

Kalinga and Burma - A Study in Ancient Relations

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Orissa, popularly known as Kalinga in the ancient times was a very powerful kingdom. Traditionally extending from the river Ganga in the north to the Godavari in the south on the western coast of the Bay of Bengal, she had ample opportunity to be a flourishing maritime power. The Kalingans, in fact, were very adventurous people (*K a l i n g a h Sahasikah*) and it is believed that the power and prosperity of Kalinga was on account of its extensive maritime trade. The vast coast

line of Kalinga was studded with a number of navigable ports whence the merchants and sailors plyed to different far-off countries in pursuit of fortune. Tamralipti, Chelitalo / Manikapatna, Palur, Khalkattapatna, Pithunda, Kalingapatnam were some of the significant ports worthy to be mentioned. Kalinga had maritime contact not only with the Asian countries but also with Africa and the Roman Empire. Since time immemorial she had brisk contact with Srilanka and south-east Asian

countries. It is said that the evolution of Hindu culture in the Island of Bali, and the establishment of Sri Vijaya empire in Sumatra traced their origin to the Kalingan maritime contact. Vijaya, the first king of Sri Lanka had also Kalingan origin.

With this sketchy background, in the present paper, an endeavour has been made to bring out the ancient relations of Kalinga with Burma.

Kalinga had maintained close contact with Burma (Myanmar) in the

ancient times. From the Burmese traditions it is gleaned that the people of Kalinga had established colonies in Burma since time immemorial. Burma being nearest to India, and directly accessible by both land and sea routes naturally attracted Indian traders, merchants, missionaries and more ardent military spirits from a very early period¹. As such, the geographical proximity of Kalinga and Burma and their location on the north-western and north-eastern parts of the Bay of Bengal



respectively provided favourable conditions for the establishment of maritime contact between the two. G.E.Gerini² in his researches on Ptolemy's Geography has pointed out that the mighty people of Kalinga had colonized Burma much before emperor Ashoka led his victorious soldiers into Kalinga. B.C.Majumdar³ advocates that "the Kalingans established an empire in Burma perhaps many hundred years before the rise of Buddhism". In absence of authentic data these views sometimes, however, appears to be mere exaggerations. Without an analysis we can not say exactly the role played by the Kalingans in Burma.

The *Jatakas*, the *Arthashastra* of Kautilya (cir.4th CBC), and the *Mahaniddesa*(cir.3rd CBC) have references to Burma as *Suvarnabhumi* (the golden land). The classical writers refers to it as Chryse and Golden Khersonese. J.G.Scott⁴ observes" it seems more likely that the Golden Chersonese is simply a translation of the name *Suvarnabhumi*, the classic, or sacred name of Burma". The Cinghalese (Cylonese) monks have given the name *Brahma-desa* to Burma⁵. The Arab geographers mention the Mon country of lower Burma under the name of Ramanadesa⁶. The *Mahajanaka Jataka* (no.539) states that prince Mahajanaka reached *Suvarnabhumi* with 350 persons. According to H.B.Sarkar⁷ "evidently they had gone there with the purpose of colonization". The *Tagaung Yazawin*, a late Burmese chronicle based on earlier traditions says that Abhi Raja of Kapilavastu, who became the first ruler of Burma, came with a military contingent as early as cir 923 BC. He is said to have arrived in Burma through Arakan and founded the kingdom called Sangassarattha in the Tagaung country of Burma⁸. According to Burmese tradition, another Indian prince named

Chandravamsa, said to be a brother of Ashoka's chief Queen Asandhimitra, came to Burma in 324 BC and founded a new dynasty. But the date of Chandravamsa's arrival in Burma *i.e.* 324 B.C. referred to by the Burmese traditions appears to be wrong, as this date would make him a contemporary of Ashoka's grandfather Chandragupta Maurya and not that of Ashoka. However, this prince is said to have built a new capital city called Shue-hnanmyo (the Golden Palace city) which had been visited by Ashoka's son Mahendra. Mahendra is reputed to have built a monastery on the Yangoma hill in the vicinity of the capital and is believed to have preached Theravada Buddhism in the kingdom before his departure for Ceylon⁹. From the above narration though we can not be able to determine exactly the date of influx of Indians into Burma, historically one thing is evident that in the pre-centuries of the Christian era many Indian settlers from northern India came by the land route and carved out small principalities in different places of Burma. Of course, one can not deny the use of water routes to Burma . It is believed that the trade centres on the banks of Ganga had direct water routes for *Suvarnabhumi* (Burma).

Burma went by the name of Kalingarat (*Kalinga Rastra*) in the seventh century B.C.¹⁰ The *Buddhagat*, the sacred Burmese scripture refers to "a steady commercial interaction with Burma by the Buddhist merchants of Kalinga, which soon led to the missionary undertakings for the propagation of their religion, and afterwards to the assumption of political supremacy in the land¹¹. Tapassu and Bhalluka, the first lay disciples of Buddha, supposed to be two merchant brothers of Utkal (another name of Orissa) went to the golden land (Burma) by sea with eight hairs of the head of

Buddha (given by the Buddha himself) and enshrined under the Shwe Dagon Pagoda at Rangoon¹². Besides, there are evidences to prove that certain sections of the people migrated from Kalinga and had their settlements there who were known as the Talaing people. The new Kalingarat in Burma was given the designation Mudu Kalinga. (Mudu means three, thus, Mudu Kalinga is TriKalinga). From the Mon chronicles it is known that two Buddhist monks, Sona and Uttara were deputed to the Golden land by the Third Buddhist synod at Pataliputra in *cir.*241 BC¹³. According to G.E.Gerini¹⁴ before Ptolemy wrote his geography in the second century A.D., the rule of the Kalingans centred around at least three places in Burma *i.e* (i) Kale, (ii) the valley of the Arakan river, and (iii) Pegu proper around the gulf of Martaban. G.Coedes¹⁵ has also observed that in lower Burma there were colonies of Indians who had come from Orissa. According to R.F. St.Andrew and St. John, “somewhere about A.D. 300, people from the east coast of the Bay of Bengal founded colonies on the coast of the Gulf of Martaban, of which the principal appears to have been Thaton or Saddhammanagara.”¹⁶ Thus, on the basis of these evidences it can be inferred that there was brisk relationship between Kalinga and Burma in the pre and the beginning centuries of the Christian era.

K.C.Panigrahi¹⁷, observed that “the people of Kalinga (Orissa) entered into lower Burma in large numbers, settled there permanently, changing even names of cities and some parts of Burma.” The view of Professor Panigrahi, however, requires to be scrutinised. No doubt, Kalinga had tremendous influence on Burmese place names and monuments. On the other hand, Burma owed to Orissa many

elements of culture too. The ruins of a ship which have been excavated at Tante, near Rangoon is even believed to have belonged to the merchants of Kalinga¹⁸. In Burma, the old name of Pegu was Ussa which is a form of Odra or Orissa.¹⁹ Similarly, the old kingdom of Prome was called *Srikshetra*, so often mentioned in the Mon records as *Sikset* or *Srikset* apparently was named after *Srikshetra*, modern Puri of Orissa.²⁰ It is said that Srikshetra was the first great Hindu kingdom beyond the frontier of East India.²¹ Hiuen Tsang and I-Tsing, the Chinese pilgrims (7th CAD) specifically say : “Southward from this (Kettara), and close to the sea-coast, there is a country called *Shi-li-cha-to-lo* (*Shrikshetra*)”.²² K.A.N.Sastri²³, however, has wrongly identified Shrikshetra of Burma with Vanavasi, the capital of the Kadambas in the western part of south India. It is believed that the Pyus who settled in the 11th century AD.in and around Prome had direct connection with Orissa (Shrikshetra).²⁴

In connection with the establishment of the Shrikshetra kingdom the Shwezigon Pagoda inscription records : “The Lord Buddha smiled and Ananda asked the cause of this smile ; and the lord spoke unto Ananda. Ananda, hereafter a sage named Bishnu, great in supernatural power, great in glory, possessing the five transcendental faculties, together with my son Ganapati and King Indra and Bissukarmadevaput (putra) and Katakarmmanagaraja, shall build a city called *Sisit Srikhetra!* After the sage Bishnu has built the city of Sisit, he shall depart from thence (and) in the city of Arimaddanpur (Pagan) he shall become king Sri Tribhuvanaditya Dharmaraja.”²⁵ Tribhuvanaditya Dharmaraja has been identified with king Kyanzittha of Pagan.²⁶ From the inscription it is revealed that

the king had claimed about Buddha's prediction in founding Srikshetra by him. Similarly, the north-western part of Burma, the region extending from Rangoon to Tante (Pegu) was known as Ukkala or Utkalapa; a variant of Utkala or Odisa. According to R.C. Majumdar²⁷ the name Utkala originally applied to a region in the delta in lower Burma by the colonists from the Orissa coast. The Talaings, the ruling races of lower Burma otherwise known as the Mons had their capital at Triglypton or Trilingon. Gerini²⁸ has identified Triglypton of Ptolemy with Kale / Kula. It is now universally acknowledged that the Talaing people of Burma or the Mons obtained their name from TriKalinga. G.E. Harvey²⁹ says that the name Talainga could have been derived from Telengana, a region on the Madras (Chennai) coast. However, TriKalingas as a name used to mean almost the whole of the Andhra - Kalinga zone. Thus, without any doubt it can be presumed that the people of Kalinga went there at different stages of history and started the process of colonization. G.E. Gerini³⁰ observed that the Kalingans alongwith the Andhras, founded in Burma, "a kingdom consisting of three districts or separate communities called Tri-Kalinga or Tri-linga, a name from which the term Telingana was derived, and employed to designate the country of Kalinga proper, on the western side of the Gulf of Bengal, as well as the country of the Mons or Telengs (Talaings) on the opposite shore, which had been colonized by them".

About Kalinga - Burma maritime contact, and the changes that took place in Burma as a result of a steady flow of immigrants from Kalinga, N.R. Ray³¹ has aptly described:

"In Thalon *i.e.* the ancient Rammanades, the land par excellence of the

Tailangas, the Indian, at least the Brahmanical elements was imported decidedly from Orissa, the ancient Odra or Kalinga. The ancient name attributed to old Prome is Srikshetra, so often mentioned in the Mon records as Sikset or Srikset, and by the Chinese pilgrims as Si-li-cha-ta-lo ; and Srikshetra is the holy land of Puri on the ancient Kalinga coast. The name Srikshetra given to old Prome may be apocryphal, but attribution itself is significant, however late it may be. The old name for Pegu is Ussa which is but a form of Odra or Orissa. It is difficult to disbelieve that Pegu colonized from Orissa or was once dominated by a people who migrated from Orissa. Indeed, these classical names are but survivals of actual colonization from the original countries inhabited by the colonists themselves. The latter authorities who used those names did not satisfy their whims alone but their origins. Lower Burma is the land of a people who were and are still called "*Tailangas*". The term used as early as 1107 A.D. in Mon records is but a deviation of 'Telingana' or 'TriKalinga', a name used to mean almost the whole of the Andhra-Kalinga zone."

Apart from the similarity of names, there are some prominent architectural evidences showing the cultural affinity of the two regions. In some of the sculptures of the Shewezayan *Pagoda* at Thaton, similarities with the Orissan art are found. The dress and hair style of some of the females are of the Orissan varieties. Some of the bas-reliefs of the *Pagoda* in high technical as well as artistic efficiency show affinity with the early medieval sculptures of Orissa³². The resemblance of a Siva image seated with Parvati of the above *Pagoda* with Hara-Parvati on the outer walls of Vaital temple of Bhubaneswar is the most striking one.

During the reign period of Kyanzitha, the Pagan king (CAD 1084-1113), Burma was in intimate touch with India as well as Kalinga. It was during his rule that many Buddhists and Vaishnavas from India settled in his kingdom³³. During his reign the famous Ananda temple “justly regarded as the master-piece of Burman architecture” was also designed and constructed. In this temple, the Orissan influence is evident in architectural and decorative programmes. The legend speaks that Kyanzitha had heard from eight monks of India about the cave temple of Ananta in the Khandagiri hills of Orissa and this inspired him to construct the Ananda temple in imitation of Ananta.³⁴ The king is said to have fed eight Indian monks with his own hands for three months. He is also believed to have repaired the holy temple of Bodh-Gaya in India. The construction style of the stupas at Prome which have cylindrical drums with hemispherical or ogival domes probably originated in north-east India and the Orissa coast.³⁵ Another characteristic form of Pyu architecture found at Hmawza (old Prome) is the type of building with an inner chamber surmounted by a tapering superstructure known in India as *Sikhara*, which also has its origin in the architecture of Orissa.³⁶ It is observed that the *Sikharas* of the monuments of Prome are remarkable in similarity with the temples at Bhubaneswar. The style and language of two gold plates bearing Pali inscription of 5th and 6th centuries A.D. discovered near Prome had similarity with inscription of Mathara and early Ganga kings of Kalinga.³⁷ It is believed that Burmese Mahayana and Tantric sect of Buddhism came from Orissa and Bengal.³⁸ Besides, the discovery of coins and medals with Hindu symbols at Pegu prove that there was good trade relation between Kalinga and

Burma.³⁹ The trade link with Burma is also proved by the discovery of a brown glazed ware, known as Maratuan ware, after the name of the place located in Burma from Manikpatna. This Burmese ware is available both in thick and thin variety⁴⁰.

We have very meagre information regarding ancient ports and port-towns of Burma. But as Burma had maritime contact with different parts of Asia it must possess some ports on its coast. Hiuen Tsang places Prome near a sea-harbour.⁴¹ Martaban, Cirion (Syrian) and Bassein have been referred to as sea-ports of Burma. Burma had imported various commodities from different countries *i.e.* painted cloth from Masulipatanam, white cloth from Bengal, sandalwood from Malacca, porcelain from China, camphora from Borneo, pepper from Sumatra, woollen cloth, scarlets, opium etc. from Mecca. Though we have no clear-cut reference to any of the import items from Kalinga as Kalinga in ancient times was very famous for her fine cotton garments. It must have exported the same alongwith other articles to Burma. Burma on the other hand exported the articles like velvet stuffs, aloes wood etc. The people from northern India mainly used land route *via* north-east to Burma, though the use of water route is not ruled out. There was a route from Pataliputra to China which passed through Kajangala, Pundravardhana-Kamarupa-north Burma-Szechwan.⁴² In a slight different way P.C.Bagchi.⁴³ observed that in ancient times there were two overland routes from India to China; one through Assam, upper Burma and Yunnana, and the other through Nepal and Tibet. Regarding the Assam-Burma route he says that this route to China started from Pataliputra (Patna), the ancient capital of India, passed through Champa (Bhagalpur),

Kajangala (Rajmahal) and Pundravardhana (North Bengal) and proceeded to Kamarupa (Gauhati) in Assam. From Assam three routes went to Burma. One by the valley of the Brahmaputra upto the Patkoi ranges and then through its passes upto upper Burma; the second through Manipur upto the Chindwin valley; and the third through Arakan up to the Irrawaddy valley. All these routes met on the frontier of Burma near Bhamo and then proceeded over the mountains and across the river valleys to Yunnanfu, *i.e.* Kunming, which was the chief city of the southern province of China. From the above narration one thing is evident that though the over land routes by nature were difficult and discouraging to the travellers, Burma was well connected with northern India through land routes. Burmese Buddhist legends tell of Indian influence coming to lower Burma by sea.⁴⁴ The Kalingan sailors, however, used both land and sea-routes in course of their journey to Burma.

So far land route is concerned, the most popular route used by the north Indians was *via* Pundravardhan and Kamarupa. In course of his discussion regarding the penetration and establishment of a dominion in Burma by the Kalingans G.E. Gerini⁴⁵ has referred to a route. He observed "since the Kalingans and the Andhras appear to have been in the third century B.C., master of the valley of the Ganges from the frontier of Magadha to the sea, it is easy to conceive on the one part that the Kalingans could penetrate into western Burma through Silhet, Manipur and the Kubo valley, and establish thereat a dominion called Mudu-Kalinga or Tri-Kalinga; and that the Andhras, in their turn could easily advanced along the coast line as far the Naf or the Kuladan." Gerini, however, has wrongly mixed up the Andhras with the Kalingans, because in the

third century BC, Kalinga, no doubt, was an independent powerful dominion and was the immediate neighbour of Magadha extending upto the sea, a fact which has been attested to by the bloody Kalinga war of *cir.* 261BC. It is also an admitted fact that Ashoka invaded Kalinga to capture her flourishing ports.

The Kalingan sailors plyed their ships from the ports of Tamralipti, Palur etc. along the coast of Bengal to Burma. As during the ancient period, coasting voyage was the order of the day. It is believed that this route was regularly followed by sailors of both Kalinga and northern India. Ptolemy⁴⁶ has referred to a direct route from Paloura (Palur) to Sada which was frequently used by the Kalingans in course of their journey to Burma. Sada was the first port touched at in Ptolemy's time by ships proceeding from India to the eastern coast of the Bay of Bengal. It is most plausible that the people of Kalinga used to take the help of the south-west monsoon in course of their onward journey to Burma while in the return journey they could avail the north-east monsoon wind. To conclude, we can say that Orissa in ancient times had close commercial and cultural contact with Burma. It had considerable influence on different aspects of the culture of Burma, though it is not an easy task to measure it exactly.

Notes and References

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3. B.C.Majumdar, *Orissa in the Making* (Early Dynasties of Orissa), Patna, 1984, p.31.
4. J.G.Scott, *Burma* (From the Earliest times to the Present Day,) London, 1924, p.11.

5. *Ibid*, p.20.
6. D.G.E. Hall, *Burma*, p. 11 ; D.G.E. Hall, *A History of South-East Asia*, London, 1970, p.143.
7. H.B.Sarkar, *Trade and Commercial Activities of Southern India in the Malayo-Indonesian World* (upto AD 1511), vol-I, Calcutta, 1986, p.42.
8. *Ibid*, pp.42-43
9. *Ibid*, p.46
10. S.P.Das, *Glories of Ancient Orissa*, Sambalpur, 1965, p.53 ; G.E.Gerini (*op.cit*.p.32) has observed that in the old Indo-Chinese records Pegu has very often been designated as Kalinga-rattha.
11. Quoted by R.K.Mookerji, *Indian Shipping*, Allahabad, 1962, p.101.
12. D.G.E.Hall, *op.cit* (1970), p.140. Hall refers to them as Tapusa and Palikat.
13. *Ibid*, The Third Buddhist Council, however, was held in cir.252/251 B.C. According to *Mahavamsa* it was summoned in 21st year of Ashoka.
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20. *Ibid*, p.68.
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22. J.G.Scott, *op.cit*, p.5.
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30. G.E.Gerini, *op.cit*. pp.29 & 30.
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32. *Ibid*, pp.57-58.
33. R.C.Majumdar, *op.cit*, p.242.
34. D.G.E.Hall, *op.cit*, p.150 ; Hall has wrongly called it as Udayagiri ; W.S. Desai, *A Pageant of Burmese History*, Calcutta, 1961, p.19.
35. G.Coedes, *The Making of South- East Asia*, p.111.
36. *Ibid*, pp.111 & 112.
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40. K.S.Behera, 'Maritime Contacts of Orissa: Literary and Archaeological Evidence', in : *Utkal Historical Research Journal*, vol.V, p.66.
41. J.G.Scott, *op.cit*, p.8
42. H.B. Sarkar, *op.cit*, p.184.
43. P.C.Bagchi, *India and China* (A Thousand Year of Cultural Relations) New York (Second edition), pp.16 & 17.
44. D.G.E.Hall, *op.cit*. p.140.
45. G.E.Gerini, *op.cit*. p.32.
46. *Ibid*, p.47; Palura was an ancient port on the coast of Kalinga and has been identified with modern Palur of the Ganjam District.

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