



Book Review

Balagnath Bhattacharyya

Ex-Dy General Manger (Finance), Damodar Valley Corporation- a PSU

Email: bhattacharyyabn@gmail.com

Accepted: 25 November 2021 / Published online: 26 December 2021

Book Review on

Debalgarh Anulia Pratnakkhtra

(Harano Ek RajdhanIr Sondhane)

Dr Biswajit Ray

Beyond Horizon's Publication, Alipurduar , West Bengal – 2021

Debal Garh - Anulia area located in the district of Nadia, West Bengal is a very significant and interesting archaeological site. In 1898 AD a Copper plate inscription known as 'Anulia Tamra Shasan' was unearthed from Anulia . The copperplate was issued by King Laxman Sen in his 3rd regnal year in 1182 CE. Thereafter in the area various archaeologically and historically important artefacts numbering several hundreds if not thousands have been exposed due to natural causes like rain ,flood and human intervention like tilling of land, excavation of pond , digging of land for construction of residential houses etc during next hundred years . We have had a reference of this site in page 118 of the book 'The list of ancient monuments of Bengal' published in 1896. It was stated there that "outside the forts there are ruins of several large temples which appear to be of great interest and of some antiquity as evidenced by the size of the bricks. They are undoubtedly pre-Mahamedan ruins". It signifies that in 1896 also archaeological evidences of ruins of large structures (temples) and also of a fort were found which indicate the historical importance of the site. Also there are references of this site in several literatures like 'Annada Mangal' composed by Raigunakar Bharat Chandra Ray , court poet of Maharaja Krishnachanda of Nadia(1728-82 CE) ; 'Ramcharita' composed by Sandhyakar Nandi court poet of Rampal (1072-1128 CE), Nadia District Gazeteers ,1975 edited by Durgadas Majumdar, Nadia Jelar Purakirrti by Mohit Ray published by GOWB in 1975 ; 'Paschimbonger Puja Parbon o Mela' Vol 2 by Asok Mitra published by GOWB in 1959 etc.



Though there are several literature references ; hundreds of very significant archeological findings , foundation of temples or palaces even jetty like structures indicating river trade have been found in the area and collected by villagers and still they are collecting the same. It is surprising that such a significant site has remained neglected by the authorities concerned for some unknown reason till date.. Here comes Dr Biswajit Ray, a professor of geography, of a mufassil college . He being a professor of geography was studying the lost river paths –paleo-channels in the area. Incidentally the area being in Ganga Valley region accommodates number of tributaries or branches of river Ganga like Churni , Gomati Marali, Anjana , Jamuna ,Jalangi etc .This network of rivers helped development of a great civilization in the area in early medieval and later medieval period . Some of the rivers are lost due to siltation or human intervention and some has changed its' earlier courses. While studying the paleo-channels in 2015-16 he chanced to observe a large fort like structure with watch towers in the area , and large number of historical artifacts collected by villagers. He also observed pottery shreds of different historical periods strewn everywhere near the fort area. Gradually he frequented to the area time and again, discussed with the villagers and made them understood about the importance of conservation of the artifacts. Villagers also came up enthusiastically. An organization ‘ Debalgram Debal raja Puratatwa O Loksanskriti Sangha’ was born. A villager donated a room to preserve the artifacts . Villagers also donated the artifacts collected by them to preserve there. Thus a small museum was formed. Subsequently a number of newer artifacts have come out .Dr Ray thereafter worked on this site for several years. He associated various scholars and stalwarts and various Govt. departments, associations with the site. He also incessantly researched on the artifacts, relevant literatures and history as available related to the area. The book “ Debalgarh Anulia Pratnakkhetra – Harano ek Rajdhanir Sandhane” is the outcome of his intensive research work for several years.

The book though is in two parts but practically the first part may be divided into two parts. The first of the first part is related to the river dynamics of the area – present river system as well as earlier river system that existed in earlier period. Now-a-days in interdisciplinary approach Geo - archaeology is assuming great importance to study the early history of human habitation of a



particular area. Study of old river channels which is a part of geo archaeology is *sin qua non* in studying human history since rivers play a great role in development of civilization . Thus being a student of geography Dr Ray in his book has elaborately discussed about the old river network of the area which shall be very effective in addressing various debatable issues related to history of the site, which has been discussed in second part of the book. Moreover this will also help solving the vexed question about abundantly available sandstone and Makara(stone artifacts – mostly part of columns or foundation of buildings or part of any temple etc , as well as a jetty like structure near the fort and in other areas including large anchoring stones.

In the second of first part the researcher has discussed in details about the artifacts available and found in Debalgarh area as well as in the entire Debalgarh Anulia archaeological site comprising of several villages covering about 100 sq km area. The artifacts unearthed are really fascinating ranging from first century BCE (Kushana period) to early British period . Amphoras discovered in the area are proofs of trade with Romans . Several artifacts discovered in Chandraketurarh archaeological field which is not very far off proved beyond doubt its intensive relation with Roman trade . Anulia Debalgarh civilization (still it is not said so by the scholars but may be one day they may call it so after full discovery of the site) being the contemporary civilization must had relation with Roman traders through Chandraketurarh. Besides we have had artifacts ,pottery shreds, stone ,terracotta and metallic figures of both Buddhist and Hindu religions , structural remains , Coins etc of Pre-pala period , Pala Sena period , Islamic period as well as early British period. The writer gave detailed account of the same as well as its' provenance which has made the book a very significant one which also help understand the evolution of the site from Kushana period to early British period.

In the second part Dr Ray drew attention to a much debated and unsolved mystery in the history of Bengal in medieval period. As per historian Minhaj, In 1201 CE or 1202 CE Ikhtiar Uddin Bakhtiar Khilji a Turk warlord attacked the palace of last Hindu King of Bengal Laxman Sen in Naudia (Nabadwip) . Due to sudden attack the resistance offered by soldiers of Laxman Sen found totally ineffective and Turks overpowered and defeated them without any fight and the king fled away through backdoor to east Bengal sailing over the river Ganges which was flowing by the side of the palace.



Now where was the palace of Laxman Sen from where he fled away? Whether this place was his capital Bijaypur as mentioned in ‘Pabandut’ of Dhoyi –court poet of king Laxmana Sena or anywhere else? These are very vexed questions and different historians, scholars gave different opinions about it. First mention of the site is available in “Tabakat I Nasiri” written by Minhaz I Siraz about invasion of Naudia by Bakhtiar Khilji, written 50 years after the incident. According to Minhaz it was a city of Naudia. Scholars inferred from it that Naudia is nothing but present day Nabadwip. But no archeological or historical evidences are unearthed there to support the view. The convenient reply to this is that due to constant change of flow of river Ganga the site was inundated several times in next centuries the remains of capital were washed away. However here is an important archaeological site- Ballalhipi near present day Nabadwip having significant stone foundations spread over a very large area. Some scholars believe that Bijaypur the erstwhile capital of Senas was located in this site. But as viewed by eminent archaeologists of ASI this large structure is the foundation of a Pancharatha temple in an walled enclosure.

Dr Ray in his well researched book has thrown new light on this issue. He through various literary, historical, archaeological, and geo –archaeological evidences as well as studying the ancient river network of the area has attempted to prove that Debalgarh is the site of original Bijaypur, capital of Laxman Sena as mentioned by Dhoyi in his Composition ‘Paban Doot’. Debalgarh with its large fort with watch tower and mote all around, city infrastructure, trade centers, port (river) is matching the description of the ‘city of Naudia’ as stated by Minhaz and as detailed in Pabandoot rather than Nabadwip. He also attempted to trace out the escape route of Laxman Sena. It is known that Laxman Sen fled to Bikrampur, Dhaka his second capital in present day East Bengal through water course. He showed that shortest route to reach Bikram pur was from Debalgarh sailing through the rivers Marali –attached to the fort, Ichhamati and Padma whereas from Nabadwip it was a long route sailing through Ganges and Padma via Farakka.

It may concluded that the writer has attempted to unearth the hidden history of Anulia – Debalgarh archaeological site through painstakingly furnishing the detailed account of the archeological evidences found and collected by the villagers. A methodological excavation by



proper authorities like ASI is required to unfold the history of the site which dates back to 1st century BCE which uninterruptedly continued upto early British period since evidences of all the periods of history within the range have been obtained. This is no doubt a very significant site of Bengal and the authorities must consider it as such. Dr Ray also attempted to prove that Debalgarh is the lost capital Bijaypur of Laxman Sena from where he fled away at the wake of invasion of Naudia by Bakhtiar Khilji. He showed number of evidences from various angles in support of his view. It is a novel insight no doubt. However his logics are very powerful. Hope scholars must give due attention to the proposition of Dr Ray. In fine I must say that the style of writing of is very attractive. The photographs, maps attached with the book are highly informative and valuable addition. Both researchers and common history buffs will be benefitted going through the book. The pioneering work of Dr Ray on the issue must be appreciated by the scholars and we expect that relevant organizations will take note of the findings of Dr Ray and initiate exploring activities in the site so that a new history of Bengal may be unearthed.

