

RECENT ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDS AT KRIMILA: THEIR IMPLICATIONS ON THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF EARLY MEDIEVAL INDIAN HISTORY

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ABSTRACT

Krimila Adhithana, an early medieval religious-cum-administrative centre of eastern India is located in the area around Lakhisarai, a modern town and districts headquarter of Bihar. Valgudar (a village 3km north from the modern district headquarter of Lakhisarai) was the centre of Krimila Vishya. Mention of Krimila Vishya also occurs in various Gupta and post- Gupta inscriptions. Krimila was a prosperous medieval city lying between two major monastic universities- Nalanda and Vikramashila. The present paper reports two important recent finds from this area. In a recent course of exploration in area east of river Kiul (Krimikal), a hill which is located between the two modern villages, Bicchwe (Long. 25.165837) and Shringarpur has been identified for archaeological excavation. Height of the hill from the surface is approximately 125 meters, over which twenty seven cells made of post -Gupta bricks were discovered. These cells are of various size, 14/9', 12/8', 11/9', 8/6' and 6/4'. Along with these cells, 90 meter long and 30" thick brick wall running east to west is visible. Scientific clearance and proper excavations of this place by competent archaeologists may yield existence of several similar chambers (Cells), which appears as remain of a big Buddhist Vihara.

Keywords: Buddhist iconography, Falgu, Ganga, *Kimilasutta*, Krimila, Nalanda, Pala.

INTRODUCTION

The post-Gupta social formation was marked by the emergence of regional identities. Right from the time of the Guptas, and more so during the post- Gupta time the process of the origin and evolution of states which was till then confined to the upper and middle valleys of Ganga with some activities on this front also going on in some other parts of the sub-continent,

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came to acquire a regional dimension. This was preceded by a large-scale agrarianisation of the erstwhile peripheral areas and this in turn set in motion the beginnings of differing patterns of regional economies during the period. In the case of eastern India, despite sub-regional variations, one encounters the emergence of a cultural idiom that can be said to have assumed an identity of its own.

While talking about eastern India, one needs to take into consideration the differing conjunction of forces that operated in its three sub-regions – Mithila, Bengal and Orissa. While a large part of Bihar constituting the mid-Ganga valley had hitherto been the core area of economic development, the area of Bengal was yet to undergo that process of the exploitation of natural resources. Despite the Magadhan intrusions into these areas and the emergence of localized state systems, the developed elements of material culture had at best made only a nominal presence with their major segments remaining in the backwaters of economic development. Data pertaining to the urban centres in eastern India makes it imperative that the dominant theory of decline of urban centres from the Gupta period needs to be evaluated afresh. This explanatory model is developed primarily on the basis of empirical data germane to the upper and the middle valleys of Ganga. (i) Can one accord a Pan-Indian validity to the explanatory models developed primarily on the basis of empirical data germane to the upper and middle valleys of Ganga?; and (ii) Can one deny the specificities endemic to the formations that start crystallizing from the Gupta period? The two queries become extremely pertinent in the context of the developments of Gupta and post- Gupta times, the developments that undermined the hitherto dominant status of the mid -Ganga valley and led to the emergence of cultural nuclei in the erstwhile peripheral regions. Even a casual survey of the available archaeological data from Bengal would vindicate this pattern of social formation. Survey of sources reveals the change in the functional nature of urban centres during the period. Majority of urban centres in early eastern India during ancient period were either commercial or administrative, but the situation started changing during Gupta period. There are references indicating that such centres continued to exist during Gupta and post -Gupta period with changed character. Most of the urban centres were converted into either religious or fortified administrative nuclei during this period. This change in character itself is indicative of their disassociation from the mercantile activities. There is hardly any convincing evidence of large scale external trade in the early medieval eastern India. The decline in trade is attested by the decline in the fortunes of sea ports of eastern India by the Gupta times. Seemingly, the expanding agrarian economy along with the on-going process of state formation in the area sustained the urban centres that also emerged as centres of community activities in differentiation.

Responses to these queries shall, no doubt, assume centrality in any discourse related to the making of early medieval India. Such an exercise needs to explicate the concern that all region-specific developments, if these have to have any bearing on the attempts to construct our past, have to be related to the broader processes of the concurrently dominant social formation. A negation of this reality would tantamount to the denial of the elements of commonality in regional formation in north India. Such a stance leads to the projection of a pattern of cultural evolution characterized by the insolubly situated and spatially fragmented societies. Adherence to such a formation brings one face to face with a number of questions

that are conceptually uncomfortable. If the process of evolution of regional cultures is exclusively rooted in the complexities of their respective spatial context, then why is it that such a process, almost in every region, starts during the same period, i.e. the 5th-6th centuries A.D.? Has it anything to do with the social restructurings that the upper and middle valleys of Ganga underwent during this period? Moreover, how to rationalize for those elements of regional cultures, too intelligibly articulated to be ignored, that were obviously disseminated from the mid-Ganga valley? The construction of an "alternate mode" of analysis, therefore cannot afford to disengage itself from the dominant historical process of the times. It is with these concerns at the centre stage that the present paper seeks to explore the twin issues of the differential pattern of urban growth in north India during the Gupta period and the factors responsible for the emergence of cultural nuclei (the contemporary urban pattern being one of its manifestations) in the erstwhile peripheral regions.

An archaeological survey of northern India of the times brings to the fore a significant chronological dimension of the habitational pattern of the early Indian urban centres. Despite suggestion to the contrary, these settlements do not admit of a history of habitation that may be fitted into any universally applicable and chronologically standardized format. The dominant stand in the current debate on the question of urban decay in early India, however, ignores this variant chronological schema of decline obviously to buttress the hypothesis of the emergence of the homogeneous and chronologically uniform feudal formation from the Gupta/post-Gupta period. This dichotomy between urban tradition and feudal formation has been accorded such an absolute relevance in Indian historiography that complete negation of urban form becomes a logical deduction in the context of the feudal mode of production. Is the antagonism between feudalism and towns so intense? Does one negate the other so comprehensively? Or does it distinctly underline a pattern of urban decline that was both qualitative and quantitative in nature? What is then the specific form of opposition between the two?

Marx, in his apparently Eurocentric definition of the specificity of the feudal town, does lay bare the dynamics of the relationship: "The history of the classical antiquity is the history of the cities, but of cities founded on landed property and agriculture: Asiatic history is a kind of undifferentiated unity of town and countryside (the largest cities must be regarded here as royal camps as works of artifice created above the economic construction proper); the Middle Ages (Germanic period) begins with the land as the seat of history, whose further development then moves forward in the opposition between town and countryside; the modern age is the urbanization of the country, not realization of the city as in antiquity." This opposition need not be construed as a complete negation of towns in the feudal complex. The complex of an inherent antagonism between feudalism and towns as well as the latter's separation from the countryside finds an echo in the writings of Max Weber, Ferdinand Braudel and Sjoberg who delimit the town as an institutional expression of power. Taking the cue from Weber, Philip Abrams situates the town in a larger social context called the complex of domination, which is marked by a struggle to constitute and elaborate power. Such a concept of domination and power associated with the medieval European towns had a crucial bearing on the explanations related to the formation of the cultural and economic base for the origins of capitalism. The projection of these "*non-feudal*

islands in the feudal seas" as the prime mover towards capitalism underlines this position. The more recent writings, however, do not talk in terms of an absolute antagonism between feudalism and towns, rather they underscore the changing functional nature of these settlements. Now the process of urbanization is sought to be situated within the feudal system and the medieval towns are seen as development integral to it. Significantly it has been suggested that the feudal pattern of social control constrained economy within towns and instead of looking for urban origins of capitalism one should look for its rural roots. A feudal society, therefore, does not negate the very tradition of urbanization; it only makes the town bereft of meaningful economic initiatives. The suggestion that some of the early towns declined and got transformed into centres of pilgrimage underscores a similar functional mutation. Krimila, an early medieval religio-administrative centre of eastern India can be used an example for early medieval urban centre.¹

Krimila Adhithana is located in the area around Lakhisarai, a modern town and districts headquarter of Bihar. Valgudar (a village three km north from the modern district headquarter of Lakhisarai) was the centre of Krimila *Vishya*. Mention of Krimila Vishya occurs in the Gupta and post- Gupta inscriptions also. In this regard, Nalanda plate of Samudragupta, Bihar inscription of Gupta period, Naulagarh inscription of Pala period and two other inscriptions discovered from Valgudar and its adjacent area are significant. In one inscription it is mentioned that in the Dharmapala's kingdom at Krimila *Vishya Madhu Srenika* (A guild of honey collectors), in honor of Dharmapala, has founded a *Devadhammayam* i.e religious centre. In this inscription, Krimila is mentioned as *Adhithana*, and this word has been taken to mean as centre for administration i.e. a city or town. Another inscription from Valgudar gives us very important information about the date of the Pala ruler Madanapala, in which we learn that during the 18th regnal year of his rule a Narayana image was installed by two Paramavaishnava Bhatta brothers, Shree Sukim Bhatta and his brother Shree Abhi Bhatta with his father, in the Saka era 1083. Hence, from this inscription we can conclude that Madanapala had ascended the Pala throne in 1143 A.D. and ruled at least for 18 years that would mark the year 1161 A.D. In this inscription, the place Krimila is prominently mentioned. Munger copper plate inscription of Devepala mentions Krimila Vishya in Srinagar Bhukti (Pataliputra has been identified as centre of Srinagar Bhukti). Mention of Krimila as a nagara is also found from the contemporary Brahmanical and Buddhist texts. There is a tradition recorded in *Harivamsa* and *Vayu purana* that a local ruler Krimi, son of Usinara, a king of Puru dynasty, was the lord of Krimilapuri, early Buddhist works mentions Krimila as a very old city, situated on the bank of river Ganga, which witnessed activities of the Buddha. Two suttas, entitled *Kimilasutta* and *Kimilasutta*, were preached by Buddha when he was camping at the *Venuvana* at the city of Krimila. Analysis of these inscriptions and literature suggests that this place flourished in ancient period and continued as an important religio- administrative centre up to 12th century A.D. Another significant aspect is donation by the merchant community and existence of guild during the period of Dharmapala, the ruler of Pala dynasty in 9th century A.D.²

Antiquarian remains around this region take us towards early historicity of this region which is much earlier than the Gupta period. Cunningham identified *Lo-in-ni-lo* mentioned by Xuanzang at Rajaouna. Xuanzang mentions that he visited this place, where he saw a

The geographical location of this region is significant; the place is situated on the confluence of three major rivers of eastern India: Ganga, Haruhar and Kiul. The existing morphology of river Ganga is around five km north. However, earlier scars of river are still visible at the site. Moreover from the scar, white sand of Ganga is available. The geographical as well as historical significance of the river Ganga is well known. No less important in this respect is the river Haruhar, as it connects the entire south Bihar. The river Haruhar originates near Nalanda as one of the branches of the river Falgu. Besides Ganga, both the rivers Haruhar and Kiul are perennial in nature and connected to the early historical places of Bihar. As far as the river Haruhar is concerned, it connects Lakhisarai with early historical centers like Nalanda, Rajgir, Bodh-Gaya in south and while merging into Ganga at the site, it connects Pataliputra and Varanasi in the west, Munger, Champa and Tamralipti in the east. River Kiul does have significance in these connecting possibilities. R. Kiul is connected with southeast region of Bihar. Early reference to this river is mentioned in several Buddhist texts like *Anuguttarnikaya* and *Moghyevagga* in which this river is called Krimikala and on the bank of this river *Chaliya Parvat* was situated, where Buddha spent time during rainy season. Buddha spent his 13th, 18th and 19th rainy seasons at this mountain. It is significant to note that the river Kiul passes through these two mountains, one on the western bank another is on the eastern bank and on top of these two mountains, there are antiquities of ancient period lying unprotected.

Historical geography of this place is of great historical significance because on the northern bank of this confluence early historical site of north Bihar, Naulagarh is located. This place might have been used as a river port, because almost all the important rivers of north Bihar again connect Naulagarh, situated just opposite Lakhisarai, on the northern bank of this confluence. Particularly during the Pala rule in north Bihar (north of river Ganga), we get plenty of black stone sculptures in various sites i.e. Dumra, Akaur, Ucchaith, Mahisi, Kapilesvara, Balirajgarh, Kopagarh, Andhra Tharhi etc.³ Non-availability of material in north Bihar for making sculptures in this period is key factor before us. Topography of north Bihar reveals the existence of only plain land, and black stone used for the making of sculptures were perhaps procured from South Bihar region. To carry stone slab for construction or carving of sculpture, it is certain that the river routes would have been used. Significance of the location of these two places Valgudar and Naulagarh, one on the southern side and another on the northern side has to be taken into account. Moreover, their connectivity with major rivers of south and north Bihar leads towards this conclusion. Further Lakhisarai is also situated between Nalanda and Vikramshila, the two religio-educational centers of early medieval Bihar. Another significant aspect is that the location of this place can be pinned on the old Pataliputra to Tamralipti route (via Champa). The ancient connectivity of this place has been discussed by Claudine Bautze-Picron in her study of late Buddhist Iconography of sculptures found in Lakhisarai (1991-92).⁴

The purpose of the present paper is to report two important recent finds from this area. In a recent course of exploration in area east of river Kiul (*Krimikala*), a hill which is located between the two modern villages, Bicchwe (Long. 25.165837) and Shringarpur. Height of the hill from the surface is approximately 125 meters, over which twenty seven cells made of post-Gupta bricks were discovered. These cells are of various size, 14/9', 12/8', 11/9', 8/6' and 6/4'. Along with these cells, 90 meter long and 30" thick brick wall running east to west is visible.

Scientific clearance and proper excavations of this place by competent archaeologists may yield existence of several similar chambers (cells), which appears as remain of a big Buddhist Vihara. In the centre of the hillock, a 40'x27' courtyard has been identified. Photographs of these structures are given below.



Picture: 1



Picture: 2



Picture: 3



Picture: 4



Picture: 5

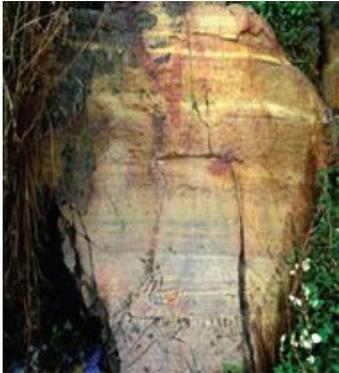


Picture: 6

(Source: Kumar, Anil, 2016)

Besides these remains on the top of the hill; at the middle of the same hill there is a cave of 17/4 meter in size, facing towards south west direction. It is worth mentioning that from this hill towards south west, another hill exists around three kilometers on the bank of river Krimikala (modern Kiul). This hill is located in the modern village of Ghosi Kundi, where remains of a Buddhist Stupa are reported first by Alexander Cunningham. He had done preliminary excavation of this Stupa and found the relic casket, containing twenty seven hundred coins made of lac etc, which finds mention in his report. Further this Stupa remains were identified as Chaliya stupa, where Buddha spent three rainy seasons and near the hill in the Veluvana he preached two suttas of *Sutta Pitaka*. Inside the cave, there are two chambers of 8/8' and 12/11', with height of 7'. Walls of these chambers are smooth polished.

On the middle of this hill towards north facing Shrigarpur village, there are evidences of petro glyphs and few inscriptions engraved on the rock of the hill. Paleographically, these inscriptions are dated 9th c. A.D. and the language of inscription is Sanskrit. Existence of petro glyphs gives us sufficient indications about early settlement of human being in this region. Inscriptions engraved near these petro glyphs were definitely later activity.



Picture: 7



Picture: 8



Picture: 9

Inscriptions are in early Siddhamatrika characters and Sanskrit is the language. Paleographically they are datable to about 9th century A.D. and indicate very interesting facts of history. In these inscriptions, we get evidence of stone cutter and artisan.



Picture: 10

Inscription reads: "*Sutradhara Purasya*", in early Siddhamatrika character and Sanskrit language. Paleographically it can be dated to 9th century A.D. It seems to record the name of the artisan as Pura.



Picture: 11

Picture 11 reads: "*Sūtradhāra Sā|vatsya*". Inscription is in early Nāgarī characters and in the Sanskrit language. Paleographically, this can also be dated to about 9th century A.D. The inscription refers to the name of an artisan as Sā|vata.



Picture: 12

Inscription reads: "*ūr~ Madha=a (line 1), üakadha*" (line 2). Period script and language is same as above.



Picture: 13

Inscription reads: (line 1) *Jatīdhavalla iilakīlī**a Kavi putral* (line 2) *Liḱhīyanta Gahakēṅāḱ*. Period script and language is same as above.

The inscription seems to refer to a stone-cutter (iilak@**a) named Jatīdhavalla, son of certain Kavi. The second line probably refers to the name of the engraver as Gahaka.

Prior to these finds from this locality large number of sculptures of Buddhist and Brahmanical religion is reported in various scholars work.

Many of the sculptures are still lying in the nearby villages in an area of around 50 square kilometres unprotected and unguarded. Existence of large number of sculptures in this region was surprising for the scholars because they were not sure from where they have come? Few of them have suggested that perhaps this place was the manufacturing centre for sculptures found in this region.



Picture: 14

On the beneath of this hill, towards north one, Vishnu image is engraved in the hill. Stylistically this image can be dated to 9th-10th century A.D.

Besides these engraved images, per glyphs and inscriptions, on the beneath of the hill there are few sculptures of Brahmanical deities which are kept in a temple called "*Ramesvaradham*". Sculpture of Ganesha, Mahishasurmardini and a Shiva linga is installed inside this temple and worshipped by local people. Stylistically these sculptures suggest their dates as 8-9th century A.D. All the sculpture is made of black basalt stone and except the Linga and Ganesha sculpture all other is 2.5' in size.



Picture: 15



Picture: 16



Picture: 17

Uren:

The village is situated on the Patna Bhagalpur rail line, between the two important railway stations Kiul and Jamalpur. This village is around 15 km's east from Kiul station. Historical artifacts from this village are reported since 19th century by A. Cunningham (1873), Beglar (1878) and Waddell (1892). Uren has been a significant early historic site showing continuous occupation up to the early medieval phase. Waddell brought to the notice about the significance amongst the Buddhist ruins of Bihar. He described about the Buddhist ruins on the hills which exists south and north of the modern village. He also reported about existence of a Stupa and temple on the top of the hill. Waddell noticed a life size image of Buddha, several inscribed images and votive 'Chaityas' of high artistic merit. On the south eastern side of the summit of a solitary hill near the village Waddell mentions as Lorik-ka Ghar. Lorik is one of the most legendary heroes known to the folklore of Bihar. Waddel also identified here the house of Bakula Yaksha of Buddhist tradition which claims that Buddha ultimately converted the Yaksha.⁵

Besides the colonial writers this site was explored by few eminent archaeologists in modern times. Por. D.K. Chakrabarti has mentioned about this site in his book "*Archaeological Geography of Ganga Plain: Lower and Middle Ganga Valley*".⁶ His observations after exploration of the site are "Uren has been a significant early historic site showing continuous occupation up to the early medieval phase." In 2004-05 Prof. R.K. Chattopadhyaya and Dr. Rajat Sanyal also explored the site and published their report by concluding that the occupation of this site is from early period to the middle ages. They have reported finds of BRW, BSW, and NBPW potteries along with microlithic tools, potter's equipments, bone harpoons and fish hooks of early period from this site. They also identified architectural remains of Buddhist and Brahmanical institution remains of early medieval period and discussed about their nature in their article.

In a recent course of exploratory work near the Buddhist monuments mentioned by the previous scholars, few images of votive stupa were found engraved on the hillock where the brick stupa is reported. These engraved votive stupa images suggests existence of worshipper and donor at the site.



Picture: 18



Picture: 19

Besides these engraved votives stupa marks in all the directions of the hillock, on the north western side of this hillock few holes for cutting the stone in rectangular way, made by chisel were identified.



Picture: 20



Picture: 21



Picture: 22

These holes made by chisels are clear evidence of stone cutting for making sculptures in this region. Lakhisarai as a centre for making sculptures during early medieval period is mentioned in writings of Picron and others but they were not sure that for making those sculptures from where the stone was taken. Common people describe the rock used for making these sculptures were either brought from Gaya or Rajmahal hills. Frederick M. Asher is of the view that the stone used for making sculpture during this period in this region was brought from Matadih quarry near Munger.⁷ These marks clearly suggests that the source of stone for making sculpture in this region was Uren because this place is hardly 12 kilometres east from the main centre of activity in this region. Further, the inscriptional evidences about the artisans on the Bicchwe hill strengthen this argument. Evidence for source of stone, scribes/artisans and large number of sculptures clearly suggests that this was a big centre for manufacturing sculptures in early medieval period.

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