

## The Contribution of Narmadā to the Urban Growth of Tripurī

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The Narmadā is regarded as the life line of Madhya Pradesh. With a course of over 1312 km, this is the largest among the west flowing rivers of Indian subcontinent. Originating from Amarkantaka, the Narmadā flows westward, through a symmetrical valley of about 160 km. in length, enclosed between the Vindhya on the north and Satpura on the south, till it reaches down to the neighbouring region of Tripurī. The gorge like valley is full of rapids and falls. At Bheraghat near Tripurī, Narmadā forms a beautiful 15 metres high Dhuandhaar Water falls.<sup>1</sup>

Tripurī is situated in the basin of the Narmadā a river which divides the Indian subcontinent in two distinct cultural zones. Tripurī now represented by a modern village situated on the Jabalpur-Bheraghat Road about 13 km. to the west of Jabalpur. The site is bounded on its three sides by the Bāṇagaṅgā, a tributary of the Narmadā.<sup>2</sup> The Narmadā played a vital role in the urban growth of the Tripurī. The river not only provided drinking water, fertile agriculture land and relatively easier network of communications, but it also facilitates irrigation. It may be mentioned here that the ancient main trade routes, passed through the Tripurī connecting the town with the other parts of India<sup>3</sup>, also play a significant role in the urban growth of this town.

In ancient India, there were two important categories of towns political and economic. In the present context if we limit our analysis to the latter category it will become obvious that such towns were trade centres and some of them grew as a result of their location on important trade routes.<sup>4</sup>

The excavations conducted at Tripurī<sup>5</sup> have thrown valuable light on the urban growth and decay.<sup>6</sup> The post Harappan Chalcolithic cultures developed in the valley of Narmadā from beginning of the second millennium B.C.E. to c.600 B.C.E.<sup>7</sup> The urban occupation of Tripurī continued from c.500 B.C.E. to c.400 C.E.<sup>8</sup> The Sātavāhana and post Sātavāhana periods are well represented by various coins of lead, copper or potin found

from the site.<sup>9</sup> In addition, the Sātavāhana age possesses red polished ware sprinklers and kaolin wares.<sup>10</sup> During this age Tripurī grew up into trade centre of Central India.<sup>11</sup> This period also marks the introduction of Buddhism in Tripurī and two brick buildings were identified here as buddhist *Vihāras* as is evident from various objects like steatite caskets, beads and pottery marked with Buddhist symbols. There was also an extensive use of kaolin for potteries which was procured from nearby quarries from Lametaghat.<sup>12</sup> In this period the region around Tripurī is marked by a number of minor antiquities like terracotta figurines which betray an intermingling of Southern and North Indian cultures.<sup>13</sup>

The structures deteriorated during c.200 C.E. to c.400 C.E. of the post Sātavāhana phase yielding sprinklers, mica dust potteries,<sup>14</sup> punch-marked coins, iron and stone objects<sup>15</sup> and baked clay ceiling bearing inscriptions of the second-third century C.E.<sup>16</sup> The habitational deposits in this period are 0.3048 metre to 1.52 metre thick, and this last occupation shows very poor structure marked by brick bats.<sup>17</sup> In the contrast the habitational deposits representing the period c. 100 to c.200 C.E. range from 0.4572 metre to 1.82/2.13 metre thick.<sup>18</sup> The Sātavāhanas were succeeded by the Bodhi Kings who ruled the Tripurī during the second third century C.E. The excavations at Tripurī have brought to light coins and sealings of four rulers of the Bodhi dynasty.<sup>19</sup> The site was abandoned after c.400 C.E. and regained its significance under the Kalchuries.

The urban decline in general is one of the most controversial problem of Indian history.<sup>20</sup> Several scholars have attributed various factors responsible for this such as political situations, foreign invasions, natural calamities and decline of long distance trade, with Roman empire.<sup>21</sup>

Tripurī is no exception, M.G.Dikshit<sup>22</sup> considers Huṇa invasions, H.D.Sankalia advocated the theory - struggle between Buddhist and Śaivas as the main cause of decay;<sup>23</sup> while A.M.Shastri assigned no particular reason for this.<sup>24</sup> Undoubtedly the decline of long distance trade which involved Roman, Chinese, Pārthians, Kuṣāṇas and Sātavāhanas was an important cause of urban decay in the late third and fourth centuries C.E.<sup>25</sup> It is interesting to note that Narmadā which was so conducive for urban growth of Tripurī, also spelt disaster for town due to erosion and recurrent flooding. In spite of presence of Narmadā and the Bāṇagaṅgā there has been the scarcity of water in the adjoining areas of Tripurī, throughout its long history. It was, therefore necessary to dig lakes, ponds and wells and make sufficient provisions for water in the habitational areas. The Kalachuri dynasty ruling over Tripurī paid their special attention to the water problems and got excavated several big and small lakes in the adjoining areas of Tripurī.<sup>26</sup> Thus water scarcity can also be responsible for urban decay of Tripurī to some extent.

## References

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2. *Ibid.*: Tripurī *tīrthapaṭṭa* is bounded on its three sides by the Narmadā, p.5a, pl.17.
3. *Journal of the Madhya Pradesh Itihasa Parishad*, No. V,p.55.
4. *Great Rivers of India*, p.110.
5. M.G.Dikshit, *Tripurī* -1952- *Indian Archaeological Review* (IAR); 1965-66, pp.21.22; 1966-67, 17-19, 1967-68, pp.23-24; 1968-69, pp. 11-12.
6. R.S.Sharma, *Urban Decay in India*, p.62.
7. *Mārg*, Vol.XXVI, No. 3, p.27.
8. R.S.Sharma, *op.cit.*
9. IAR, 1966-67, p.18.
10. IAR, 1965-66, p.22.
11. *Mārg*, Vol.XXVI, No. 3, p.28.
12. M.G.Dikshit, *op.cit.*, p.2.
13. *Ibid.*
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15. IAR, 1966-67, p.18.
16. IAR, 1966-67, p.18.
17. M.G.Dikshit, *op.cit.*, pp.13,18,29.
18. R.S.Sharma, *op.cit.*, p.63.
19. *Mārg*, VI, XXVI, No.3, p.28.
20. R.S.Sharma, *op.cit.*, pp.132.142.
21. *Ibid.*
22. M.G.Dikshit, *op.cit.*, p2.
23. *Journal of the Madhya Pradesh, Itihasa Parishad*, No.V, p.55 ff.
24. A.M. Shastri, *Tripurī* (Hindi), p.89.
25. R.S.Sharma, *op.cit.*, p.135.
26. S.R.Nema, *Political History of the Soma-Varnśī King of South Kosala & Orissa*, Forward, p.IX-XIII.