

EARLY HISTORY OF DAKSHINA KOSHALA

Ms. Gopika Bhandari

Assistant Professor, Vivekananda College

Abstract: The article attempts to trace the early history of the region of Dakshina Koshala as it emerges from the available sources, many of them directly of this region itself and others indirectly pertaining to it. One can see the different empire state systems exerting control over it and thus contributing to its shaping. The contribution of a number of other forces, even before the advent of these state administrative systems cannot be denied.

Index Terms: Maurya state, Satvahanas, Malhar, Asurgarh, Allahabad Inscription

In ancient India, the middle Gangetic area witnessed the beginnings of early Historical period in the mid 1st millennium BCE. Around this time, some of the tribes that had been repeatedly mentioned in the Vedic literature had settled down and carved out kingdoms for themselves. The period that was initiated was marked by important features that were witnessed for the first time in their mature state. Foremost among them were the beginning of city life, introduction of a system of coinage which facilitated trade, especially distance trade, long distance communication, a comparatively more extensive use of iron. At this very same time, the Deccan and south India were experiencing Megalithic culture. Subsequently, Gangetic valley especially the mid Gangetic valley remained the focus of important developments which were witnessed under the ambit of the empires that were carved out by the rulers of indigenous, foreign origin such as the Mauryas, Kushana dynasts, Guptas. The contact of this area with other regions which had always existed, became better defined in the later Historical period. As economic potential of areas across the Vindhyas came into focus, the urge to politically expand the frontiers and tap their resources became a predominant feature of the times.

AREA OF STUDY

The area that is being studied here is that of Dakshina Koshala. Some of the present day districts of Chhattisgarh i.e. Bilaspur, Raipur, Raigarh, Durg and the western districts of Orissa, i.e. Kalahandi and Sambalpur comprised the historical region which is known in as Dakshina Koshala. Apart from textual references to the area, we also have archaeological reports of the excavations that were carried out of some of the sites that had shown a prominent status in its Historical period. The references to this area in its pre – historical phase are few and serve to provide only a sketchy outline of the history of that phase. An approach of studying the two kinds of sources in a complimentary fashion enables us to trace some of the developments that were going into forming of this region.

HISTORICAL RECONSTRUCTION

One of the scattered early references to the south Koshala which we have is from the text of Ashtadhyayi of Panini ascribed generally to the c. 5th century BC. The Grammarian in his Ashtadhyayi mentions the presence of Taitila Janapada. It flourished to the west of Kalinga and that territory has been associated by some scholars with the modern town of Titligarh in Balangir district (*JGO*: 4). Keeping in mind the late origin of the cities and states in south Koshala, largely between c. 3rd century B.C. and 1st century A.D. the existence of a Janapada here cannot be correlated to the wider context available to us. It is common knowledge that the same name for different areas were and are still to be found. Hence, Titligarh has to be sought elsewhere.

162 silver punch – marked coins were found in the treasury of Sonepur state of Orissa. Similar coins were recovered from other places: 2 from Sambalpur, 7 from Balapur and 15 from Tarapur. Parameshwar Lal Gupta and Balachandra Jain who examined these coins ascribed them to the ‘period of Mahajanapadas, anterior to the rise of the Magadha empire and may be dated earlier than 600 B.C (1947). The quite substantial number of coins indicates that a fair amount of trade must have been carried out between north Indian states and the region of Dakshina Koshala. But at this stage, no observations can be made regarding the articles which were imported or exported.

In the fourth century B.C., the Mauryas overthrowing the Nanda dynasty came to power in Magadha. Scholars are nearly unanimous in their belief that Chandragupta Maurya, the first ruler of this dynasty exercised sway not only over northern India but beyond the Vindhyas up to Mysore. The only region which was left unconquered was Kalinga, which was subdued by Ashoka, during his reign in the latter half of the 3rd century B.C. The assorted edicts issued by Ashoka constitutes the only direct source for the study of his reign as well as the contemporary times. One piece of evidence contained in the II Separate Rock edict carved only at Dhauli and Jaugada has given rise to confusion among scholars as to whether his kingdom comprised western Orissa or not? N.K. Sahu and S. P. Singh Deo are of the opinion that although much of south Koshala was incorporated in the Mauryan empire but ‘the wild uplands to the west, which was known as the *atavika* territory was not annexed by him’ (Deo, 1987). This view is based on the ‘unconquered borderers’ who are mentioned in this edict and who were located by these scholars to the west of Orissa, which constituted the *atavika* territory.

Incidentally, c. 3rd century B.C. is also the period which witnessed the genesis of urban centres in Dakshina Koshala – Malhar, Kothi in Bilaspur, Asurgarh, Dumberbahal, Budhigarh in Kalahandi districts (Mohanty et al, 1998-1999) and Bhanwarpur, Pirde in Raigarh (*JAR*, 1991-92: 54), Lilar and Rajim in Raipur. To start with, the area was probably explored by traders, who are known to have pioneered into unchartered and unknown land. Intermittent migrations took place in their wake. As in the case of the western Deccan, along with the monks and the Brahmanas, elements of advanced cultural and technological developments, recognized as features of urbanization, must have penetrated this region. Thus urbanization was largely a result of influences exerted at the grass – root level. But the agency of this influence is difficult to ascertain with precision. However, by examining the available information from Malhar and Asurgarh, for example we can formulate a few suggestions. The cultural ensemble at Asurgarh (*JAR*, 1972-73: 27) consisted of black polished potteries, potsherds of Ahichchatra type and a piece of chunar sandstone with Ashokan type polish. This does not amount to much but it certainly identifies our strand of influence – north eastern India or the Mauryan empire.

Moreover, an ancient route known to have gone from Kaushambi to south eastern coast has been discovered which passed through Bharhut, Bandogarh, Amarkantak and Malhar (Bajpai, 1989:1) which shows Dakshina Koshala to have had contacts with Kaushambi and gives certainty to our assumption. On a broader level, we can then talk about contacts with northern India. Although it cannot be

stated with any certainty as to when it came to be drafted on ground but it probably came into frequent use during and after the Mauryan period. An interesting feature regarding these early historical centres is that all of them were located in the plains on the banks of the rivers – Malhar on the bank of Lilagarh, Rajim on the confluence of the river Pairi with the Mahanadi, (Dikshit 1960: 27) Asurgarh on the bank of Sandul, Budhigarh besides the Rahul, Dumberbahal, river Ret (Mohanty et al, 1998-1999: 121-3) which were not only springs of life vital for agriculture but also channels for communication of ideas, thoughts and goods between the residents of the plains and the dwellers of the hills and in fact, far flung areas. The recovery of iron implements, beads of semi – precious stones, punch – marked silver and copper coins, glass bangles indicates the presence of society that showed evident signs of stratification in economic terms. The presence of the bones of domesticated sheep, goats, cattle, pig and buffalo as part of the faunal assemblage, points towards a diversification of the economy between the agriculturists and pastoralists.

There is no evidence forthcoming which would prove that the Mauryan state authority exercised any influence in this trans-Vindhyan region. An administrative machinery of the kind established in many other areas by the Mauryas cannot be seen here. Any contact between the two areas would have been informal, unstructured. One, however, does find some information mentioned in the Arthashastra. Scholars hold divergent views regarding the date which should be ascribed to their text. Since it is widely believed the information contained in this text pertains to the reign of Chandragupta Maurya, it is dated to the c. 4th century B.C. In the Arthashastra, six kinds of diamonds are mentioned and Madhyamarashtraka variety of diamonds according to the same authority, was available in Koshala. (Mohanty et al., 1998-1999: 123) This probably meant south Koshala. (Deo, 1987: p.68) This information is confirmed by the work of Ptolemy who writes that Sabara (perhaps Sambalpur) also yielded diamonds (Moti Chandra, 1977: 122). It is necessary before proceeding further with the task of reconstruction of the historical aspects of Dakshina Koshala to establish the political framework of the region, which would have been seen in conjunction with the historical proceedings in Orissa. The two important dynasties which came to power c. 2nd-1st century B.C. in the trans-Vindhyan region were the Satvahanas and the Mahameghavahanas. The former exercised control chiefly on the western Deccan while the latter represented a lesser power and the territory of Kalinga, over which they ruled constituted the rich and fertile coastal land stretching from the river Mahanadi in the north to the Godavari in the south with a hinterland of mountains and uplands in the west (Rath, 1983: 4).

N.K. Sahu is of the opinion that the present districts of Balangir and parts of the Kalahandi district formed a part of Kharavela's empire. (*ISG Balangir*: 42) J. P. Singh Deo inflated this area saying that 'there is probability of the whole western Orissa portion of South Koshala region, to have been incorporated in the Kalinga empire during the Chedi rule, when their power was extended to Kalinga...' (Deo, 1987: 74). As supporting evidence J. P. Singh Deo has placed considerable emphasis on locating the original homeland of the Chedis. He traces the Chedi ruler of Kalinga to Chedi tribe who are known to have ruled over a region with Shuktimatipuri as their capital. This Shuktimatipuri is seen to be similar to the river and town of Mahabharata and Sothivatinagar of Cetiya Jataka which were also stated in these texts to have associated with the Chedis. J. P. Singh Deo is of the view that Cedirashtra, founded by Abhicandra in the Vindhya region, may be said to be the same as South Koshala (1987: 74). Alexander Cunningham (*ASR*, XVII: 24, 69) locates Shuktimat range to south of Sehoa and Kanker which gives rise to the Shuktimat (i.e. Mahanadi according to Cunningham), Pyri and Seonath rivers. Pargiter rejects the theory on the ground that it confounds Shuktimat with Mahendra region. He identifies Suktimat river with Ken and the city of Sothivati (Shuktimati) he places in the vicinity of Bonda. D. R. Bhandakar (Bhattacharya, 1977: 124) opines that Cheta or Chetiya corresponds roughly to modern Bundelkhand. According to H. C. Raychaudhri, the ancient cedi territory corresponds to the eastern part of modern Bundelkhand and adjoining tracts (Raychaudhri, 1996: 129). D.C. Sircar suggested that the name of the Shuktimat is preserved in that of the Shakti hills in Raigarh, Madhya Pradesh and possibly in that of the Suktel river which joins the Mahanadi near Sonepur in Orissa. The predominant view, shared among the scholars is one that places the river Shuktimati and consequently the Shuktimati city in Bundelkhand region of Madhya Pradesh. What further makes the identification made by Deo impossible to accept is that the presence of the Cedi Janapada, one of the sixteen Mahajanapadas with an organized system in western Orissa, mentioned in the Buddhist literature, cannot be reconciled with the picture of cultural development which is obtained through archaeological excavations pertaining to the period.

From the Hathigumpha inscription of Kharavela it appears that he had sent a large army to the western countries without even thinking of Shatakarni. He sent a large army to the west and with its aid, having reached the Krishnavena struck terror into the hearts of the people (or city) of Musika (Asika?) nagara (Raychaudhri, 1996: 370-1). D. C. Sircar (1968: 213) would have it that '...there is no indication that Kharavela's army came into conflict with Shatakarni...', '...friendly relations existed between the two...' but he does not rule out the possibility that Kharavela's army attacked a city on the Krishna in the southern part of Satvahana kingdom. This evidence serves the purpose of establishing that the Satvahanas were present in western Orissa in c.1st century B.C. and ruled the country west of Kalinga but it is difficult from the same evidence to estimate the nature of the relationship that existed between the two neighbours. The Satvahana presence in south Koshala is confirmed by the excavation which had been carried out by Dr. S. K. Pandey of University of Sagar at Malhar in Trench 8 (Raychaudhri, 1996:129). It revealed a phase of structural activity belonging to the Satvahana and earlier times and it was observed that the area was obtained after the Satvahana occupation. Among the finds belonging to this period is a massive stone wall enclosing the plinths of a house – complex belonging to this period.

Next, some information on south Koshala was provided in the account which Yuan Chwang (Watters, 1973: 201-4) or Hiuen Tsang left behind of his sojourn to different regions in the Indian sub-continent between 639-645 A.D. Traversing southwards, one of the regions he visited was Dakshina Koshala. He remarked that a contemporary of Nagarjuna Pusa, a philosopher and Mahayanist by religion who had come to reside in Dakshina Koshala was Sha-to-p'o-ha or "Leading Light" [yin-cheng] who had quarried for the former, a monastery in the mountain. Regarding the identification of this ruler, Beal, Cunningham (1963) and Deo (1987: 78) identified Sha-to-p'o-ha with Gautmiputra Shatakarni. But D.C. Sircar (1968: 203-6) argues that not Gautmiputra Shatakarni but Yajna Shatakarni was the ruler who is believed to have restored the glory of Satvahanas, was the contemporary of Nagarjuna. These opinions were tied to the way these scholars interpreted the piece of evidence contained in the Nasik cave inscription which eulogises the conquests of Gautamiputra Shatakarni which made him the 'lord of Vindhya, Rikshavat, Pariyatra, Sahya, Malaya, Mahendra and other mountain ranges encircling the peninsular of south India'. Those who identified the Sha-to-p'o-ha with Gautmiputra firmly believed that the mention of the mount Mahendra in the list shows that the whole part of south Koshala was under the Satvahana empire (Deo, 1987: 78); those who did not condone this identification believed it to be a conventional claim of dig-vijaya (Sircar, 1968: 202).

Regarding the mountain in which the monastery was quarried, Hiuen-Tsang informs that it was called po-lo-mo-ki-li which was located to the south-west of the country about 300 li from the capital. It becomes imperative to positively identify this so as to have

the identifiable eastern limit of the Satvahana empire. This mountain has been identified by virtually all the scholars with Gandharmardangini situated on the borders of Sambalpur and Balangir districts.

A single copper was recovered from Balpur of Apilaka (Pandeya, 1948: 89-92) who belonged to a branch of the family (Satvahana) holding sway here. In the Puranic lists of Andhra kings, he is assigned a reign of twelve years and is placed immediately after Shatakarni and thus comparatively early in the dynastic list. The coin, however, is dated to the end of the second century A.D. This evidence was used by the scholars to reinforce their belief that Dakshina Koshala was under the Satvahana ruler. But solely on the basis of this coin, which had been recovered, one cannot reach any assumption with certainty.

In the intervening period between the rule of Shatakarni (after whom there is proof for the continuity of the Satvahanas in this area) and Sha-to-p'o-ha who has been variously identified, we come across a ruler named Kumaravardatta mentioned in the Gunji inscription (Mirashi, 1956: 48-53). This records the donation of two of his Amatyas to Brahmanas. The inscription has been dated to the first of 1st century A.D. by V.V. Mirashi (1956 : 49) on the basis of palaeographical evidence. In the epigraph, Kumaravardatta is referred to as rajan. The use of this title implies the lowest status of the personage in the political hierarchy and was adopted by the leader of those tribes which had effected a transition and become the nucleus of early kingdoms. The importance of this inscription lies in the fact that it is the first evidence we get of the existence of a local state. The establishment of the Satvahana ruler or administration in south Koshala and the socio-economic set up which were planted here played a key role in bringing about a transformation of the internal developments which had been taking place in the region in the shape of local dynasties. The state still had strong pastoral moorings since the object of the engraving is to record the grant on three different occasions of thousand cows to Brahmanas.

Four copper, rectangular coins found in the bed of the Mahanadi river at Balapur in Bilaspur district were examined by A.S. Altekar (1947) and twelve similar coins were studied by Balachandra Jain (1957). Altekar observes that the coins "appear to be more degenerated in type and execution than the Satvahana coins of Andhradesha. It is equally possible that they may have been issued after the downfall of the Satvahanas by local rulers in Southern Koshala". Balachandra Jain endorses this view where the four coins are concerned. These then could be assigned either to the period between 1st century B.C. and 2nd century A.D. Found as they were – 4 on the bed of the river and twelve in the coin – collection of the Mahant Ghasidas Memorial Museum, Raipur, their place of minting, origin or the area in which they occurred cannot be determined. But one thing which they perhaps indicate is the presence of local states organized enough to issue their own coins.

A Brahmi inscription on a wooden pillar from Kirari has been found. Kirari is a small village in the Chhattisgarh Division of Central Provinces, ten miles to the west of Chandarpur and about twenty miles to the south of Kharsia. The river Mahanadi flows some four miles to the south of it. Made of Bija Sal, it has been ascribed to c. 2nd century A.D. by Hirananda Sastri. A name that occurs in it reads like Sitha(dha)raja and the editor opines that the pillar was in some way connected to him or his son. This person has not been identified by any scholar, as yet. The pillar also mentions a host of designations or functionaries: Nagarkhins (city guards or police inspectors), Senapati (commander of the army), Pratihara, Ganka (accountant), Gahapatiya (?=garhapatiya, keeper of the household ire), Bhandaka(ga)rika (store keeper), Hatharoha (?=hastyarha or ? the king's elephant driver), Padamulika (temple-attendant), Rathika (probably the superintendent of chariots), mahasanika (kitchen-officer), Hathivaka (=hastipaka, perhaps superintendent of elephants), Dhavaka (fore-runner), Sa[u]ga[ndh]jika (=Saugandhika, office in charge of perfumery?), Goma[nd]lika (=gomandalika, or officer in charge of cows or cattle?), Yana[sha]alayudhagarika (officer in charge of carriage-shed and armoury), Palavithida(ka)va(pa)lika (inspector of meat stalls), Lehaharaka (letter carrier), Kulapatraka (perhaps chief architect) and Mahasenani or commander-in-chief (Sastri, 1958). This inscription cannot be ascribed to any local dynasty that had by this time probably sprung up. This is because without a substantial agrarian base, these dynasts could neither have set up such a broad base administration nor maintained it. The functionaries were those of a powerful ruler who perhaps temporarily exercised sway over this region. That the name of some officers were not Sanskritic indicates that the spread of Aryan culture was in an early stage.

The next reference to this region is available, strangely enough, only after a gap of nearly two centuries from the Allahabad Pillar inscription of Samudragupta engraved on the Ashoka pillar at Allahabad. The prashasti was composed by his minister for war and peace – Harishena and gives a detailed description of his personality and conquests which he had undertaken in the trans-Vindhyan region. He undertook, one or more expeditions beyond the Vindhya to the south-east where he defeated twelve rulers or Atavi-rajyas (forest kingdoms). The relevant part of the inscription reads: Kaushalaka- Mahendra- Maha[a]kaantaaraka- Vyaaghraraja- Kauralaka- Mantaraja-Paishtpuraka-Mahendra-giri Kautturaka- Svamidatt- Airandapallaka- Damana- Kancheyaka- Vishnugop- Avamuktaka- Nilaraja- Vaineeyaka- Hastivarma- Palakkak- Oyrasena- Daivarashtraka- Kubera- Kausthalapuaraka- Dhananjaya-prabhrti- sarvva- dakshinapatha- raja- grhana- moksh- anugraha- janita- pratap-onmisra- mahabhagyasa ...sarvva-atavika-rajyasa (Fleet, 1888: 7). Following the policy of grhana-moksha, he defeated these rulers but released them when they accepted him as their sovereign. He did not incorporate any of them in his domain. Kurud plates of Maharaja Narendra records the confirmation of the grant of the rural settlement Keshvaka which had been originally been given away by Parambhattarakapada. D. C. Sircar takes this expression to be an allusion to the Gupta overlord, which would mean that a Gupta ruler had exercised his control through probably only for a short while on southern Dakshina Koshala. The term in these inscriptions, which indicated the political status of the defeated kingdoms of Dakshinapatha was atavika rajyas, which shows that they were still, politically speaking in their nascent stage of development. That Samudragupta felt the need to conquer and ensure the subordinate status of Mahendra of Koshala also implies the growing political and economic importance of this region in early medieval India.

The above sources, provide a tentative outline of the rise of early state in the region of Dakshina Koshala. The factors that went into its making must have exerted influence in multiple ways, some of which are discernible.

REFERENCE

1. Altekar, A.S. 1947. Square Copper Coins from Balapur. Journal of Numismatic Society of India Vol. IX. Varanasi:31-33.
2. Archaeological Survey Review (ASR). Vol. XVII.
3. Bajpai, K.D. 1989. Early History of South Kosala in P.K. Mishra (ed.), Culture, Tribal History and Freedom Movement. Delhi.
4. Balachandra, Jain. 1957. Local Coins of Southern Kosala. Journal of Numismatic Society of India Vol. XIX :72-73.
5. Bhattacharya, P.K. 1977. Historical Geography of Madhya Pradesh from Early Records. Delhi.
6. Chandra, Moti. 1977. Trade and Trade-Routes in Ancient India. New Delhi.
7. Cunningham, Alexander. 1963. The Ancient Geography of India.
8. Dikshit, M.G. 1960. Sirpur and Rajim Temples. Bombay.
9. Deo, S.P. Singh. 1987. Cultural Profile of South Kosala from early period till the Rise of the Nagas and the Chauhans in the 14th century. Delhi.
10. Fleet, J. F. 1888. Early Gupta Kings. Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum Vol. III. Calcutta. 1888.
11. Gupta, Parmeshwar Lal and Jain Balachandra. 1947. Interesting Silver Coins from Madhya Pradesh, Journal of Numismatic Society of India Vol. IX (2) :107-113.
12. Imperial Gazette of Bihar and Orissa (*IGBO*).
13. Imperial Gazetteer Balangir (*IGB*).
14. Indian Archaeological Review (*IAR*). 1972-73, 1977-78, 1991- 92. New Delhi.
15. Mirashi, V.V. 1956. Epigraphia Indica, XXVII, New Delhi, 1956.
16. Mohanty et al. Early Historic Investigation in Kalahandi District, Orissa: a Preliminary report. Puratattva 29 (1998-1999) :120-131.
17. Pandeya, L.P. 1948. A Unique Andhra Coin Attributed to Apilaka in Kosala –Kaumudi. Allahabad.
18. Sastri, Hiranand. 1958. Brahmi inscription on a wooden pillar from Kirari. Epigraphia Indica, Vol. XVIII. Delhi. 1958 :152-157
19. Sircar, D.C. 1968. The Chedi (Maha – Meghavahana) Dynasty of Kalinga in History and Culture of Ancient People Vol II The Age of Imperial Unity. Bombay.
20. Sircar, D.C. 1970. History and Culture of Ancient People Vol III. The Classical Age. Bombay.
21. Raychaudhri, H.C. 1966. Political History of Ancient India from the Accession of Parikshit to the Extinction of the Gupta Dynasty. Eighth Edition. Delhi.
22. Watters, Thomas. 1973. On Yuan Chwang's Travels in India (A.D. 629 – 645) Vol. II. Second Edition. Delhi.