Archaeological remains of Phuket and Bodhgaya: A cultural study of India and Thailandย

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Chapter 1

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ย The earliest evidence of man and society in Siam doubtless goes back much further than early Christian era, yet we have traced the history of Thai speaking people who are generally thought to have originated in western China. Later on they moved into the southern province of Yunnan in the first or second century B.C. It was perhaps owing to the collapse of the Han dynasty around 220 A.D. Consequently, Thai leaders founded the first kingdom of Nan Chao, which endured until the Mongal Conquest in 1253. Long before that time, however, groups of Thai people had begun a southward migration that throughout the following centuries led them- far down the Malay peninsula and as far east as Cambodia. At the outset the Thais, who were in interested in agriculture sector were attracted towards the watery Chao Phraya basin of Thailand and started to produce wet rice and in due course they came in Indian influence and adopted Buddhism and consequently vibrant culture emerged.

ย In course of exploring the origin of Thai or Thai society therein I come a cross that Thailand is the modern name of Siam and this land owing to its rich cultural heritage and healthy tradition it is best known as the โ Land of smileโ . It was general outlook for their tolearance and hospitality to every one in their respective culture today. Siam or Thailand of today is some sort of bridge which connects Burma, China, Mainland South-East Asia with Indonesia, Australia and Madagascar. In other words, it connects the Indian oceans with the pacific, exchange of people, technology, trade and culture through the corridors provided by Thailand since the pre historic times. So, far as the remains of Thai society is concerned we have came a cross a number of un-natural mounds and historical sites around the Thailand. Some of the sites of historic archaeological significance were attended in due course and found Nakorn pathom, Phuket, Chaiya in Surat Thani, Ayuthaya, Chiang Mai etc. are the most fertile land and coastlines which deserves special attention in writing social routes and precepts of Buddhism in Thailand.

ย In course of studying the archacological remains of Thai society it is important to note that Buddhism succeeded in providing a religious base to the emerging urban culture which was otherwise denounce and condemned by the primitive and Brahmnical normative. The mutual interdepen- dence of Buddhist ideology and the dominant institution of society emerged as a key issue to trace its social in debate. This debate in India was first started by D. D. Kasambi. The methodological denounce mint and the negative perception of the current Marxist historiography not withstanding; G. C. Pandey himself admits a connection between the process of social change and the fact of ideological evolution. It is worthless to state that there was no connection between the movement which the Buddha started and the condition of the society in which the movement was first began in this regard Eminent Historians, Romila Thapar, R.S. Sharma, Ifran Habib, Vijay Thakur have admitted the urban connection of Buddhism. The writings of Trevor Ling, KTS, Saroa, G.B. Upreti, Ven prayudha and Chatsumarn Kabil Singh has not only underscored the social roots of Buddhism but has also sharpened the tools of analysis.

ย I shall endeavour in the present work to piece together weigh and incorporate all the evidence for study the archaeological Remains of Phuket and Bodhgaya of historical importance to justify the argument undertaken forth. It is about the 3rd century B.C. Tamils from Kalinga soil in south India fled king Ashokaโ s invading armies were taken refuge and settled in the Andaman coast notably around Takua pha and Trang. The Indians introduced a cosmopolitan culture and economic knowledge of urban life. With their efforts the coastal areas along the peninsula of Phuket which quickly became spice trading centres. The Indian Brahmins, however, brought stone carving skills, laws, Languages, religious mythologies and dominated river mouth trade on both sides of the peninsula. This brought the people freedom in economy and feeling of societal values therein now known as central Thailand. It has many traditions, falk tales and the significant historical background to be studied.

ย Other historical region of Phaket in Southern Thailand played the most significant role in emergence of Thai culture and remote history of human society. Phuket has a long primitive history followed with stone age culture as represented by its caves painting discovered from Phanga Bay. It was noticed that stone age people in this zone lived in caves and were nomadic called sea gypsies and also known as โ Mokenโ , โ Mokkenโ , Chaole, Chao Thaley, Chao nam and were sea nomads. They still speak ofย Mokken language but youngster speaks Thai language now Southern Thailand has been inhabited since the early days of mankind by ancient tribes who settled and or adapted their lifestyles to the local environment. Who arrived first and whose pushed out or assimilatedย who has kept archaeologists occupied for a long time, and promises to keep them working for a good while to come.

ย Remains of domesticated rice found at spirit cave, of Thailand, may date back form before 6800 BC. The development of bronze (copper and tin) for use in weapons and tools generally marks the time when archaeologists consider a society to have left the Stone Age. Discoveries in Thailand since 1960 have upset traditional theories concerning the origins of copper and bronze technologies. It had been thougt that the use of bronze had originated in the Middle East, but discoveries near Ban Chiang, Thailand indicates that bronze technology was known there as early as 4500 BC. This preceded the working of bronze in the Middle East by several hundred years. Greece by comparison did not enter the Bronze Age until 3000 BC and China not until 1800 BC. What tribe or group of people created this advanced civilization and what happened to them is a matter of great debate. The developments were localized and did not affect the region as a whole.

ย ย This is due in part to Southeast Asia having some of the most inhospitable and inaccessible terrain in the world. This allowed some areas to develop into very sophisticated and modern societies while a few miles away deep in the jungles and remote mountain areas primitive societies survived ago in the kathu (central) district of Phuket. Tinย in seemingly endless quantities was easily extracted from veins near the surface. While no written records exist of when tin was first discovered and mined, cave drawings and recovered art work and other artifacts go back well into the Stone Age. In ancient times people did not mine for tin. They found it usually after a heavy rain washed away the topsoil and exposed the layers of gravel bearing tin. Phuket had long appeared on the charts of ship captains from Indian and the Arab nations as a source of fresh water, firewood, and pitch to caulk their boats. Ships would anchor in the safe harbors of Phuket and wait for the monsoon winds to allow them to proceed across the Andaman sea to the Indian subcontinent. As these ships were at times forced to wait weeks or even months for favorable winds, it is believed that these early sailors discovered the precious metal.

ย ย Among the earliest permanent residents of Phuket were primitive tribes similar to the Semang pygmies that still exist today in Malaysia. Small tribes of these hunter-gathers survived in the jungle by hunting and eating the bountiful fruits and roots found in the lush triple-canopy rainforest that then covered the entire island. Small groups of these semang people are reported to have survived in the dense jungles of the Phuketโ s interior until finally being displaced in the midnineteenth century by tin miners.

ย ย The coastal areas of Phuket were populated by a nomadic seafaring people, the Chao Nam or โ sea gypsiesโ . The Chao Nam traditionally โ strand loopedโ or traveled from cove to cove, staying until the shellfish and other resources were depleted. They then moved on, allowing the cove to re-establish its former ecological balance before returning to repeat the cycle. Described as โ Saliteersโ the Chao Nam developed a rather unsavoury reputation among sea captains that plied the Straits of Malacca. The Chao Nam figured prominently in reports filed by early visitors of the area. Often they were described as a small but hardy people, who were expert sailors and who built small but sturdy ships that could weather the roughest seas. They moved from place to place like gypsies, encamping on the islands but never cultivating the soil. Piracy and fishing for pearls were their only means of support. They had no written language, practiced a religion based on animism, and were generally described as heathens of the first order.

ย ย Captain Hamilton, an early European trader, write of them: โ Between Mergui and Jonckelaon there are several good harbors for shipping, but the sea coast is very thin of inhabitants, because there are great numbers of Freebooters, called saliteers, who inhabit islands along the sea coast and they both rob and take people for slaves and transport them to the Sumatran kingdom of Atjeh and there make sale of them and Jonckelaon often feels the weight of their depredations.โ An early French Jesuit missionary believed it impossible to go by foot more than half a league from Junkceylon without life and property being endangered by bandits. The fierce reputation of these saliteers (pirates) may explain why it took so long for permanent trading and mining settlements to be established on Phuket.

ย ย By the 3rd century there were scattered settlements of traders from south India along the west coast of Thailand. A four meter stone statue of the Hindu god โ Vishnuโ was unearthed in the nearby province of Phang-nga. It is now on display in the Thalang National Museum in Phuket and is one of man examples of art and sculpture recovered from this period.

ย ย India and Thailand both the countries have a very close affinity and cultural relation from the distant past. The emigration of Indian culture and civilization to the lands of Suvarnadipa, particularly in Siam began much before the arrival of Buddhism in Thailand. Right from sixth century B.C. and

onwards there were frequent cultural exchange between India and Thailand, hence a large number of Indian epic remains had been traced to the different parts of Thailand. In course of time a lot of Vedic remains as well as Buddhist remains were foundย and explored at larger seale in Thailand in the past and the practicing the same religion even today reflects a deep Indian cultural impact over the Siam of modern Thailand is worthy to be studied the same in both the ways. As the legacy of Buddhism at Pukef in Thailand is one of the most vibrant example where a lot of Archaeological remains have been found around the Phuket the southeren part of Thailand near Nakhorn Rajasithammarat of Pre-Christian era. Like Taradih, Bodhgaya in India we have traced a lot of archaeological remains of Pre Christian era found in course of excavation therein.

ย ย The Archaeological site Phuket of Thailand has yielded a lot of archacological remains which have many similarities as the remains found from Bodhgaya Taradih in India. These similarities in findings of the two different archeological sites in two nation clearly reflects the cultural and political interactions of both the countries. We have a lot of literacy resources to enlight there affinity in both the cultural polarization but we have a little resources with regards to archeological perspectives to study such cultural sites responding archeological findings unearthed by the archaeologists of Thailand and India.

ย ย So far as the site Phuket in concerned I have to submit that this site was much popular owing to acceptance of first Theravada Buddhist school in Thailand during first-second century B.C. and after short while Theravada Buddhism was replaced by Mahayana Buddhism which could not succeed for long. The excavation of Phuket recalls the same events after studding the remains unearthed from this holy archeological site. Not only that we have few more successive cultural findings in different stratifications entitles theย history of the past Phuket like in Taradih, Bodhgaya we have at least five successive layer began from 6th cent. B.C. and onwards to the Gupta era. Mauryan and Kushan remains had been the focuss of the site associated with NBP ceramics to these sites. Therefore in many ways the archaeological remains from Phuket in Thailand and Indian site of Taradih, Bodhgaya have many resemblance in its nature and findings. In the light of above discoveries the proposed research project has been submitted for the purpose.

ย ย Thai-speaking peoples are generally thought to have originated in wewtern China and moved into the southern province of Yunnan in the 1st or 2nd century B.C. following the collapse of Han dynasty around 220 AD, Thai leaders founded the kingdom of Nan Chao, which endured untill the Mongol conquest in 1253. Long before that time, however, groups of thai people had begun a southward migration that throughtout the following centuries led them far down the Malay peninsula and as far east as Cambodia. The Thais, who cultivated wet rice were attracted to the agricultural potential of the watery chao Phraya basin. Here they were subject to indian influences and adoptd the Buddhist religion. By the end of the 12th century several Thai Principalities united and began to challenge the khamers whose Angkor government was in rapid decline for control of central Thailand. Burma taking land from the Mons to the west and north, the Thais controlled an area they called โ   Lan Ni Thai.โ

ย ย One of the earliest recorded references to Phuket is the 12th century kedah Annals fo Malaysia that refers to most island or โ   peninsula.โ When centre of the island was wrested from the sirivijaya Empire by king Ramkhamhaeng, the island was called Thalang. On early European maps Phuket was known as โ   Junk Ceylonโ   or โ   Jonkcelaonโ   thought to be a corruption of the Malay language. Other early accounts refer to an island called โ   bukitโ   the Malay word for mountain. During the reign of RamaV (1868-1910) the island was officially named as Bhuket, which remained until 1967 when the spelling was changed to the present day Phuket. It has a long historical and Archaeology treasures to lid off its past features.ย In this way we observed a lot of archaeological mounds in around Bodhgaya. Taradih, Sonpur and Senanigama is the oldest excavated sites around Bodhgaya to be exposed in present work.

ย ย So far as the heritage of Bodhgaya, Taradih is concerned its past history goes back into the primitive age and co-relates with the history much earlier than the coming of the Buddha to this soil. The earliest remains of this site entales the presence of Chalcolithic men towards this region of Indian sub continent. Chalcolithic is succeeded by pre-historic people, archaeologically known as Iron-age or N.B.P. age people who witnessed the evolution of urbanized life in Indian. These people were succeeded by Mauryas and Sungas and later on Kushanas, Guptas and Pallas as witnessed with the remains of Taradih and other excavated sites around Bodhgaya, India has its archaeological remains value discovered so far. The proposed work is an attempt to highlight the archaeological and cultural remains of both the countries as exposed in latest findings of both the countriesย sites extending their cultural exchange motifs which started during pre Christian era or more earlier.

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