

Expansion and Consolidation of Pataliputra under Kushanas

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Abstract:

Pataliputra, adjacent to modern day Patna was originally built by Magadhan ruler Ajatshatru. The strategic location and commercial advantages gave it the status of an imperial capital. The glimpses and glories of Pataliputra are well documented in Indian literature, the Greek and Chinese travellers who visited India. The ancient city was known by different names, e.g., *Kusumpura*, *Pushpa-pura*, *Kusumadhvaja*, *Padmavati*, *Mahendrapura* and *Patligram*. But the name Pataliputra became more common from the 4th century B.C. onwards. The Greek ambassador to India, Megasthenes calls it *Palimbothra*. Pataliputra as an imperial capital also finds place in the Girnar Rock-Edict V of Asoka. Thus *Pataligama* of the early Pali literature had become Pataliputra, the nerve-centre of Indian politics, by the time of the Mauryas. Though the place lost its earlier grandeur with the fall of the Mauryan Empire, still it was the centre of political activities and served as the capital of the Magadhan Empire.

Keywords : Pataliputra, Magadh, Capital, Greek, Maurya

The grandeur of Pataliputra tempted every ambitious monarch to capture this important city. In fact, none could become the emperor of India unless he succeeded in conquering the capital city of Pataliputra. The political chaos which prevailed in Magadha after the collapse of the Mauryan power emboldened many ambitious rulers who invaded and tried to capture this city. The Indo-Greeks, Kharavela of the Cheta dynasty of Kalinga and probably the Satavahanas tried to capture Pataliputra and invaded it. By the beginning of the early centuries of the Christian era the Kusanas had firmly established their hold in north-western India. They also took advantage of the political situation and tried to advance as far as Magadha and Pataliputra. The Kusana occupation of Pataliputra is attested by literary as well as archaeological evidences.

The first ruler of the Kusanas line was Kujula Kadphises whose political activities were confined to the north-western part of India alone, but his son and successor, Wema Kadphises, extended the Kusana empire in northern India as well. *The Annals of the second Han Dynasty* credits this king with the conquest of "T'en-tchou" (India). *The Annals* informs us that "Yen-Kao- Chien ascended the throne, he conquered T'en-tchou (India) and appointed generals there who governed in the name of the Yuetchi. *Yen-Kao-Chien* has been identified with Wema Kadphises who consolidated Kusana power in India. It has been suggested that the easternmost expansion of the empire of Wema was up to Benaras. Such a view is based on the fact that Kusana inscriptions have not been discovered so far east of Benaras (Sarnath). If we rely on epigraphic evidences alone then we have to concede that Wema Kadphises' empire did not include even Benaras as no inscriptions of Wema have been discovered from there. But the numismatic evidences at our disposal make it clear that Wema's empire included a large part of modern U.P. and Bihar also. There is sufficient numismatic evidence to indicate that Wema Kadphises extended his suzerainty over Bihar and Pataliputra. The excavations of Pataliputra have brought to light some Copper Coins of Wema Kadphises. His coins have been discovered from other parts of Bihar also. Thus numismatic evidences suggest the inclusion of Pataliputra and Magadha in the empire of Wema Kadphises.

Infact, we have no account of Wema's campaigns in Magadha. *The Annals* does not inform us how the Kusana King "conquered India. But we have some literary evidences about Kaniska's campaign in Magadha and the conquest of Pataliputra. Thus, the Chinese biography of Asvaghosa (*Ma-ming-pou-Satchoen*) informs us about a tradition. It says that the king of Yue-

chi invaded Magadha to demand Buddha's bowl and Asvaghosa. Unfortunately, the biographer does not name the invader, but since Asvaghosa was a contemporary of Kaniska-I and lived in Pataliputra it may be safely assumed that the invader mentioned in the biography was Kaniska-I and he came up to Pataliputra. Other literary sources clearly mention the name of Kaniska as the invader of Magadha and Pataliputra. Thus, *the Sri-Dharamapitakanidana Sutra (Foufa-tsanginiuen-tchoen)*, an anonymous collection of 121 *avadanas* which preserves the history of twenty-three patriarchs from Maha Kasyapa to Simha, gives us an interesting story about Kaniska's invasion of Pataliputra. This text was translated into Chinese by Ki-Kia-Ye and T' an-Lao in the 5th century AD (472, under the Northern Wei dynasty). According to the story given in this text "the total number of men in the town of Hoa-Cheu (Pataliputra, Kusumapura— "the town of flowers") was nine hundred thousand. The king of the kingdom of Yue-Chi, Tchen-tanki, nitcha (*devaputra*, Kaniska) equipped the 'four forces' came to Hao-Cheu, and in a battle defeated its king who made his submission. The Conqueror demanded nine hundred thousand gold pieces. Then the king of Hoa-Cheu, considering that Ma-ming (Asvaghosa), the Buddha's wooden bowl and a naturally compassionate cock, which would not drink water containing insects, were each worth three thousand pieces, offered the three to Ki-ni-tcha, who accepted them joyfully and returned to his Kingdom. This story is relevant because it suggests the conquest of Pataliputra by Kaniska.

There are other important literary sources which mention Kaniska as the conqueror of Pataliputra and Magadha. For eg *Kalpandmanditika* of Kumaralata is a very important source for our purpose because it was composed soon after Kaniska's reign and later on was translated into Chinese. This text also informs us that Kaniska conquered Tung-T'en-Chu (Eastern India). Moreover as suggested by Cunningham and other scholars, "Eastern India" included Eastern Bihar also. Other literary sources (Tibetan accounts) also suggest the conquest of Pataliputra by Kaniska. The king who was defeated by Kaniska is not mentioned in these sources but other evidences suggest that it was a Murunda king.

Apart from literary sources, epigraphic, numismatic and other archaeological evidences also suggest the Kusana occupation of Pataliputra. The Sarnath Buddhist Image inscription of Kaniska I, belonging to the 3rd regnal year, refers to Mahaksatrapa Kharapallana and Ksatrapa Vanaspara as ruling over the eastern portion of the Kusana empire. Thus, it is quite natural to suppose that after the conquest of Pataliputra, Kaniska left it in the charge of Mahaksatrapa Kharapallana and Kshatrapa Vanaspara, who controlled the affairs of Pataliputra from Sarnath. This argument is further corroborated by the Puranic evidences. The *Vayu*, the *Brahmandaa*, the *Visnu* and the *Bhagwat Puranas* which refer to the "Dynasties of the 3rd century AD, mention the name of Visvaphani, the king of Magadha. His activities are greatly admired.¹The king Visvaphani (also known as Vinsaphatika and Visvaphurja) has been compared with Vanaspara of the Sarnath inscription. All these evidences make it quite clear that Kaniska conquered Pataliputra and brought it under his authority.

The political history of the Kusanas after Kaniska is not well documented and we have no literary or epigraphic sources to confirm whether the successors of Kaniska maintained their hold over Pataliputra and Magadha. But numismatic and archaeological evidences suggest that the Kusanas continued to exercise their control over Pataliputra, and other areas of ancient Bihar. A good number of coins belonging to the post-Kaniska period have been brought to light during archaeological excavations. Some of these have been unearthed from Pataliputra itself while others have been discovered from ancient sites such as Buxar, Chirand, Gaya, Lauriya, Nandangarh and parts of Ranchi district. From Kumrahar (ancient site of Pataliputra) itself Ratan Tata's excavations (1912-13) exposed two gold coins, one of which belonged to Vasudeva I and the other one was of the later Kusana type. Later excavations also brought to light Kusana coins from Pataliputra. A hoard of 45 Kusana coins was discovered by Spooner from Kumrahar and Bulandibagh. Of these, 3 belonged to Wema Kadphises, 12 to Kaniska and 30 to Huviska. The excavation carried by A.S Altekar and V.K Mishra from 1951-55 also brought to light 7 Kusana coins belonging to Kaniska and Huviska. A broken golden *talisman* imitating the gold coin of the Kusanas was also discovered. A similar golden amulet copying the coin type of Huviska was discovered in a subsequent excavation. The discovery of

such a large number of coins from Pataliputra is indicative of the fact that the Kusanas exercised control over Pataliputra. There is no sound basis to suggest that these coins had come to Pataliputra merely due to trade and commerce. Moreover, the sequence of the coin finds also indicate that the Kusana hold over Pataliputra continued up to the reign of Vasudeva I, the last great king of the Kusana dynasty.

Pataliputra flourished as an important city in the Kusana period. The architectural and antiquarian remains of Pataliputra give us some idea about the city life under the Kusanas. Perhaps the old fortification of Fatah-putra about which Megasthenes informs us, continued in the time of the Kusanas also. This becomes apparent from the accounts of a Chinese officer (AD 222-280). But most probably the Mauryan wooden fortification was strengthened or replaced by brick fortification. This becomes clear from the extensive use of burnt bricks in the Kusana period. Although details of the town-planning of Pataliputra are not available but the exposed structural remains give us some idea about the structures in the Kusana period. Remains of large brick-built walls, some of them as long as 79 and 104 feet were exposed during excavations at Kumrahar. Such walls probably formed parts of massive houses. We have also the evidence of concrete long floors and covered drains. One such drain was nearly 34' and 8" deep. Arrangement for the regular cleaning of this drain was also made. Remains of brick columns and verandahs or halls were also exposed. The houses were probably single-storeyed as no flight of steps have been discovered. For roofing purposes clay tiles were used. Some religious structures eg Vihar and brick chaitya belonging to the Kusana period were also excavated at Pataliputra.

The economic condition of the citizens of Pataliputra could be drawn on the basis of antiquarian remains. The city flourished as an industrial and commercial centre. It was well connected with the famous *Uttarapatha* (Northern trade-route) through which internal and even foreign trade was carried on. Some idea about the commercial activities of the merchants of Pataliputra can be had from the *Milindapanho*. It refers to the merchants of Magadha and Pataliputra coming to the city of Sagala which was famous as a *Putabhedana*. Pataliputra is also mentioned as a town of commodity ex-change. These evidences speak of the commercial importance of the city of Pataliputra in the early centuries of the Christian era when the Kushanas exercised their sway over it. Pataliputra also seems to have been an industrial centre. The excavated material from the city suggests that several crafts and industries like those of pottery, terracotta figurines, bricks, beads of semi- precious stones, textile, carpentry, metallurgy, jewellery, glass and other industries flourished under the Kusanas.

Pataliputra was also a religious hub under the Kusanas. Remains of Buddhist monasteries were excavated here. Two types of Buddhist monasteries were exposed. The usual pattern of the *Vihara* consisted of a central courtyard and rooms on three sides with verandahs. The unusual style of monastery comprised 14 small cells and four narrow but longish halls in their front. The steps were provided at six places to approach the verandah. The monastery was laid on a brick concrete foundation. The use of lime plaster was noticed at several places. From the dimensions of the walls, cells and halls it appears that the *Vihara* was a massive structure. Such monasteries have not come to light from other ancient sites. Apart from the monastic establishments a brick *Chaitya* with a *Stupa*, ascribable to the 1st three centuries of the Christian era, was also discovered. It seems that Pataliputra was a centre of Buddhism where devotees of the Buddha used to come. This becomes clear from the inscribed terracotta plaque which had the representation of the Bodh Gaya temple on it and was discovered by D.B. Spooner during the excavation of Kumrahar. This was brought to Pataliputra by a pilgrim from the north-west.

The glory and grandeur of Pataliputra was lost in the Post-Kusana period. Although it remained in partial occupation under the Guptas, the place had been deprived of its earlier prosperity. This is evident from the Post-Kusana structures and antiquities. In comparison to Kusana coins only few Gupta coins have been discovered from Kumrahar. The structures and antiquarian remains are also poor in the Gupta phase. Archaeological evidence and the travel account of the Chinese pilgrim Hiuen-tsang suggest poor habitation at Pataliputra in the Gupta period and the abandonment of the city in the post-Gupta period. Several factors were responsible for the decline of Pataliputra in the post-

Kusana period. It appears, that since the Guptas shifted their capital from Pataliputra to Prayaga, Pataliputra lost its earlier importance. Moreover, flood and fire played a crucial role in the decline of this city. Economic and religious factors further aggravated the situation as a result Pataliputra could never regain its earlier importance and status in the post-Kusana period. The city was later on revived by the Afghans and the Mughals in the 16th century A.D. The 17th and 18th century A.D. saw Patna emerging as an important centre for handicraft and trade.

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