



Mythological And Historical Narratives Associated With The Asuragarh Archaeological Site In Islampur Subdivision Of Uttar Dinajpur District : A Critical Study

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Abstract: The current Islampur Subdivision is intertwined with various mythological and historical narratives, making it appealing to tourists. The legends of the Subdivision are still alive among the local people, playing an important role in their culture. This Subdivision contains several Garhs that are associated with various Mythological and Historical events. Among the Garh in this Subdivision, Asuragarh is one of them. It is a archaeological site. There are various mythological and historical stories associated with this site, which are passed down by word of mouth. During the Mahabharata era, this region was governed under the rule of a king Virat. Many believe that the residence of this king Virat's brother-in-law was actually this Asuragarh. Other hand, Many believe that this Asuragarh was built during the Gupta period. A copper coin from the age of kushan Emperor Kanishka has also been found from this Asuragarh, which is an important piece of evidence in ancient history of India. Also, copper plates, bangles, medals and seals were found from Asuragarh.

Keywords: Purnea, Islampur, Chakulia, Mythological, Historical, Asuragarh, Gupta etc.

Introduction

Currently, it is known that the present Islampur Subdivision was part of the Mithila Kingdom during the age of religious scriptures. This area was part of the Surjapur Pargana during the Muslims reign. During the British period this area was part of undivided Purnea district and Kishanganj Subdivision. The glorious past of Islampur Subdivision embedded in the history of Bihar. Various English researchers have authored many quality works in the field of research concerning this area. Also, many modern researchers have published various research papers and books on this area. This research by the scholars reveals that various mythological and historical tales are intertwined with the history of this Subdivision. Various researchers have presented their findings an Asuragarh using different methodologies. According to various historians, this Subdivision was part of the Virat's kingdom during the Mahabharata era. This brother-in-law of the King Virat, Kichak , was an important character of Mahabharata. And

this Kichak had residence in different places in this area. Several villages in this area bear the name Kichaktola, which is believed by many to be a testament to him.

Mythological Narratives Related To Asuragarh

Islampur Subdivision holds an important place in the history of Bihar, because, Islampur Subdivision was a part of the undivided Purnea district of Bihar. On the east side of this district lies Pundras and on the west side lies the Angas. "The earliest inhabitants of the district are believed to have been Angas to the west and Pundras to the East."¹ In the era of Dharmashastra, the rule of Sun dynasty Kings fostered development and cultural identity in this region. This area has an important chapter in history associated with king Janak, marking the era of the Ramayana. During the era of the Ramayana, the influential King Janak of Mithila ruled over this region. "The boundary of Mithila comprises the modern districts of Muzaffarpur, Darbhanga, Champaran, and parts of the districts of Monghyr, Bhagalpur and Purnea."² This area is an important part of the history of the Mahabharata era. The eastern side of this district was home to the Pundras Kingdom, ruled by Basudev Pundrak. During the Mahabharata war, Basudev Pundrak joined the Kauravas and provided them support. The present Karandighi police stations of the Islampur Subdivision was under the rule of the king Karna of the Anga Kingdom. The name of the place is Karandighi, which has been derived from the name of this Karna. A pond (Dighi) in the Karandighi region is named Karnadighi, which was originally excavated by King Karna. King Karna performed water offering in this pond (Dighi) for his ancestors. The 'Shiruya Fair' starts here in the Bengali month of Baisakh, attracting many visitors. This fair, which lasts nearly a month, is a significant part of the local culture. People believe that the water of this pond(dighi) is sacred and brings happiness to their lives."In the police station of Karandighi, there is a tank named Karandighi, locally associated with the king named Karna. There is a tendency in the locality to identify this Karna with the Karna of the Mahabharata. The local people, both Hindus and Muslims, believe that wishes are granted if one takes a dip in the water Karandighi promising to make an offering should the wish come true. If the wish comes true, then offering is made on the first of Baishakh following, at the tank. A mela or religious gathering is held in the month of Baishakh at the banks of Karandighi to celebrate the fulfillment of vows "³ Additionally, many parts of the Islampur Subdivision were under the rule of the King Virat during the era of the Mahabharata. The kingdom of the Raja Virat was known as the Matsya Kingdom. "Local tradition still speaks of the struggles and conquests of the Kiratas, and a Kirata (Kiranti) women from the Morang or Tarai is said to have been the wife of Raja Virat, who, according to legend, gave shelter to Yudhishtira and his four Pandava brothers during their 12 years exile. The site of his fort is still pointed out at Thakurganj in the north of the district."⁴

Asuragarh is a beautiful village located in the Chakulia police station under the Islampur Subdivision. During his survey, Francis Buchanan was able to learn a lot about the Asuragarh from the locals. Many say that this Asuragarh was the residence of king Virat's brother-in-law (Kichak). King Virat's brother-in-law was this demon. Many believe that the neighbouring area of Dinajpur district was under the rule of Kichak. "This part of the country is acknowledged to be in Matsya, and a ruin is pointed out as having been the house of Kichak. It is usually called the Asura Garh, of house of the Infidel, and in general the native do not pretend to know who this personage was. Some intelligent people, however as I have said, allege that this Infidel was no other than Kichak, the brother-in-law of Virat the Raja of Matsya, and this is in some measure confirmed by its having been said in Dinajpur that the neighbouring parts of the district belonged to this personage. The pandit of the mission is however unwilling to admit that Kichak was an Asur, and supposes it more probable that the fort belonged to some of the Infidel chiefs of the mountains, who are known to have made an irruption into this part of the country. The people here also allege that Matsya extended all the way to the kosi; but that must refer to the situation of the country when the Kosi came east from its entrance into the plains of Tajpur, and its left Bank would then be nearly the South boundary of the

kiratas; or Kichak Virat main very probably have married a sister of the prince of that country, as in early Times it is generally admitted that there was no restriction to prevent men of rank from marrying low women."⁵

Even during the time of the W.W. Hunters, the same tale about Asuragarh was prevalent in the Mahabharata. "They were said to mark the site of the chief residence of a Raja Virat, whose territory lay along the east of the Kusi, and included the country round about as far as Rangpur and Dinajpur. Of this Raja Virat, it is related that he gave shelter to Yudhishtira and his four brothers, the chiefs of the Pandavas, during their twelve years, exile, after they had been driven out of Hastinapur by the Kauravas, the other branch of the lunar race."⁶ There were many supernatural beliefs among the people regarding Asuragarh, which deeply influenced their culture. Which can be found in w.w. Hunter text. "That the Earth of the tank, if taken near any other tank, has the power of immediately drawing forth from it all the fish it contains."⁷

Historical Narratives Related To Asuragarh

During the British period, Asuragarh was one of the prominent Garh in the Kishanganj Subdivision of undivided purnea district. Connected with various Historical events, Asuragarh is one of the main attractions of this region. During the British period, many ancient artifacts were scattered around Asuragarh, which are a part of history. Many say that when the soil of this Asuragarh is dug up, numerous copper utensils come to light. "There are ample materials for archaeological researches, as rocks and portions aap pillars with figures and inscriptions are to be seen lying about the sites."⁸ W.W. Hunter mentioned that in 57 B.C, during the reign of emperor Vikramaditya of Ujjain, five brothers built fives Garhs in one night in there own names. Three Garhs marks were clearly observed within it. "The five brothers are said to have lived in the Vikramaditya period, that is to say, about 57 B.C, and the forts , it is added, were all built in a night."⁹ These five brothers came to this area during the time of Vikramaditya and established fort here to showcase their strength and bravery. "The story locally current as to the origin of these Garhs is that there were five brothers, Benu, Barijan, Asura, Nanha, and Kanha, who each built a garh or fortified residence, and named it after himself."¹⁰

Many researchers identify these five brother as belonging to the Gupta Era Emperor Chandragupta-II or Vikramaditya. Dr. Brindaban Ghosh has said that-"In the Asuragarh village of the Surjapur Pargana, which is part of the Chakulia police station, five brothers named Benu, Barijan, Asura, Nanha, and Kanha built a garh overnight during the Gupta period under the rule of Vikramaditya."¹¹ Also, Dr. Partha Sen has said that -" locals believe that during the time of the Gupta Emperor Vikramaditya, the five brothers, namely Benugarh, Vanijan, Asur, Nanha, Kanha came here and each brother built a fortified garh named after him. Garhs are made overnight."¹² As time passed, it is said that this area became completely filled with jungle. There were large trees that were born there. Hindus were afraid to go here because they felt insecure. Hindus believed that if they went there, the Asur would be angered at them. "The people on the spot state that some hundred years ago the place was covered with trees; and that no Hindu would Venture to live on it, lest Asur Deo should be offended."¹³ After the establishment of the Muslim empire in India, Muslims began exert political and social influence in various regions. It is said that are holy Muslim occupied this place during the time by appeasing the Asur by sacrificing a cow. And cleared the forest there and started farming. "At length a holy Musalman came, and, killing a cow, took possession, which is descendants retain. They have cleared and cultivated the whole place, and enjoy considerable reputation."¹⁴

Many copper artifacts have been found from this Asuragarh, which testify to ancient history. A copper coin of the emperor Kanishka was found from Asuragarh.¹⁵ It is said that these five brothers were associated with the business of copper made goods. That is why many copper goods were stored in Asuragarh. Perhaps this coin from the

Kanishka era came to this region for trade purposes.¹⁶ It is also said that these five brothers were very powerful and tyrannical, which made everyone fear them. They used to loot the wealth of many people and Store it in the fortress. Large pits were constructed round the portress to help increase security against enemy attacks.¹⁷ In the research, Smarajit Ghosh has briefly discussed this Asuragarh. He also discussed the same. Hi mentioned those five brothers who constructed the Garh built in one night.¹⁸

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be said that there is no accurate historical evidence regarding this Asuragarh, so it not possible to say when it was built. Therefore, various mythological and historical narratives have been associated with Asuragarh. Regardless of the narratives associated with this Asuragarh, it cannot be denied that it is an archaeological site. In this garh there were many large buildings that were buried over time. During the British period, many archaeological indicators were found around Asuragarh. Excavations of this Asuragarh even today yield many copper objects. There is no denying that this Asuragarh is a valuable archaeological site in modern Islampur Subdivision of Uttar Dinajpur District.

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