

# Maritime Heritage of Orissa

*Prof. Atul Kumar Pradhan*

Orissa is famous for her trade and commerce in ancient times. Orissa's maritime contacts with outside world are traceable to the Early Historic Period. But archaeological exploitation in marine coast of Orissa could be dated back to the Neolithic and Chalcolithic periods. It is said that the prosperity of ancient Orissa was due to its maritime trade. The people of Orissa or Kalinga were known for their bravery and daring ventures. So in Indonesia the people of this land were known as '*Kalinga Sahasika*'. The coastline of Orissa was dotted with several sea ports, which were main centers of life of the people in commercial, cultural and political fields. With these rich ports and well equipped ships, Kalinga dominated in the sphere of maritime trade. So Orissa became very prosperous because of these maritime activities. So this economic prosperity seems to have been the principal cause of Kalinga War. Both literary and archaeological sources refer to inland and overseas trade of early Orissa. The numismatic sources throw light on the well established trade and economy of ancient Orissa.

From Mahabharat, it is known that Kalinga had communications with other parts of India through inlands as well as water routes. It states that the river Baitarani passed through the land of Kalinga. It also mentions that the Pandavas reached Kalinga by travelling on the

sea shore from the Gangasagarasangama. Kalidas in his '*Raghuvamsa*' referred to the king of Kalinga as 'the Lord of the Sea or Mahodadhipati'. The *Aryamanjusrimulakalpa*, a Buddhist text refers to all islands in the Kalinga Sea. Vidyarnava describes Chilika lake as 'a sea of the thousand boats'. Besides many Sanskrit works of Oriya poets mention about Orissan maritime traditions. The *Ratnavali* refers to South Kosala and the plight of a Ceylonese princess as a result of shipwreck probably on the coast of Orissa.

The east coast of Orissa came in the maritime map of India well before the time of the Buddha. The early Buddhist source *Anguttaranikaya* states that Tapussa and Bhallika, two merchants of Utkal met Buddha at Urubella forest on the last day of his enlightenment. Buddha received cakes from them. Ultimately, Buddha gave them his hair which was afterwards worshipped by these merchants in their native town called Asitanagara. So it is said that Tapussa and Bhallika are the first lay disciples of Buddha. With the rise of Buddhism, the trading networks between Orissa and South East Asia were strengthened. So this continuous trade contacts continued during post-Mauryan and early medieval period of Bhaumakaras. From an inscription of Bhaumakara dynasty, the term '*Samudra kara bandha*' is mentioned. So it is

a tax related to ocean which has clearly defined the trade system of Orissa during that period.

From a Chinese source, it is known that a scholar of Orissa named Subhakara Simha visited the court of Chinese emperor Husang-Tsang and he translated the Maha-Vairochana Sutra into Chinese. The Chinese pilgrim Huen-Tsang who visited Orissa in the 7th C.A.D., mentions about an important port Che-li-ta-lo. A Buddhist monk named Prajna who had settled in the monastery of the king of Odra went to China in 795 A.D. He carried a Buddhist manuscript autographed by the king of Wu-cha (Orissa) from the Chinese emperor Te-Tsang. This Orissan king is generally identified as Bhaumakara monarch Sivakara. The Hatigumpha inscription of Kharavela states that various people with jewels and precious stones were sent by the Pandyan king to Kharavela's capital. Many other Chinese scholars also refer to Kalinga's sea-going vessels and their trade system.

The archaeological excavations and explorations have revealed about trade items exported through various ports of Orissa. These include various potteries, beads, medallions, clay bulae etc. Besides these, rouletted ware, knobbed vassels, glass beads, semi-precious stone beads, ivory etc. are discovered. The rouletted ware is an important evidence for Indo-Roman trade, which was discovered from Sisupalgarh, Manikapatna and Radha Nagar. This ware is also found in Java, Bali, Srilanka and some parts of Bangladesh. Glass bead manufacturing is reported from Thailand, Malaysia, Bali and Vietnam. But such items are also found from Sisupalgarh and Manikapatna. Semi-precious stone beads of South East Asia are also discovered from Sisupalgarh. The Buddhist ritualistic items like knobbed vessels are also found both in Orissa and Thailand. In ancient Orissa, there were

plenty of elephants and therefore, Orissa was regarded as an important center of ivory trade. There is also a sculptural panel depicting an elephant on the boat in the Sun temple at Konark. The Chinese potteries are also discovered from Manikapatna, Khalkattapatna and some parts on Ganjam and Balasore. So it clearly proves that there was a trade network between China and Orissa.

Under the Somavamsis, Gangas and Gajapatis, Orissa's overseas trade reached its climax. Many sculptured friezes noticed in various temples give many clues about our maritime trade. The representation of boats in sculptural art of temples are quite significant. At Deokund in Mayurbhanj, Goddess Ambika is shown seated on a boat. A stone panel carved with a scene carrying elephant on a boat is in Brahmeswar temple at Bhubaneswar. Another slab containing an image of Mahisamardini lying under a banyan tree near the Brahmeswar temple, is having representation of a boat below the pedestal of the Devi. A panel in the *Bhogamandapa* of Sri Jagannath temple at Puri, depicts a boat. The *Jagamohana* of the Sun temple at Konark has a carving on its parapet depicting the Martanda Bhairavas dancing on a boat. Another sculptural piece believed to be from Konark shows a boat being rowed by four persons. This sculptural piece is now preserved in the Indian Museum, Kolkata. But the interesting sculptured panel of the Konark temple shows the king presented with a giraffe, an animal of Africa. So it clearly indicates that there was maritime trade between Orissa and Africa during the time of the Gangas. Boats and ships are also represented in the paintings of manuscripts which are housed in the Orissa State Museum, Bhubaneswar.

Besides these findings, some artistic designs of Orissa and other countries are also

having close similarity which are regarded as the outcome of maritime contact. The sculptural designs and hair styles of images of Burma are having close similarity with Orissan art. In Thailand, the 12 C.A.D. temple of Wat Mahadhatu of Swarnalok shows affinity with Bhubaneswar temples of Orissa. The four-armed Bhairava image of Weing Sa is closely similar with the image of Sakta temples of Bhubaneswar and Prachi Valley. In Vietnam the window designs of Cham temple is very closely similar with the baluster window of Rajarani temple of Bhubaneswar. In Cambodia, foot-prints of Siva are also installed. In Orissa also Siva's foot-points are worshipped at Ranipur Jharial.

In Indonesia, the motifs of the Kirtimukha and the Makara represent the Orissan style, depicted in Vaital and Mukteswara temples of Bhubaneswar. In Orissa the Ramayan scenes are depicted in Simhanath temple at Badamba in Cuttack district, and Satrugneswar temple at Bhubaneswar. The Ramayan scenes are also said to remind the massive heads of Buddha at Ratnagiri in Jajpur district of Orissa. So it clearly shows the evidence of cultural contacts between Orissa and various regions.

Orissa's overseas trade spread all over Burma, Java, Sumatra, Borneo, Bali, Sri Lanka and China and after 9th C.A.D. over Arabia, Greece, even some of the West African countries. During these days the South East Asian countries were collectively known as "Suvarnadwipa". Due to the demand for Indian articles of luxury in the Roman Empire, India had active commercial relation with the West. The discoveries of rouletted ware, Roman coins and Roman bullas prove the existence of the brisk trade relations with the Roman Empire. Orissa had also good

commercial relations with Africa. This may be presumed from the representation of a giraffe in the sculptural panel of Sun temple at Konark.

There was a brisk trade relationship between Kalinga and China. Huen Tsang passed through Orissa which was then divided into Wu-tu(Odra), Kung-yu-tu(Kangoda) and Ka-leng-ka (Kalinga). He describes the soil of Orissa as rich and fertile. He mentions about the existence of a good number of monasteries. He also mentions about a large sea port called Che-li-ta-lo which had a resting place for sea going traders. I-tsing arrived at Tamralipti in 673 A.D. by the sea route from China. From the Chinese writer Wang-Ta-Yuan of 14th C.A.D., it is learnt that rice was the staple food of the Oriya people, which was sold at the unbelievable low price of 46 baskets in one cowrie during that period. He also mentions that because of the cheapness of living in Orissa nine out of ten persons going there for trade, did not like to return home.

Kalinga also had a good relationship with Ceylon throughout the ancient period. According to Mahavamsa, Vijaya, the first king of Ceylon, went there from eastern India. The island was named as Simhaladwipa after Simhala, the father of Vijaya. The grandmother of Vijaya was the daughter of the king of Kalinga. The Dathavamsa mentions that Hemalata married Dantakumara, a prince of Ceylon. Hemalata was the daughter of Guhasiva, the king of Kalinga. To save the tooth relic of Buddha, Hemalata and Dantakumara went to Ceylon taking the tooth relic of Buddha from Dantapura of Kalinga. When they reached Ceylon, the king of Simhala Sri Meghabahana took the relic in a grand royal procession and placed it at Anuradhapura, the capital of Simhala. After this event, the relation between Kalinga and Simhala reached its zenith in the field of socio-religious and maritime activities.

To preach the *dharma*, Sanghamitra, the daughter of Asoka went to Ceylon with eight families from Kalinga. The Chulavamsa states that the king and queen of Kalinga visited Simhala during the reign of Ceylonese king Agrabodhi II in 592-662 A.D. This text also mentions that king Vijayabahu of Ceylon (1054-1109 A.D.) married a Kalingan princess named Trilokasundari. King Mahendra IV Sri Sanghabodhi (A.D. 953-69) married a princess of Kalinga. One king of Ceylon Nishankamalla was the son of the king Jayagopa of Kalinga. So, due to strong political link between these two countries, the trade between Kalinga and Simhala increased.

There was a strong maritime trade between Suvarnadwipa and India in general and Kalinga in particular. The legends of Java relate that Kalinga took a leading part in establishing political relationship with Java. The alphabets used in inscriptions of Java are very similar to those of the inscriptions of Orissa.

Orissa seems to have supplied spices, diamond and other precious stones to the Roman Empire. It is said that Ceylon purchased elephants from India. Kalinga was also famous for her elephants. Orissa probably imported pearls and silver from Ceylon. China also received precious stones, ivory, pepper, betel and nuts etc. for which Kalinga was famous. The other items of trade were pearls, muslins, silk, indigo, peacocks and variety of spices, oil seeds, sugar-cane, rice etc. But not much is known about the volume of trade and products involved in such transactions.

Some socio-religious festivals are still prevalent in coastal Orissa which provide vital informations about our glorious maritime heritage. In Kartika Purnima which falls in the months of October and November, *Boita Vandana* festival is celebrated throughout

Orissa when the women-folk of Orissa float boats made of banana stems in rivers, tanks and seas. The whole affair means the commencement of the journey and wishing a *bon voyage* to the sailors in the past. The *Akasadipa* festival is also celebrated to remember the artificial light houses along the coast. The *Khudurukuni Osha* is observed in coastal Orissa to worship Goddess Mangala for the safe return of their family members. So on the Sundays of the month of *Bhadra* this festival is observed by the unmarried and newly married girls of the business community of the coastal districts of Orissa. The episode of "*Ta'apoi*" is a legendary account of the sufferings and success of a *Sadhab* (Sea trader) girl. It also reminds us of the maritime glory of ancient Orissa. The *Sadhabas* of Orissa were a prosperous community who had trade links with many countries. Those glorious days are now gone, but the memory is still alive.

If we study these festivals and legends in a scientific way, it is found that in India we have the Return Monsoon or the North East monsoon during the months of November and December. So this wind is favourable for ships to go to Ceylon from any of the ports of Kalinga. Therefore, the journey started during this month. In ancient Orissa, the *Sadhabas* used to set their sail during these months which is also confirmed by the celebration of Kartika Purnima. Similarly we have the South-West monsoon during the month of June to September. This wind is favourable for the return of the ships. Therefore, the festival like *Khudurukuni Osha* is associated with the return journey falling during this period.

*Bada Osha* and *Dalkhai Osha* are also observed which are associated with boat making tradition. In the city of Cuttack, a big fair known as "*Baliyatra*" is held for about three-four days every year during Kartika Purnima. Some scholars are of the opinion that

on this day *Sadhabas* were sailing off to Bali from the Mahanadi river. Another Oriya festival called *Bata Osha* is also observed. In the festival of Kartika Purnima an Oriya lyric is usually song.

*"Aa-Ka-Ma-Bai  
Pana-Gua-Thoi".*

*Aa-Ka-Ma-Bai* relates to the months of Ashad, Kartika, Magha and Baisakha of the Oriya Calender. So it may be presumed that the period of Ashada and Kartika (July to September) was the season of outgoing voyage. Magha to Baisakha was the season of the return voyage.

The coastline of Orissa was dotted with several ancient and medieval sea ports. The important ports on the coast of Kalinga were Tamralipti, Che-li-ta-lo, Paloura-Dantapura and Pithunda etc.

### **Che-Li-Ta-Lo**

It was an important port of Kalinga. The reference of Che-li-ta-lo for the first time appears in the travel accounts of Hiuen Tsang, that was in Wucha (Odra) country. He also mentions that near this port city, there were Buddhist monasteries. Alexander Cunningham has identified it with the town of Puri. Some scholars have identified it with a spot around Konark or Chandrabhaga, which is situated on the sea-shore and has a number of Buddhist Viharas around. Adikavi Sarala Das in his "Sarala Mahaharat" has mentioned that the river Chitrotpala was flowing upto Chandrabhaga near Konark.

### **Tamralipti**

It was one of the greatest sea ports of India which was connected both by land and water with different parts of India and many other countries in the 6th C.B.C. It was the first important port in the East Coast of India. It was linked by roads with ancient towns like

Rajagriha, Sravasti, Varanasi and Kalinganagara. It is identified with present Tamluk in the Midnapur district of West Bengal. This port is also mentioned in the Mahabharat and Indian and Ceylonese literatures as well as Chinese and Greco-Roman accounts. In the Arthasastra there is also mention about this port. Dandi in his "Dasakumaracharita" has referred to the port of Tamralipti. Kathasaritasagar mentions Tamralipti as a port. From 4th to 12th C.A.D. Ptolemy, Fahien, Huen-Tsang, I-tsing and many others have mentioned about this port. The Dathavamsa also mentions that Hemalata and Dantakumara went to Ceylon with the tooth relic of Buddha from this port. The "Periplus of the Erythraean Sea" mentions that Tamralipti was a great commercial city near the mouth of the Ganges. Mahendra started his journey from Tamralipti to Ceylon. Ashok is said to have travelled upto Tamralipti to sea off the ship carrying a branch of Bodhi tree to Ceylon, and his journey by land to the mouth of the Ganges took only seven days. Fa-hein visited India in the 5th C.A.D. and remained here for two years. Hiuen-Tsang also visited Tamralipti in 7th C.A.D.

### **Manikapatna**

Manikapatna, once a thriving port, is located in the Puri district. It is quite close to the mouth of the Chilika lake. The excavated trade materials clearly show that it was a flourishing port in the past, which continued upto the Mughul period. It is also described in various literary sources like Ain-i-Akbari and Madala Panji. Capt. Hamilton has also described about it as, "A Great Inlet from Sea", in 1739. The Maratha accounts mention about a war which took place at Manikpatana in 1803.

### **Khalkatapatna**

It is situated on the left bank of river Kushabhadra, where it joins the Bay of Bengal.



A brick floor has been found which might have served as loading and unloading platform. Many potteries of foreign origin have been also discovered from here. So it seems that the Kalingan merchants proceeded to South East Asia and China from here in 11th-12th A.D., during the reign of Somavamsi and Ganga dynasty.

### Palour & Dantapur

Palour on the Coramandal coast acted as the port of departure to the East. According to some scholars that the word Paloura is of Dravidian origin. *Palu* means tooth in Tamil and *ur* means "Pura" or City. This port city is very nearer to Samapa. The Greek Geographer Ptolemy speaks of this famous port. It is identified with the modern village Pallur in Ganjam district of Orissa.

The earliest reference to Dantapura is seen in Mahagobinda Suttanta of Dighanikaya. Dathavamsa describes Dantapur as the capital of Kalinga upto Buddha's time. Some scholars have also identified it with Gopalpur. A. Chunningham has identified it with Rajmahendri and W.W. Hunter has identified it with Puri. But some scholars have identified it with Radhanagar in Dharmasala area of Jajpur district of Orissa.

### Pithunda

Pithunda was a flourishing sea port of Kalinga. It is mentioned in Hatigumpha inscription of Kharavela. Pithunda has been identified with modern Kalingapatnam on the Bay of Bengal. Ptolemy refers to a metropolis named Pithunda and locates it in the country of Moissolia between the mouths of Godavari and Mahanadi. Some scholars identify it with Machilipatnam of Andhra Pradesh.

### Kalingapatnam

Kalingapatnam was another important port of Kalinga situated in the mouth of the river

Nagavali in the Srikakulam district of Andhra Pradesh. The meaning of Kalingapatnam means the city of Kalinga. For some time it was the capital city of Kalinga.

Besides these port towns many more ports also flourished during the ancient period. Asurgarh was an important political and commercial center of western Orissa. Golabai Sasan is located about 20 kms northwest of Chilika lake. It is believed that Golabaians being the earliest boat people of Orissa may well have laid the foundation for the famous and well known maritime activities of the Kalingans. Archaeological research in the Boudh region also throw light on the ancient trade route. The other ports are like Gourang Patna and Banika Patna of Banamalipur, situated at a distance of 23 kms from Bhubaneswar. It is said that the traders of Banika Patna were invited by a Bhaumakara king and they settled in this area.

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Prof. Atul Kumar Pradhan is a faculty member of Department of Ancient Indian History, Culture and Archaeology, Utkal University, Vanivihar, Bhubaneswar.