

Maritime Trade of Ancient Orissa

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Province of Orissa, known as Kalinga in the early time was commanding a very high position in the maritime activities of India in the past. Its territory extended from the Ganges in the North to Godavari in the South at different epochs of history. The present coastal lines of Orissa being 482 km shows the signs of bulging landscapes by the development lagoons and spits. It comprises of the districts of Balasore, Bhadrak, Kendrapara, Jagatsinghpur, Puri and Ganjam. It was also studded with excellent ports and harbours during ancient period. Ports plays an important role in the maritime activities of a country.

There are some reference in the Buddhist literature to show that people of ancient India, especially of eastern region were interested in maritime activities, sailing on the ocean continuously for six-months with the direction-showing-birds (crow) during the time of Buddha. Theragatha speaks of merchants sailing on the sea with the hope of earing wealth Sea-farers from Varanasi, Videha and Champa (Bhagalpur) were sailing to foreign lands like Suvannadipa and Tamba panni¹ perhaps via the ancient Orissan ports.

The Mahanidessa tells us that India's trade to the east existed with Kalamukha, Suvannabhumi, Vessunga, Verapatha, Takkola, Tamali, Tambapanni and Java. First two of

these places can be identified with Arakan coast and lower Burma.² Tamali has been identified by Sylvain Levi with Tamralinga in the Malaya peninsula. Apadana state that traders from Malaya and China visited India.³

The Jatakas mention the eastern sea ports Champa and Tamralipti, whence traders sailed to Ceylon and Suvannabhumi (lower Berma and Malacca). Buddhist chronicles speak of the invasion of ceylon in the 6th century B.C. by Vijaya Simha who gave his name to island. He is said to have sailed in a ship which could hold over seven hundred people.⁴ The Buddhist literature named 'Siuki' speaks number of ports in the coast of Utkal (Orissa).⁵

Orissa has a network of large and navigable rivers, free from the freezing effects of a severely cold climate. She has also a weath of forests abounding in strong timber which might be readily utilised for the construction of ship and boats. These natural advantages coupled with steadiness within the direction of the monsoon, over the Bay of Bengal, Indian ocean and China sea - aided the Oriyas to acquire that nautical skill and enterprise for which they were justly famous in the ancient world.

The history of Orissa shipping and maritime activities goes back to the early times

of the *Rgveda* (1,48,3) and (1,116,5), the Jatakas, the Greek and Roman authors, the early literatures as well as a host of archaeological discoveries in India and abroad, all go to prove that long before the birth of Christ, the Oriyas had acquired a fair knowledge of the art of navigation and that they plied their boats not only on the inland rivers, but also on the high seas. There were ports and harbours all along the coastal line such as Tamralipti (Tamluk), Adamus (Suvarnarekha), Kosambia (Balasore), Dosarene (Dhamarra), Manada (Mahanadi), Pakura (Palur-Risikulya), Konnagar (Konark),⁶ Nanigain (Puri), Kakadaram (Cuttack) Kalinganagar (Vamsadhara), Dantapuram.

These are some of the important points to be carefully examined to get the reliable information of the maritime activities in the early past.

(i) Early Literature

The art of employing boats and ships for the military purpose was known during Vedic and Puranic days. The *Rgveda* retains the echo of a naval expedition, on which Tugra the Rsi king, commissioned his son Bhujyu. Bhujyu however was shipwrecked on the ocean but was rescued by the twin Aswins (Rv-1-112-6).⁷ The Mahabharat relates how the Pandavas, ingeniously escaping from the house of the lac by a subterranean passage, came up on the Ganges and get on board vessel, which was provided with machinery and all kinds of weapons and was capable of defying storms and waves (Adiparva-ch-15). Elsewhere in the same work we read how Sahadeva, the youngest of the Pandava brothers, continued his march of conquest till he reached several islands in the sea (on doubt with the help of ships) and subjugated the mlechha inhabitants there of (Sabha-parva-ch-31). In the Ramayana we

have a picture of the preparations made by a Nisad chief for an impending naval encounter with Bharata.

(ii) Buddhist Records

The Dighanikaya refers Dantapura of Kalingadesa as one of the seven famous cities of India and was ruled by a king called Sattabhu. The chulla Jataka states that Dantapura was well connected by road-ways to many other places. Mahavasthu, a Buddhist text of Ceylon mentions that Dantapur was one of the seven cities of Jambudvipa.⁸

(iii) Other Records

It is known from the Madalapanji that king Bhoja had built many ships with local wood.⁹ Rules and regulations regarding construction of ships were recorded in a book called Juktikalpataru in Sanskrit. Radhamukunda Baboo of Orissa, a research scholar had wrote a book called 'Bharatiya Arnaba Pota' in English. This book describes two types of ship (i) Samanya (ii) Bisesh or Arnaba Pota (means ship used for journey in sea). About twenty types of ship with details of their sizes has been furnished in this book.¹⁰

(iv) Arthasastra of Kautilya

From the Chief adviser of Chandragupta (326-296 BC) we learnt that trade both overland and over-seas flourished very much at the end of the 4th century B.C.¹¹

(v) Travellers diary

From Megasthenes we know that existing routes were linked up and made a grand Trunk road which ran from Puskalavati in Gandhar through Takhasila, Kanyakubja, Hastinapura, Prayaga to Pataliputra and then to Tamralipti (Tamluk), a national sea-port. Through this route Megasthenes travelled in 4th century B.C.¹²

Greek traveller Pliny who wrote his natural history in 77 A.D. had placed on record that the companies of archers had to be carried on board merchant ship sailing out of India because the Indian seas are infested by pirates.

The author of the Periplus of the Erythraean sea, who made a coastal voyage round India, noticed the prevalence of piracy along the Malbar sea-board.¹³

According to early Tamil authors, Cenkuttuvan, contemporary to Gajabahu-I of Ceylon, led an expedition to the Gangetic Valley and in that expedition "the journey from Cera kingdom to Orissa was performed by sea."¹⁴ It is known from the above that in ancient times there was a regular sea-faring from Tamralipti via Orissa ports to Tamrapanni (Sri Lanka). From the sea-port to inner river ports of Orissa was connected by regular trade traffic.

(vi) Archaeology

From History we know that Augustus conquered Egypt in 30 B.C. He and his successors strove to suppress the Arab traders and pirates. They also developed a direct sea-trade between India and the Roman empire. From Mc crindle's Ancient India, Strabo says that he saw in 25 B.C. about 120 ships sailing from Hormus to India.¹⁵

From the archaeological excavations of Kaveripattinam, we find the history of the site from the third century B.C. to the twelfth century A.D. coins of different kinds were found, some belonging to the chola kings who ruled here and Roman coins brought here by traders. Archaeologist found many kinds of ancient artefacts here.¹⁶

From the excavation of Sisupalgarh (near Bhubaneswar), it is learnt that people lived here from 3rd century B.C. to the middle of the

fourth century A.D. certain clay medallions (known as bullae) have a design of animals with human heads. This design is very similar to one found on Roman Coins.¹⁷ This shows that there was some trade contacts with Romans. Some historian identified Sisupalgarh as Tosali, the capital of the provinces of Mauryan empire and some others with Kalinganagar, the capital of Kharavela, Chedi kings of Orissa. The trade with Roman empire was carried by boats through Daya-Vargavi-Kaukhia-Prachi river route to some of the old sea-ports of Orissa like Konagar (Konark) of Ptolemy or Charitrapur (che-li-ta-lo) of Hiuen-Tsang.

Another excavation was carried at Manikapatna where some Chinese and Kushan coins have been found.¹⁸ A large quantity of China celadon pieces also found assigned to the period 13th and 14th century A.D. by the historian Karuna Sagar Behera.¹⁹ These findings points out Chilika as a natural sea-port in the old days.

In the neighbour-hood of Chilika near the mouth of river Rsikulya, there is a place called palur situated in the Chhatrapur sub-division of Ganjam district. This place had been identified by Garini with a port described by the Greek sailor Ptolemy (2nd century A.D) who had named it as paloura. This port occupied an enviable position on the trade route between India and the South-East-Asia.²⁰ It has been referred to in the Nagarjunikonda of Virapurasadatta (regnal year-14) as an internationally important maritime emporium, the script of which belong to the second half of the third century A.D.²¹ On the west side of Chilika, there is a mountain just above the site called 'Palur Pahara' seems to have acted as the protector of the palur port. Ptolemy

travelled upto Malaya by a ship from this port.²²

In the early centuries of Christian era, there existed six ports on the coast of Kalinga viz, Tamralipti (Tamulka) Kosambi (Balasore), Charitrapura (ce-li-ta-lo), Kannagar (Konark) Paloura (Palur) and Kalingapatnam. Among these port towns, Ptolemy, mentions Paloura as an important port town in Eastern India, which generally tallies with the present day village of Paloura in Ganjam district of Orissa.²³

Survey and investigation had been conducted recently in and around Paloura resulted in the identification of palaeoharbours such as Palur and Ghantasila or Rambha, situated on Southern horizon of Chilika lagoon and north of Rusikulya estuary. Survey has yielded glazed black and red ware, red polished ware, Northern Black polished glazed ware, glazed black ware with black core resembling the ceramics of Sumatra and Vietnam and also Chinese celadon and porcelain were, ranging in date from the early centuries of Christian era to the medieval times. So far, no brick structural activity and antiquities of Buddhist affiliation have been reported from the sites.²⁴ It is evident from the archaeological findings that it was an internationally important sea port for the brisk trade with China, Sumatra, Vietnam and other far south-east countries in ancient time.

Department of Archaeology and Museums Government of Andhra Pradesh had taken up excavations in and around Dantavaktrunikota in the ex-state of Paralakhimidi (present Srikakulam district of Andhra) and identified the place as Dantapura, the ancient capital of Kalinga. Antiquities unearthed at the site include beads of terracotta, carnation,

Jasper and agate, bangle pieces of glass and shell, iron nails, strips and rings, copper collyrium (antimony) rods, terracotta human and animal figures, stone objects like muller, querns, and whet stone, bone objects like stylus and comb.²⁵

Sylvan Levi opine that Dantapura was a famous emporium having brisk trade contacts not only with the east and west coast of India, but countries like China and Persia from the times even before the 6th century B.C.²⁶

(vii) Rock Edict and Grants

From the XIIIth Rock Edict of Ashoka that the emperor maintained diplomatic relations not only with Tamparni (Ceylon) but with the Hellenistic monarchies of Syria, Egypt, Cyrene, Macedonia and Epirus. The Maurya Navy created by Chandragupta probably continued to the end of Asoka's reign.²⁷

The Kamauli grant credits the Vaidyadev, the minister of Kumarpala (1097 A.D.) with a naval victory in southern Banga near the mouths of the Ganges. Mr. R.D. Banerji suggests that this naval encounter probably took place with Anantavarman king of Utkal and Kalinga.²⁸ It suggested that this naval warfare took place by using the naval bases of Utkal and Kaling ports.

(viii) Paintings, architecture and sculptural panels

Figure of ships from many stone panels carrying elephants in temple architecture, exported a large number to foreign countries shows the ancient maritime activities of Orissa. A sculptural panel of such a ship can be seen on the walls of the Jagannath temple in Puri. Another panel in Konark temple depicts a stray giraffe carried on a ship in temple art lends support to this hypothesis.²⁹

(ix) Cultural Festivals and Rituals

In ancient times South-East-Asia remained under the influence of Indian culture. The Vaishyas called sadhabas, a trading communities of Orissa had been credited in colonizing South-East-Asia alongwith other castes. Trade was the driving force for the early contact with other nations. It led to settlements, which slowly developed into colonies.³⁰ Indian colonies were grown up in the state like Cambodia, Champa, Malaya Peninsula, Sumatra, Java and Bali and finally the Burmese and Thai kingdoms. Bali yatra festival were performed in Orissa where the ladies, young-girls and married women sail boats made of 'shole' or bark of plantain tree (Kadalipatua) with lamp lighted up, guava, raw rice, betel leaves and different types of flower for safe return of Sea-Voyages in the month of bright day of Kartika. The same rituals is also observed at Bali where infants are helped to sail tiny souls of their sailer ancestors.³¹ 'Taapoi' idol are worshiped in the coastal Orissa to remember the days of ancient maritime trade.

People of Orissa lighted a lamp on a high pillar of bamboo or bullah (Akash Dipa) near Siva temple or in front of a Tulasi tree as a symbol of light house for the sea voyages in the month of Kartika when the trade winds are favourable. The strong north-eastern wind carried the ships swiftly till they reached ceylon where their sail fitted with north-westerly trade wind and carried them to Suvarnadvip. Foreign countries were not accustomed with the Indian monsoon till 45 A.D. Hippalus the Roman pilot 'discovered' it about 45 A.D. the periodic change of monsoon winds. The Romans rewarded the discover by giving the name Hippalus to the S.W. Monsoon and utilise the discovery by developing a great

direct sea-trades in gems and pearls, sandal wood, ebony, balms and spices and especially pepper of India.³²

While discussing Travellers' diary, the portion of the Chinese traveller has been left. The Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsang while visiting the capital of VCHA(Utkal) i.e. Jajapur described on the south-east frontiers of the country, on the borders of the ocean is the town Charitra (che-li-ta-lo) about 20li round. Here it is merchants depart for distant countries and strangers come and go and stop there way. xxx Going south 20,000li or so is the country of Simhala (Seng-kia-lo) xx. From this going south-west about 1200li through great forest we come to the kingdom of Kong-u-to (Kangoda).³³

From Jajapur, capital of Ucha (Utkal) south-east direction points towards Hukitola, Jambo and False-point harbour. Historian Padmashree Paramananda Acharya identified a place near about false point which is situated in between mouth of river Baitarani and Mahanadi on the sea shore.³⁴ Historian Pratap Kumar Roy also identified it little above false-point on the left bank of Chitrotpala and Luna confluence, branches of Mahanadi.³⁵ The Chinese pilgrime Hiuen Tsang told that the city of Charitra in the country of UCHA (Utkal) whose south east boarder is the mouth of river Mahanadi and ocean.

The false point is well connected with Patamundai an ancient river port on the left bank of old river Brahmani. It is also connected to Dhamara, Chandabali, Kharsua river, Budha river, Birupa, Matai, Salandi, the branches of river Brahmani and Baitarani via Pattamundai. It is connected through river Gobari to Kendrapara. The false-point is only 6 km from Paradeep through river route. It is a narrow

mass of land going out into the sea which was once a harbour of international repute. The anchorage was protected by two sandy reefs called Long island and Dowdes well island. Two separate channels lead inland from the anchorage. The Jambo river on the north and Bakul on the south, a branch of Mahanadi river. This harbour was connected with Devi river by tidal creeks, which were navigable by the country boats throughout the year. It is well connected to Cuttack, Sonapur, Tusura (Bolangir) Binka, Boudh, Athmalik, Sambalpur by river route.

Due to regression of the ocean, tectonic movement, coastal erosion and sedimentation, change of river course, heavy flood, severe cyclonic effect and other types of vagaries of nature, the port town of Charitrapura (Che-li-ta-lo) might have lost its existence. Engineers have estimated that a strong littoral drift carrying nearly one million cubic meters of sediments pass along the eastern coast of India in the Bay of Bengal from south to north every year. Under its influence the sediments carried by rivers are deposited in northern side there by lengthening the river course.³⁶ This type of formation of spit in the mouth of eastern flowing rivers reduces discharge capacity of flood water in to sea. As a result of which sand bars are formed in the mouth of rivers which prevent the port to be navigable. Hence port was abandoned.

Under these circumstances many ancient ports like Kalingapatanam, Palur, Manikapatana, Kannagar (Konark) Kosambi (Balasore), Tamralipti (Tamulka) were declared abandoned. Sea coast goes away from the port town due to the above reason or the port town may be submerged into the sea due to change in land or sea like Dwaraka and Che-li-ta-lo. Under water archaeology can help us in finding

the port town of Charitrapur if hidden under the waters of ocean.

Historian W.W. Hunter in his history of Orissa mentioned about Dhamara port. He described that out of nine ports like Subarnarekha, Chhanua, Balasore, Laichanpur, Churamani, Dhamara, False point, Puri and Gopalpur, Dhamara was the only all weather river port in 19th century A.D.³⁷ The length of the Dhamara river is only 20 km from confluence of Baitarani and Brahmani river upto the sea. It is 42 feet deep at low water approximately. The author of periplus had mentioned the port Dosarene (Orissa) "Yielding the ivory known as Dosarenic."³⁸ Historian Jagabandhu Singh identified dosarene as river Baitarani (Dhamara).³⁹ Hence it played a very important role in the ancient maritime activities of Orissa in the past.

The spirit of enterprise and adventure was remarkable among the Oriyas in ancient times, who cherished the ambition of founding colonies in distant lands of south east Asia and Ceylon. Orissa's glorious maritime past had been proved from the excavated materials like Roman coins and Kushan coins and Chinese ceramic sherds found from different parts of Orissa in the recent pasts. The Chinese ceramic sherd detained from Manikapatana and Khalkatapatna in Puri district, Ganjam, Balasore and from Barabati fort in Cuttack⁴⁰ town testify to the importance of ancient maritime trade in East-West, especially in the trade with China. Black Knobbed ware found from Sisupalgarh (Orissa), Dantapura (ex-state of Parala-Khemidi), gopalpatnam in Andhra Pradesh are conveniently called 'Kaling ware' assign to 5th to 2nd century B.C.⁴¹ suggests the cultural contacts between Orissa with South-India through maritime trade from ancient times.

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