



Chandraketugarh, Unknown Chapter of History

Rupa Bose

Research Scholar, Department of History

RKDF University, Ranchi

Abstract:

The lost civilization of Chandraketugarh is a wonderful civilization. Among the very few archaeological sites that West Bengal can boast of, one that is of utmost importance is the site of "Chandraketugarh". It is located in Berachapa of North 24 Parganas. Sites of Haroa, Debalaya, Hadipur, Sarpukur, and Jhikra have produced relics of Ancient Bengal. The site is named after the name of the mythical king Chandraketu. He is a controversial character. Many places of Burdwan Hooghly are named after him. Dr. Gourishankar De says the Chandraketu is an ethical feudal chief. Archaeological survey of India has discovered in this site Khana Mihirer Dhupi which is a temple complex most probably of the Pala period and probably it was a temple where Buddhist Jain and Hindu God and Goddess were worshiped. The huge fortified area was first visited by Long Hurst of Dr. S.I. in 1906. The relics that have been discovered from Chandraketugarh can be dated from Post-Maurya to Pala-Sena period including that of the Sunga, Skanva, Kushana, Satavahana and Gupta periods. From the extensive excavation it can be said that Chandraketugarh was an agriculture base and commerce base vast riverine civilization which had been a very rich port-city carrying on its internal, as well as national and international trade within various places. Sunga period saw the growth of terracotta figurines and Kushana period saw the growth of Gandhara Art. The relics of these regions they resemble of Arts of these periods.

Key Words: Chandraketugarh, God Goddess, Agriculture, Ancient Bengal.

Introduction:

The question that first arises regarding King Chandraketu is who was he? To which dynasty he belonged? Before him what was the name of Chandraketugarh? There is a myth and a story regarding this controversial King Chandraketu and Pir Gorachand in the local area. But archaeological evidences and historians say a different story. According to them there was no existence of King Chandraketu. If any ruler had ruled in this region he was a feudal Chief. Who was perhaps a tax paying chief to Kushan dynasty? Dr. Gourishankar De and Dr. Sharmi Chakraborty are of the same opinion. According to feudal chiefs these regions they kept the direct contact with the North Indian sovereigns specially of Patuliputra and Takshashila. They were Maurya, Sunga, Kanva, Satavahana and Kushana Kings.

Socially Chandraketugarh was a free society. Women had an important place in the society. They decorated themselves with beautiful ornaments and dresses. The waist bands and anklets were also exclusively carved out. It was an affluent and prosperous society which was mainly urban in nature. The religion of this region

shows eclecticism. This was a place where all the religious Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and local cults existed together. The icons of Ganasha, Surya, Kartikeya, Agni, Parvati, Buddha, Kubera, Yakshya and Yakshini and Jain icon proved these facts. The temple complex called Khana Mihira Dhipi has been identified by archaeological survey of India which was a place where both Hindu and as well as Buddhist Gods and Goddess were worshipped. Local cults like nature worship of mother Goddess, animals and plants took place. In the later period also the civilization highlighted non-communalism.

The Vanga on the Ganges Delta as described by Ptolemy's Geography. There was notion of a port-city named Gange. Some of the historians have identified it as Chandraketurah. Some seals and coins have been discovered which indicate these regions conducted the internal, national and international trade. On these seals are depicted the picture of large ships which conducted sea trade. Dr. Brahindranath Mukherjee says three seals were most probably of the 3rd century B.C. made of terracotta with Brahmin and Kharasti's scripts depicted on them. Ptolemy was first Western historian who described Bay of Bengal as Gangetic Gulf. Bengal of the ancient period in which Chandraketurah was included traded to international world on different textile. They were mainly muslins as well as cotton textiles. Other materials included ivory items precious and semi-precious stones and species. The trade of Chandraketurah continued with Roman Emperor.

The materials that were imported to India and Bengal silk from China which comes probably by sea route. "Periplus of the Erythrean Sea has indicated has many ports have been used of import of olive oil and wine from Mediterranean belt to places of India and Chandraketurah was one of those places. The potteries found in Chandraketurah and glass materials indicate that ample amount of wine were brought from Rome. The potteries were mainly Northern Black Polished were many coins from Roman Emperor also came to India through sea trade Chandraketurah was a port-city which was probably a great urban and trade centre of the Kushana period which had internal trade with Patuliputra and Taxila international trade with Roman Emperor and Greece according to Dr. Ranabir Chakraborty.

Discovered of Chandraketurah:

Discovered Of the port-city of Chandraketurah can be dated from Past Maurya to Pala-Sena period including those of the Sunga, Kermas, Kushana and Gupta periods. Excavation brought to light that evidences to prove that Chandraketurah was a flourishing coastal town from about 4th century B.C. down to post Gupta age having trade contact with foreign countries in the early period of the history. The objects which have been found by in complete aplanatic attempts of Archaeological Survey of India and private collectors are gold and copper coins ivory Bengals and nucleuse bronze and terracotta females figures, various dolls, icons of Gods and Goddesses like Parvati, Yaksha, Yakshini and others. Various kinds of pots and potteries in the Northern Black polished wares of small and large plots of bolds tubs and drinking cup. Pottery cups with small spout pictures, jugs, hemispherical coins, gray wares Roulette potteries, Black polished potteries with Brahmi and Kharasthi letters engraved on them and many others like Red wares are formed along with Potteries sealed chain pipes also depict the antiquity, roughly to 3rd and 4th century B.C. The other relics that have been discovered from this area are bones of various animals, terracotta bricks combs dices and a large amount of animal figures such as goats, elephants, sheep, owls, birds of different types small birds of different colours, coins made of copper and gold we also this covered Various terracotta figures of Kubera, Daksha, Yaksha, Yakshya, Karin Goddesses have included in this relics. Potteries and terracotta figures of Chandraketurah are of utmost importance.

The Archaeological Problems of Chandraketurah:

Dr. Dilip Kumar Chakraborty in his book "The Issues in East Indian Archaeology" writes "If Tamruk was the most important early historic place in the Rupnarayan delta; it was the area of modern Chandraketurah which was the most important centre of that period in the Bhagirathi-Bidyadhari system. Brief notions of excavations of this site under the auspices of Ashutosh Museum of Fine Arts of Calcutta University

appeared between 1956 and 1967 in Indian Archaeology – A Review - Dr. Chakrabarti says, “There are two outstanding topographical problems about this site. First the antiquities collected by the villagers come from an area considerably wider than that within the earthen fortifications of the site. One has to define properly the basic urban configuration of the place. Secondly at present the site or even the general area cannot be linked directly to a river-channel unless one assumes that an old channel of the Bidyadhari once ran by its side and it was linked some way to the present Moravian channel of a river locally known as the Padma a couple of miles to the north. Unless we postulate a separate entrance to the West Bengal delta along the Bidyadhari which might or might not be the case one has to inform that Chandraketugarh was approached by some presently defunct channel branching off to Bhagirathi. Dr. Chakrabarti asks the question, “What is this site doing here? Which inter land is it oriented to?” He answers that Chandraketugarh was a coastal outlet situated inland and there is no reason why North Indian traffic could not come down to Chandraketugarh, but as an extra factor one may visualize that Chandraketugarh was also oriented to the north-east i.e. in the direction of the interior of Vanga and perhaps Varendra Bhumi.

Rivers of Chandraketugarh:

Padma is now almost dried up but it had strong current in ancient times. This is evident from the heaps of sand also by the curves of places and the deep bends which still exist in the form of bils in the upper regions. Padma still pulsates with life in its lower reaches from Chowrachi to Tili where one can still ebb and tides. Padma was such a big river in the past that it was identified with Bhagirathi itself. Another river flowed through the present Deganga area known as Devi Ganga or Diganga, Dipaganga (the second stream of Ganges) probably the area of Deganga came to be known after the name of the river. The channel enjoyed great sanctity as the Ganges herself. A great centre of Jain cult the lead of Gangevrous live flourished on the bank of the river. The almost dried up the bed of the river is still visible near Deganga by the side of the villages, now road running from Barasat to Basirhat. Many legends and myths are present in the villages around Deganga and Berachapa which if analysed properly may furnish to the early history of the ancient rivers of these area.

The rivers were the highways of Trade and commerce in the early and medieval period and on the river bank flourished cities and capitals of Ancient Bengal. Padma was an exception. Dr. Gourishankar Dey says, “On her bank once stood the famous but now banqueted port city of Chandraketugarh, The capital city as identified by Ptolemy and an anonymous writer of periplus. The great prosperity of Chandraketugarh enjoying busy trade was to a great extent curved by the river Padma which once flowed port of the city. Kautilya’s Arthashastra Greek writer Ptolemy, Periplus of the Erythrean Sea, Milinda Panho all mention a place called “Gange” or “Ganga” Periplus of the Erythrean Sea mention of a place at the confluence of Ganges River and sea. This place indicates the delta of Bengal. according to Dr. Bratindranath Mukherjee. Here flows ancient Ganga with its two distributaries. Yamuna and Saraswati according to various sources near North 24 Parganas flowed Ganga from Bhagirathi. Here flowed another river named Padda which met Bay of Bengal flowing through the south of Bengal. The area of Ganges meeting Bay of Bengal was named Gangaridi. Another Greek and Latin texts from 4th century B.C. mention this sea. In first century B.C. Pliny commented that there was a place called Gangaridi through which Ganges flowed, in his “Naturalis Historia”. Ptolemy also mention this place which laid at the confluence of Ganga. Periplus of the Erythrean Sea has also described the place which has similarity to Kalidas’s “Vanga”. Vanga had internal trade with area of North-Western India and Taxila during Kushana period. From the area of Chandraketugarh of North 24 Parganas many artefacts have been discovered by Dr. Gourishankar Dey with Kharashti scripts written. These were discovered from Hadipur near Chandraketugarh. Also some seals were discovered from Chandraketugarh with Kharashti inscribed on them. In this area both Bramhi and Kharashti scripts were written. Dr. Bratindranath Mukherjee has discovered more than 90 inscriptions from Chandraketugarh. Those inscriptions were inscribed on plaques, potteries and seals by dice.

The trade of Chandraketugarh:

Included transaction in horse and rice according to Brathindranath Mukherjee. From North-West horses were brought in Vanga Delta and these horses were sent to South-east Asia. The scripts of Vanga delta indicate that these Northwestern traders colonized the region of Chandraketugarh. In this region flowed Bhagirathi which was situated Ganga the ancient port-city. From a map of Renewal prepared in 18th Century there is mention of a river named Jamuna or Yamuna which flowed through south of Hooghly and met Ichamati. Later this river flowed to Raimangal and met Bay of Bengal. The Jamuna or Yamuna was an ancient tributary of Ganges. Gange a port-centre was situated on its bank which is named similar to "Deganga" in which colonized the Northwestern traders. These traders carried on trade on horses and rice. Says Dr. Brathindranath Mukherjee.

However the Kharasthi and Brahmin scripts and inscriptions were very valuable were materials to there the ancient history of lower delta of Bengal. These inscriptions included—

1) personal seals 2) governmental seals and coins 3) traders seal 4) selling permission 5) religious seal such as distributed among any "Yagna" on religious festival 6) seals of trading guilds 7) protective bands 8) any story of folk tale on incidents depicted which picture writings.

In Chandraketugarh we find a terracotta seals with Kharasthi-Brahmi inscriptions with "Koshilic Korchhga" or Karafgama" written on it. This man was owner of one crore ploughs. This may be an overestimation. But it may be agreed that this Karafgama probably was a rich cultivator with many ploughs and under him were many cultivators or farmers cultivating a huge cultivated land. He was most probably maker of a very large cultivatable land. This seal picture of rice indicating Karefgama was a man cultivating rice. In Kharasthi-Brahmi script written in a corner of this seal it was recorded that this rich cultivator was respectful and devoted to God, Brahmins and saints. While these seals show the information of rich cultivators also a small terracotta pottery with Kharasthi script inscribed on it gives information on the measurements of lands. Rice was not only supplied to local market but also sent for international markets. Some terracotta plaques have been discovered with pictures of rice and the word "Hoten" written on them. On the opposite side of these plaques were written in Kharasthi-Brahmi letter the names and signs of local chiefs or the names of local traders. One of the traders was "Aja" which was a name used in North-western India.

Rice trade was not limited to local areas. It had international market also. Huge ships loaded with rice were depicted in some of the seals. In a seal there is mention of a huge ship named "Trappag" and on this ship was a standing horse. Periplus of the Erythrean Sea mentions that these ships were mainly ships of India. In Chandraketugarh near Hadipur one seal has been discovered in which there is picture of jumping horses with a rider seated on back. In a Kharasthi script there is written that there were trained horses in the region named "Dhanido". These horses came from Middle-east and were sent to South-east Asia.

In the lower of Bengal especially in 24 Parganas many potteries have been discovered which were similar to the 3rd century A.D. potteries of amphora and roulettewares. Which were probably came from north-western India. The potteries had Hellenic and Roman influences. The trade in horse and rice must have benefited the local people also such as there was a Bengali Trader named "Dijana" who was the owner of ship engaged in horse trade. The local people used copper coins for trade. Many evidences give descriptions of pre-Gupta history in politics, economics, social and religious life of Bengal and eastern scripts of Kharasthi.

The Art of the Chandraketugarh:

North-western, Sunga and Kushana influence is also seen in the art of Chandraketugarh. A boan structure of a winged lion originally from a blooming lotus is noticed "Winged Lion" is typical art of North-western

India i.e. Gandhara art. This influence was brought to Bengal in second half of first Century. In addition the bone-made art there is also existence of terracotta art in Chandraketugarh. During Maurya, Post-Maurya, Satavahana, Sunga, Kanva and Kushana period arrived Northern Black Polished Pottery and punch-marked coins. Terracotta figures of Chandraketugarh are highly influenced by Sunga or Mathura Art and Gandhara Art. There consist the idols of God and Goddess like Indra and Kartikeya, Surya Ganesha, Kubera, Yaksha and Yakshini. There were also terracotta images of animals like horses, elephants, goat, sheep, owl, peacock, cock and hen as various birds, little clay carts, decorated birds etc. In Chandraketugarh we find an image of a winged woman with crops growing from her head dress on terracotta plaques. Same types of images have been found in Bihar which indicates the worship of a local cult of "Sri" Ornaments, toys, pen, combs, things made of bone, copper, bronze ivory and terracotta art are found in this region which belong from Maruya to Pala Sena period.

The Myth:

Though Chandraketugarh is an archaeological and historical site many local folk stories, legends and myths are present in this region. The name of "King Chandra" is itself a myth. Archaeological evidence does not prove that there was any king named Chandra living in this region. But there was existence of tax giving feudal chiefs in this region under the North-western Kushana Empire. There is however a story of this area revolving round King Chandra and a saint called Pir Gorachand who was a local preacher. The story says that once upon a time there lived a very famous King named Chandrain Chandraketugarh. He was very rich, influential powerful and famous king. He ruled in Chandraketugarh and lived happily with his queen. The queen was named Padmabati. The queen loved the king immensely and they enjoyed their lives. But their life did not end in a happy ending because of a misunderstanding. The saint Pir Gorachand and the King Chandra were rivals of each other because both are equally powerful. Once a war started between the two rivals. When the battle started as the myth says, while leaving his palace the king told his queen that he is talking with himself two pigeons one white and another black. He told the queen that if he won the battle he will send the white pigeon to the queen but if he was defeated then he would send the black one. Then he left the queen and his palace. The battle started with Pir Gorachand. Local people are of different opinions regarding the consequence of the battle. Some say that King Chandra won the battle and he by mistake sent the black pigeon to the queen. But other say that he lost in the battle and the black pigeon reached the queen. However as the story goes as the queen was waiting for the king the black pigeon came flying to her. The queen was certain that her beloved is dead. She was shattered emotionally and thought that there remain no reasons to live so she ended her life committed suicide in a nearby pond named after her. Here ended the great rulership of king Chandra and the civilization of Chandraketugarh came to end. The reality of this story is doubtful because archaeological remains bear no evidence to support this story. Chandraketugarh has no written history. Various scholars have thrown lights on its history but there are many puzzles to be covered. If the myths and legends we added to the archaeological facts it seems there existed a rich, prosperous civilization in Chandraketugarh in Ancient Bengal.

Town Planning of Chandraketugarh:

Chandraketugarh was a rich, prosperous and developed urban centre. It seems that Chandraketugarh had a very organized corporation for its city-life. It was a scientific and healthy arrangement. The city had dust bins under the soil like man-holes. After excavation there had under soils exposed bones of animals, broken potteries and wooden pieces. The municipality planning was very clear and organized. The rulers were highly alert about health of the people and the town planning and drainage system was similar to Taxila. For pure hygienic drinking water they dugged wells. In 1957 near Haroa less than 13 to 14 feet under the soil developed of terracotta pipe lines drainage have been excavated. There pipes are arranged one after another and they are 2 feet 7 inches long. Similar to the civilization this drainage system can be identified with that of skill-bent brick-build drainage of Mohenjo-Daro and that of the palace of Knossos in Greece. The whole civilization of Chandraketugarh has many resemblances to Gandhara, Sunga and Greek and Roman influences.

Chandraketugarh also contains many barrages which prove that the area was prone to flood. Later one of these barrages has developed into a wall of the city. From Maruya ages around the forts were built with huge walls such fortresses were also common during the Sunga Period.

Conclusion:

Chandraketugarh thus the history of ancient Bengal, in regional, national and international level has achieved significant position. Many researches throughout the world are taking place and spreading the historical and archaeological facts about Chandraketugarh. This work of research has tried to open up new horizons for the history of Ancient Bengal as well as throw light on the Religious, Economic, Social and Political life of Chandraketugarh. This study has used many texts, references and archaeological evidences from various local and national Museums. A thorough survey of excavated sites of the fort and Khana-Mihir Dhi has been done. Field studies in Bangarh Patna Museum, Sarnath Vaishali, Budha Gaya, Nalanda, Malda Museum; Ashutosh Museum of Calcutta University has also been done. The art of Bengal in terracotta takes an important place in this research. The plaques as well as artifacts all throw lights on the history of the region. The figures of the gods and goddesses, animals, human being all are epitome of the brilliant past of Ancient Bengal which has been so far either neglected or studied in scanty amount. The beads, Ivory and metal items, items of bones, terracotta objects are found in Chandraketugarh all are depiction of the philosophy of the Ancient Bengal. Along with Chandraketugarh which cover the Sungha, Kanva, later Satabhana, Kushana, Gupta, Pala period of the history in Bengal it is necessary to study history of Bangarh, Mahasthangarh, Tamralipta, Uaria-Bateswar and thoroughly known the full history of Ancient Bengal starting from Post-Maruya to Pala period.

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