesia (Sumatra, Java, Bali and Borneo)<sup>4</sup>. The Indian archipelago established its maritime supremacy over the world trade since time immemorial. The Bay of Bengal has been, historically, an important part of the eastern Indian Ocean. It is spread over 2,172,000 square kilometers, making it the largest bay in the world. Within this dynamic maritime space, fundamental techno-cultural processes are observed: movement of ethnolinguistic communities, opening of land-sea routes and ports, innovations in boat building and navigational technologies, spread of botanical cultivars, and refining of crafting and artistic skills. The engagements between the Indic world and the Southeast Asian realm are critical to understanding the formation of the Bay of Bengal Interaction Sphere (BBIS). The BBIS comprises the eastern part of the Indian Subcontinent (the country of Sri Lanka, the Indian states of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, West Bengal; and the country of Bangladesh) and the western part of Southeast Asia (Myanmar, coastal Thailand, coastal Malaysia, and the Indonesian island of Sumatra adjoining the Andaman Sea). The Andaman and Nicobar Island chain, which are spread in a north-south axis in the Bay of Bengal, overlook the passage through the Malacca Straits to the South China Sea. For purposes of analysis, the Andaman Sea is taken as a contiguous extension of the Bay of Bengal and treated here as one with the bay<sup>5</sup>.

Traders and shippers from both sides were involved, and we find groups of traders from particular places would reappear annually at the ports with which regular relations had been built up and would reside there during the trading season. This historical phenomenon has been

studied by many scholars who are of opinions that between four to fourteenth centuries, Indian culture, religion and political ideas played a significant role in the politico-cultural landscape of South East Asia. Kulke remarks that Indian culture did not reach Southeast Asia through any moment of 'transplantation', but through a continuous and complex set of networks of relations within and between the regions, by mutual process which linked both sides of the Bay of Bengal<sup>6</sup>. Joan Crawford (1783-1868), a scholar of his time who served at Penang and acquired extensive knowledge of Java and Bali. He has stated that the first Indian colony was set up in Java in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE and that the Javanese considered Kalinga 'as the country from which the civility, law and religion of India were introduced among them (Crawford 1820 :337). The major studies by R.C. Majumadar (1927, 1933, 1934) on Champa, the Sailendras and the Cholas provided a basis for his later works (1937-8) which examined the overall Indic influences on Southeast Asia, including maritime links. Other Indian scholars who have worked on this area included B.C. Chhabra (1935,1956) and H.B. Sarkar (1971,1986)<sup>7</sup>. The later works G.Coeds, (1956, 1957, 1964), Wheathly (1961 and1975) Guy (1993-4), Ray (1996, 1999, 2003, 2013)<sup>8</sup>, Behera (1999, 2007), Kulke (2001, 2010), Patra (2013) and some others. The erudite scholars have focused on the different aspects of the India and Indonesian interaction. But very few works have done on Kalingan context and not much has done on field study as required at this hour. Now, many new sites have been excavated, many art motifs and inscriptions have been documented and good number of historical sites have been explored which need comparative study and interpretation by scholars of Indonesia as well as of Odisha<sup>9</sup>.

The religious networks of the Buddhist, Hindu, Islamic Jewish and Parsee faiths point to the deep-rooted interactions in the ancient and medieval Indian Ocean region. The spread of Buddhism across Asia has been studied mainly from a perspective focusing on the transmission through the overland routes popularly known as “Silk Roads” and emphasizing Central Asia as an important transit corridor and contact zone between South and East Asia. However, recent scholarship has increasingly recognized the significant role played by the sea routes or maritime “Silk Roads” in shaping pre-modern intra-Asian connectivity<sup>10</sup>. This has paved the way for an appreciation of the important contribution of the southern rim of Asia, especially Eastern and Southern India, Sri Lanka, and Southeast Asia to the genesis, transformation and circulation of various forms of Buddhism. I was in Sri Lanka for a conference in mid-September 2013 and November 2018 at Bangkok (Thailand) and SiamReap (Cambodia) and on October 2019 at Borobudur and Prambanan (Yogyakarta, Java). I was interested for Angkor Wat and visited the site of Beyon and complex of Angkor Watt and Borobudur. The observations, I made at Bangkok, Siam (*Shyama Desha* in Odia) and Yogyakarta was heart-touching and recalled the history what has been written so far, as the scholars in the past have pointed out the cultural interactions of ancient Odisha with these countries. Scholars opine that between fourth to fourteenth centuries, Indian culture, religion and political ideas played a significant role in the politico-cultural landscape of Southeast Asia. "When civilizations meet, they do not necessarily clash but can cohabit and cooperate. They do not compete but can learn from each other. This is true when we look into the standing monuments, ritual practices, social beliefs, and in the material cultures of both the

regions”. It is appropriate to quote Manguin that while art and architecture, along with inscriptions, were central to the earlier understanding and debate over Indianization, including the rejection of the ‘Indian colonization’ thesis, a newer set of insights that confirms the localization perspective comes from archaeology. The recent archaeological findings confirm the existence of extensive early trade links between India and Southeast Asia, especially trade in artifacts. This has given rise to the view not only that Southeast Asia had come into contact with India for several centuries, “a millennium-long phase of exchange” before the hitherto accepted beginning of Indianization, between the third and fifth centuries CE, but also that in this process, Southeast Asians may have had even greater agency than critics of the conventional Indianization thesis had assumed<sup>11</sup>.

However, recently Milton Osborne in his 12<sup>th</sup> Edition book *Southeast Asia* has clarified a number of issues relating to general historical developments in the Southeast Asian countries particularly in Post-Second World War. He argued that the countries of Southeast Asia were neither ‘little Indians nor ‘little Chinas’. Earlier, it was the conception that Southeast Asia is an area shaped by external cultural values, most particularly those of India and China, but modern scholars have stressed to the strength and importance of indigenous cultural traditions. The importance of Indian religious concepts is recognized in a broad area of Southeast Asia. But the essential features of Indian artistic and architectural concepts played an important part in the development of South-east Asian Art<sup>12</sup>.

Undeniably, the overland and maritime “Silk Roads” were interlinked and complementary, forming what has been called a

“great circle of Buddhism.” At the same time, the combined archaeological and textual evidence increasingly points to a predominant role of the maritime Silk Roads in facilitating the mobility of Buddhist agents, artifacts, texts and ideas over a long distances from the early centuries of the first millennium CE, if not earlier, as testified by the presence of Sri Lankan and Southeast Asian toponyms in the *Mahānidessa* and some Jātakas dating to the late third–first centuries BCE.<sup>13</sup>

The connection between Buddhism and trade, including that to Southeast Asia, is not really casual. Rather, we can see in the early Common Era, a mutually supportive system. At the ideological level, Buddhism encouraged lay devotees to accumulate wealth by trade; at social level donations to Buddhist monasteries gave status to traders, and at the professional level, Buddhist monasteries were repositories of knowledge and essential skills, such as writing. Not all traders were Buddhist, though many wealthy ones were<sup>14</sup>. Sea travel was the fastest, most economical and safest way to move people and goods in the ancient world. By the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE, the seasonal monsoon winds were fully exploited by maritime traders plying the routes connecting the ports in the Mediterranean Sea with those along the coastal and insular areas of South, Southeast and East Asia. The sea was a connecting factor in Asian history since time immemorial. Cutting across the natural boundaries and barriers of continental topography, sea-based routes formed a network of conduits that led to the formation of a medieval global Buddhist Asia. By the middle of the 7<sup>th</sup> century CE, factors such as a radical expansion of commercial maritime routes connecting South with East Asia, as well as the gradual decline of Buddhism and Buddhist exchanges in Central Asia, following the Muslim

conquest of Trans-Oxiana and other socio-political contingencies, contributed significantly to the sea-based exchange not only of mercantile goods but also of Buddhist beliefs and ritual practices. Unlike the Central Asian networks, the interlocking maritime networks of Buddhism survived well past the 13<sup>th</sup> century into the 19<sup>th</sup> century, for instance, the Bay of Bengal circuit connecting Sri Lanka to Myanmar and Thailand, and the China Sea circuit linking China to Southeast Asia, Korea, and Japan. It could well be seen in Odishan context, where monks and merchants and even princess went to distant islands from East Coast to distribute and popularize Buddhist texts in particular and Buddhism in general. Perhaps, this is the reason why, we get some reflections of Odishan culture in the monuments of Angkor and Bayon temple in Cambodia, Borobudur and Prambanan in Java, Polonnaruwa and Kandy in Sri Lanka, She-hwan Dogaba in Myanmar, Craft tradition of Philippines and cultural traditions of Thailand, Malaysia and Bali even in China but not yet explored systematically. It may be mentioned that Buddhism went from India, but ‘developed in unique ways in Southeast Asia’<sup>15</sup>. This may be the reason, why Buddhism flourished in Southeast Asia while in India, the religion withered. We need to focus our study to unfold the historical truth which require extensive documentation and intensive research.

As suggested, the existence of monasteries near major commercial nodes and trading routes, the establishment of trade networks may have facilitated the spread of Buddhism as well as ensured its support by merchant communities. Buddhist sites in the Western Deccan, the Konkan coast, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, and Tamil Nadu were



Eastern India, the Bhauma-Karas in Odisha, the Early Second Lambakannas in Sri Lanka, the Sailendras in Java and Sumatra, and the Tangs in China. In some cases, the maritime passages of monks were directly sponsored by kings and doubled as diplomatic missions, involving large travel parties including dignitaries and military exponents<sup>19</sup>.

It is evident from *Buddhagat* (Burmese sacred scripture) that a steady commercial intercourse was cultivated with Burma by the Buddhist merchants of Kalinga, which soon led to missionary undertakings for the propagation of their religion, and afterwards to the assumption of political supremacy in the land. Kalinga was so prominent in the maritime trade that the great poet Kalidas referred in the *Raghuvamsa* to the king of Kalinga as *Mahodadhipati*, the conqueror of sea<sup>20</sup>. The text *Aryamanjusrimulakalpa* of Mahayana Buddhism refers that all islands of Kalinga sea were dominated by ships of Kalinga. R. Thaper mentions that Kalinga, on the coast of eastern India was in some way a counterpart to the north-west, as the maritime trade going southwards along the eastern coast of India would have to pass through it<sup>21</sup>. With discovery of so many monastic sites on this coast from Tamralipti through Odishan coast Radhanagar, Langudi, Lalitgiri, Udayagiri, Aragarh and Andhra coast sites Salihundam, Kalingapatna, Ramatirtham, Thatlakonda, Bhavikonda, upto Guntupali and Nagarjunakonda<sup>22</sup> which all are inter-connected and may be appropriately termed as *Prubiyapatha*. This route was the main spine in joining the whole of North and South India as well as Southeast Asia atleast from first century to throughout the history and was not discussed so far where Kalinga played a major role.

Ptolemy in his *Geography of Ancient India* mentions, the names of various ports of Kalinga like Palura (Palur area) Nanigania (Puri), Katikardama (Cuttack), Kannagara (Konark), Kosamba (Pipili) or Balasore<sup>23</sup>. But Ptolemy did not refer to the other ports of Kalinga like Tamralipti, Manikapatana, Che-li-Talo, Kalingapatnam where we get all archaeological evidences of port town which also played a dominant role in maritime history of Odisha from pre-Common Era. The economic factor and the profit of the overseas trade were the main factor for the earliest maritime activities of the people of Kalinga. In support of this N. Dutt writes “The main cause of expansion of Indian culture was commercial enterprise. There were Indian seamen and traders, who ventured into the sea in large boats to procure gold by selling their goods in foreign countries. This search for gold led the Indians to use the name Suvarnabhumi or Suvarnavipa indiscriminately—the Silver land and gold land of Ptolemy”. Further, he also says that the trade and commercial activities were carried on not only from the Indian side but were reciprocal<sup>24</sup>. The wealth of Southeast Asia (more particularly Burma and Indonesia) was an attraction for the Indians. This is illustrated by the Sanskrit names that were given to these countries: Suvarnabhumi, land of gold; Suvarnavipa, island of gold; Karpuradvipa, island of camphor etc. These toponyms, as well as the Buddhist Jatakas which described Indian princes going to the east to make their fortune attest to Indian interest in Southeast Asia as a source of gold<sup>25</sup>.

The ports of Kalinga had spread different sea routes to different lands for seaborne commerce. The mariners continued to have commercial, socio-cultural and political relations with South East Asian countries like Java,

Sumatra, Bali, Borneo, China, Burma, Cambodia, Malaya and Thailand and also Sri Lanka. R.D. Banerjee emphasizes that the term, "Kalinga was used extensively in the Malay peninsula denote a man going there from any part of India"<sup>26</sup>. Probably, every Indian seemed to them as a Kalingaite, irrespective of the province from where he had come. Scholars have accepted that in addition to trade, a potent motivating factor in this expansion of network from the Indian Sub-continent was Buddhism<sup>27</sup>.

### Eastern Trade Route : Purbiyapatha

The mariners of Kalinga possessed sound knowledge of navigation. They were aware of current pattern, wind direction and depth of different parts of the Bay of Bengal. The sailors

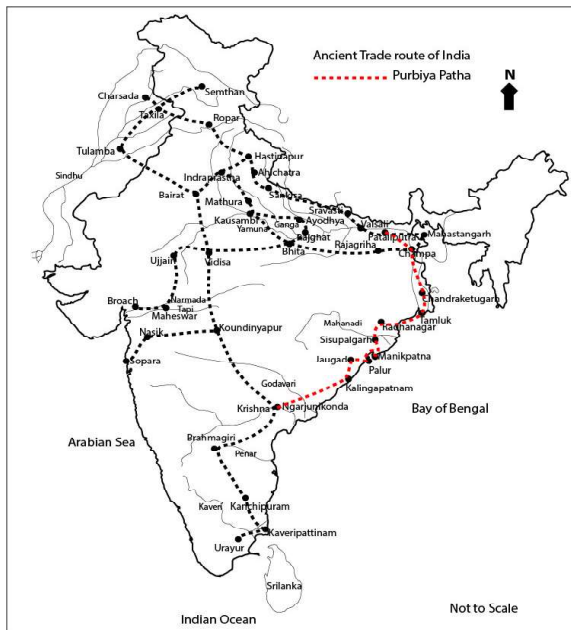


Fig.3. Trade Route in East Coast

used to sail to South East Asian countries for trade when the wind used to blow from Northeast direction and favorable current pattern. During south west monsoon the wind and the current used

to flow towards north and the sailors used to return back from Southeast Asian Countries.

The usefulness of wind and current pattern to the sailors has been scientifically proved. The use of Sun, Moon and Stars were known to them for open sea navigation. In fact, the voyages were partly coastal running south along the east coast till it reaches north of Sri Lanka and then turned east across southern Bay of Bengal to Sumatra and then to Java and Bali. The leading port in Northern Jaffna Peninsula in Sri Lanka is known as KalinganTurai<sup>28</sup> and hence the *Purbiyapatha* comes to forefront and this historical phenomenon involving both land and sea routes has to be recognized with all archaeological sites on the coast connecting nations and connecting culture.



Fig.4. *Purbiyapatha*: Trade route in East Coast connecting North and South India and Southeast Asia.

In ancient Odisha, there were two types of trading ships, known as common ships and special ships, with the common ships in turn divided into ten categories, and the special ships into two: high and wide ships and long and wide ships. The ships were 8 to 80 meters long, 5 to 25 meters wide, and 3 to 27 meters high. Rules and regulations regarding construction of ships were recorded in the Sanskrit *Yuktikalpataru*<sup>29</sup>.



This Sanskrit literature records that king Bhoja built many ships with local wood. The recovery of many wood working adzes and other artifacts from Chilika Lake area shows that this region was popular for boat-building activities which still continues at places like Arakhakuda, Pathra, Gourganapatna etc<sup>30</sup>. The remains of a ship excavated at Tante, near Yangon is thought to have belonged to Kalingan traders. The *Buddhaghat*, the Sacred Scripture of Burma describes trade with Buddhist merchants of Kalinga, leading to missionaries coming to propagate the faith, and then to political domination of parts of coastal Burma by Kalinga during the 4<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> centuries CE. Coins with Hindu symbols have been found in Pegu which confirms this contact<sup>31</sup>.

Further, ancient Odisha was the epicenter of the inland and foreign trade, being a coastal region that spread from the river lower Ganges to at least up to the Godavari river. It was and prosperous with riverine ports crisscross from west to east and east and its free and flexible accesses to the *Kalinga Sagar* which was re-designed later as Bay of Bengal. The geographical position of Kalinga with several rivers, shelter ports, provided an ideal environment for sea voyages. The rivers like the Mahanadi, the Tel, the Suvernarekha, the Baitarani, the Brahmani, the Rishikulya, the Vamsadhara and the Godavari etc., embark for distant lands provided access to the interior, where precious-stones were found, and their deltas provided natural harbours. It has been observed that the agrarian and industrial products of Kalinga like rice, barley, wheat, incense, timber, ivory, textiles, conch shells, stone products, elephants were mainly exported to Southeast Asian countries. The items of export may be divided into three categories i.e., plant

products, animal products and mineral products. But here, it was mostly plant and mineral products were the items of export. The cloth of Kalinga was considered as high value and used by royal persons. It was observed that certain metals such as silver and copper were probably imported in to Kalinga from the mines of Ceylon and spices like clove, spikenard imported from Java<sup>32</sup>.

The *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* (first century CE) of an unknown author besides mentioning the Kalingan port of Dosarene, has referred to the trade relation between Kalinga and the Roman World. The author mentions Dosarene as producing the best type of ivory known as Dosarenic<sup>33</sup>. Ptolemy, the Greek Geographer during the second century CE. referred to another famous port of Kalinga named Palur from where ships disembarked directly across the Bay of Bengal to the Southeast Asian countries<sup>34</sup>. The discovery of Rouletted Ware from Sisupalgarh, Radhanagar of Odisha and Tamluk in the Midnapore district of modern West Bengal is very significant in this regard. The Rouletted Ware was first identified and dated by Wheeler at Arikamedu is one of the parameters for trade<sup>35</sup>. These were probably brought into Odisha by the Roman merchants. Rouletted Ware is often regarded as important evidence of Indo-Roman trade. Influenced by the Hellenistic tradition of impressed decoration, rouletting is usually produced by the continuous rolling motion of a toothed-wheel, called roulette, when it is held against the revolving clay vessel. It is believed that the finer varieties of Rouletted Ware were imported from Roman Empire, while the coarser varieties were made in India. It may be mentioned that Roman bullae's have been discovered at Sisupalgarh and Radhanagar and Roman coins at Biratgarh and Bamanghati in

Mayurbhanj district, which suggests trade link of Kalinga with the Roman empire<sup>36</sup>. Besides, a gold coin bearing Graeco-Roman motif together with pottery fragments and terracotta figures of the Roman origin have been also discovered from Tamruk<sup>37</sup>, the site of ancient Tamralipti port which was in operation and part of Odisha till 15<sup>th</sup> century CE.<sup>38</sup>

It is believed that the famous Bali Yatra festival of Odisha is observed every year to commemorate the first voyage of Kalingan people to Bali. From the history of Sailodbhava dynasty of Odisha, it is known that king Madhavaraja was banished to Bali along with 20,000 soldiers in 6<sup>th</sup> century CE. He established his kingdom in Bali and later on spread his influence to other territories by conquest and trade activities. It is believed that, since then, large scale seafaring activities to Bali began. The dance forms of Bali have much connection with Mahabharata and Ramayana themes of Odishan origin. Legong dance with Balinese ballet, Ketchak or Monkey dance has much similarity with Odishan tribal dance forms. The famous Ubud paintings on Balinese life reflects echo of Odishan tribal life pattern. While, god of the forest seeing through the whistling leaves are excellent and reminiscent of tribal life in hills and dales of Odisha. The Sambalpur tie-and-die and weaving traditions of Odisha have also left imprints in Balinese textile traditions. I.G.P. Phalgunadi, a scholar of Bali has observed semblance in food habit, religious practices and vocabulary in Balinese and Odishan life style<sup>39</sup>. In Bali like Odia food habit, the people are fond of leaves of *saga* especially the tender leaves of the drum-stick tree, known to us as *Sajana* so also use of mashed coconut and cooked banana-flowers. Even *Manda* and *Enduripitha* made of rice-flour are being prepared by the Balinese people like that of Odia people.

As is shown by textual, epigraphic, and art historical materials, including icons, ritual *dharanis*, manuscripts, and monuments, Buddhist cults, imageries, and ritual technologies flourished across the vast swathe of littoral island, and hinterland territory that can be conceptualized as the socio-spatial grouping of “Maritime Asia.” Buddhist vestiges recovered from the Indian Sub-continent littorals, Sri Lanka, the Maldives Islands, peninsular and coastal mainland Southeast Asia, and what are now called the Indonesian Archipelago and the Philippine islands, speak in favor of the existence of pervasive and sustained multi-directional Buddhist exchanges among interconnected nodes linking South Asia and the Indian Ocean to China, Korea, and Japan through the maritime routes<sup>40</sup>.

Recent excavations and explorations have brought to light many port sites of Odisha. Manikapatna, an early historical port site on the estuary of Chilika Lake and Bay of Bengal continued to exist up to 14<sup>th</sup> century. The archaeological findings that include coins of Sahasramalla as well as Chinese celadon and porcelain, Burmese pottery, ivory, and a number of such other materials makes us understand about the early maritime interactions<sup>41</sup>. Another port-site of Chillika region is Gaurangapatna, with its early historical antiquity, yielded Persian turquoise glazed ware of 9<sup>th</sup>- 11<sup>th</sup> century CE.<sup>42</sup> To further north, near Konark, was excavated the port-site of Khalakatapatana, which also yielded Chinese celadon, porcelain as well as Middle Eastern pottery of 9<sup>th</sup>- 10<sup>th</sup> century CE<sup>43</sup>. Potagarh, another medieval port site to the south, again brought out two Chinese copper coins of late Tsong period. Exploration in the coastal tract below the Rushikulya river, revealed shreds of Chinese Celadon and so also the port site

Kalingapatanam, Salihundam and Thatlakonda (Vishskhapatnam) in further south on the ambit of ancient Kalinga yielded number of inscriptions, rouletted ware, knobbed Ware that indicates maritime intercourse of Southeast India and South and Southeast Asia.<sup>44</sup> However, towards 1014 CE, the Chola armies ransacked the eastern Chalukya, Kalinga, (Odisha) and Pala kingdom reaching the Ganges River. After victory over the coastal kingdoms and devastating their naval power, the Chola's attacked on Srivijaya kingdom. South Indian guilds become increasingly powerful and encroached on the commercial domain of Srivijaya. It is recorded that the first Chola embassy to China occurred in 1015 CE<sup>45</sup>. It is also evident that there were a triangular trade network between Kalinga, Siam and Java around 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> century CE and the kings of these countries had to periodically mount expeditions to put down Malaya and Bugi pirates operating in the Strait of Malacca in the Maritime Southeast Asia. The journey of Maritime trade and cultural interactions resulted in intimate encounters throughout the history of Odisha which is still reflected in the form of folk tales, traditions and rituals and Bali-yatra being celebrated in the sand bed of Mahanadi in Cuttack is one of them. The Arab writers have left behind volumes of accounts on Indo-Southeast Asian Maritime trade. Some of them visited these islands were Abu Dulaf Misar (940 CE), Masudi (943CE), and Iban Batuta (1225-54 CE). Subsequently again there were fierce contention between Arabian sailors, Portuguese, Dutch, French and English ships to become dominant in the Bay of Bengal and the internal riverine and coastal trade was thriving up to last part of 19<sup>th</sup> century. The remnants still visible in Ganjam Fort (Potagarh), Chandbali, Hukitola, Narendrapur, and Balasore coast which all need to be documented and interpreted

carefully to unravel the Maritime Past of East Coast.

The folklores and popular sayings about the sea voyages of the merchants of ancient Odisha, popularly known as *Sadhabas* in the past, are interesting chapters in the history of Odisha. The Odia *Mahabharata* of Sarala Das, *Prastaba Sindhu* of Dinakrishna and many other Odia literary texts of the late medieval period provide unmistakable evidence on the maritime trade and the ship building activities in those days. Numerous references to sea-voyages, including a mention about *Suvarna Boita* by Sarala Das, can be found in the stories and tales that have come down to us from antiquity.

The month of Kartika was favorable for sea voyage to the South East Asia with the onset of North Eastern Monsoon over Odisha. So in those days, the sailing ships, called *Boita*, used to start their journey within days after Diwali and return by the end of the month of Chaitra. The women folk of the *Sadhabas* were giving them an emotional and warm send off before they ventured in to the sea. This ceremony was called *Boita Bandana*. The ritualistic custom is even today observed as Bali Jatra on the Purnima (full moon day) of Kartika by floating small boats made of cork, colored paper and banana barks in the rivers and water bodies. At Chandrabhaga also this is celebrated with much pomp and ceremony on the beach. On Baliyatra festival of Kartika Purnima an Odia lyric is usually recited i.e. '*Aa-Ka-Ma-Bai, Pana-Gua- Thoi*'. Aa-Ka-Ma-Bai connotes the month of Asadha, Kartika, Margasira and Baisakha of Odia calendar. While the period from Asadha to Kartika (July-September) was the season of outgoing voyage and Magha to Baisakha was considered to be

the season of return voyage. Apart from other places of Odisha, Baliyatra is celebrated with much pomp and grandeur in the historic city of Cuttack for seven days from Kartika Purnima. However, the material evidences together with the traditions and rituals are the best evidence to showcase the rich tradition of Odisha which akin to the similar traditions still prevailed in Thailand and Bali. The interesting celebration of Kartika full moon day in the city Bangkok which I have witnessed in the year 2018 is that they celebrate with lighting the lamp in the night before the day of Kartika purnima celebration in Odisha which is known as Loyi Khartung. The legend and tradition associated with festival is that the Thai people is still waiting to welcome the princess who was missing in the Saphaya river. The princess happened to be from Kalinga. There is very interesting story still echoed in Thailand in relation to maritime link with Kalinga. More documentation and field research is the need of the day.

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