

Ports, Port-Towns and Maritime Trade of Odisha during the Nineteenth Century

Mrs. Sunita Panigrahy

Research Scholar

Department of History,

Panjab University, Sector-14, Chandigarh, India.

Abstract: Odisha being situated on the coast of Bay of Bengal, through the ages has played a significant role in the maritime history of India. During the ancient period, it had extensive maritime trade contacts with many foreign countries such as Africa, Sri Lanka, China, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, Java, Sumatra, Bali, Borneo etc. Kalidas in his work *Raghuvamsha* has described the king of Odisha as *Mahodadhipati* (the Lord of the Sea). The rituals and festivals like *Khudurukuni Osha*, *Kartika Purnima Boita Bandana Utsava*, etc., which are being celebrated in modern Odisha are the reminiscent of its past maritime glory. The representation of a giraffe on the Sun temple at Konarka (c.13th century CE) refers to the trade contact of early medieval Odisha with Africa. Like ancient period, maritime activities also constitute a significant chapter of colonial Odisha. The conducive geographical location of Odisha and its opulence, which had plentiful raw materials deeply attracted the Europeans like the Portuguese, the Dutch, the English and the French to establish their settlements along the coast of Odisha. In the present paper, an endeavour has been made to trace out and analyze the maritime activities, ports and port towns of Odisha during the nineteenth century.

Index Terms - Odisha, Europeans, English East India Company, Ports, routes and commodities.

I. INTRODUCTION

Orissa being situated on the coast of Bay of Bengal, through the ages has played a significant role in the maritime history of India. During the ancient period, it had extensive maritime trade contacts with many foreign countries such as Africa, Sri Lanka, China, mainland South East Asia and the countries of Indonesia. The ancient Odia sailors went regularly on their commercial voyages to far off lands without any fear. They have, thus, been referred to in the Sanskrit literature as *Kalingah sahasikah* (the brave Kalingans). They understood that richness and prosperity depends on commerce. They were the pioneers of Indian colonization in Further India (Southeast Asia) and the Indian Archipelago (Banerji, 2006, p.82). So great was the fame of Orissa as a maritime power that illustrious Sanskrit poet Kalidasa, in his famous work *Raghuvamsha* has extolled the king of Orissa as *Mahodadhipati* or the 'Lord of the Sea' (Nandargikar, 1891, p.140). The *Aryamanjusri Mulakalpa*, a seventh century Mahayana Buddhist text, describes the Bay of Bengal (*Mahodadhi*) as *Kalinga Sagara* (the Kalinga Sea) (Shastri, 1925, p.628). The rituals and festivals like *Khudurukuni Osha*, *Kartika Purnima Boita Bandana Utsava*, *Aakasha Dipa* ritual etc., which are being celebrated in different parts of modern Orissa are the reminiscent of the past maritime glory of Orissa. Legends and local traditions of Java records that, "twenty thousand families were sent to Java by the prince of Kling [Kalinga, in ancient times Orissa was mostly known as Kalinga]. These people prospered and multiplied." The depiction of a giraffe, exclusively an African animal in the sculpture of the Sun temple at Konarka (c.13th century CE) refers to the trade contact of the early medieval Orissa with Africa. The depiction of a boat on the *bhogamandapa* (hall of offering) of the Jagannath temple at Puri also reflects the maritime heritage of Orissa (Patra, 2013, p.51). In the growth of such maritime trade, the ports of Orissa played an important role. Tamralipti, *Che-li-talo* (Manikpatna), Palur, Dosarene, Barua, Kalingapatnam, Pithunda etc., were some of the important ports of ancient Orissa. It can be presumed that it was the flourishing maritime trade that led to the growth of urban centres and urbanization in Orissa (Patra, 2013, p.15).

The maritime trade of colonial Orissa, like the ancient period, too constitutes a significant chapter in the trade and commercial activities of modern India. The conducive geographical location of Orissa on the coast of the Bay of Bengal and its opulence, which had plentiful raw materials and various types of manufactured goods deeply attracted the Europeans to establish their settlement along the coast of Orissa. It was in the closing years of the sixteenth century and in the first half of the seventeenth century that different European powers made their appearance along the coast of Orissa.

The Portuguese were the first among the Europeans who came to the coast of Orissa. First, they came to the coast of Balasore and settled at Pipili around 1599. It is pertinent here to mention that Pipili was the first port of Orissa where the Europeans established their settlement. The Portuguese were followed by the Dutch who arrived at Pipili in 1625. However, due to their rivalry with the Portuguese, the Dutch shifted their centre of commercial activities to Balasore port in 1633. The English who conquered Orissa in 1803 and ruled thereafter came to Orissa in 1633 and established their factories at Hariharpur and Balasore (O'Malley, 1907, p.37). In the following year, they established a factory at Pipili too (O'Malley, 1907, p.33). Meanwhile, the French East India Company who was the main competitor of the English East India Company established their factory at Balasore and Hariharpur. Subsequently, they also came to Pipili. Haripura was the second port of colonial Orissa, which attracted the attention of the Europeans. Balasore, however, was the most important trading centre and port town of 19th century Orissa where the European Communities established their factories as well as settlements.

The European traders such as the Portuguese, the Dutch, the English and the French from the Coromandel Coast for commercial benefit shifted to the coast of Bengal. However, due to the importance of the Orissa coast from commercial point of view they concentrated their trading activities to the Orissa coast. The coast of Orissa was studded with a number of ports and port-towns. The ports were prerequisite for the growth of maritime trade. The ports of Orissa, which played a distinctive role in the maritime activities of 19th and first half of the 20th century Orissa, are as follows.

PIPILI PORT

Pipili was an important port of Orissa during sixteenth to nineteenth century CE. It was situated at a distance of 30 miles north of Balasore on the bank of river Suvarnarekha. The Portuguese sailors came to Pipili by the middle of the sixteenth century CE. From then, it became an important settlement of the Portuguese. Burton described Pipili in 1683 as a port town of the Portuguese where the Portuguese were the residents (Campos, 1919, p.98). Gradually, the Dutch and the English appeared as rival trading communities at Pipili. The Portuguese, with the collaboration of Arkanese, had turned this port into a slave market as a result they were expelled from Pipili by Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan. After the decline of the Portuguese, the Dutch established a factory at Pipili and from here continuously exported salt to different places. The English followed the Dutch and established a factory there in 1635 CE (Maddox, 1900, p.38). Gradually, Pipili flourished as an important commercial centre for the Europeans. However, owing to several causes such as rapid silting of the Subarnarekha river and the formation of sand bars around its mouth this port started to decline. It is here also to mention that the high floods of river Subarnarekha gave a death-blow to this port when the remnants of the port were washed away by the flood water in 1642 (Maddox, 1900, p.43). Hence, the port of Pipili, once a prosperous commercial centre turned to be an insignificant and deserted port town (O'Malley, 1907, pp.37-38).

BALASORE PORT

Balasore port was an important port of Orissa during the 19th century. It was situated on the bank of river Burhabalanga, at a distance of 16 miles from the coast of the Bay of Bengal. It was discovered by the English in 1633. By the year 1640, the English had developed a factory at Balasore. They also constructed a number of buildings in the town of Balasore. The Balasore port was famous for trade in calicos, muslin, silk and saltpeter. However, due to the hostilities between the Mughals and the English during the reign of Aurangzeb, the Mughal emperor, the English factories were seized at Balasore. The deposit of silt by Burhabalanga on the mouth of Balasore port, further make it inconvenient to flourish as a port by the year 1700. This significant port virtually abandoned by the year 1786 (Maddox, 1900, p.38). Thomas Motte (*Early European Travellers in Nagpur Territories*, 1930, p.1), who went to Sambalpur Diamond Mines as an emissary of Lord Clive in 1766 via Balasore throws sufficient light on the commercial activities of the English, the French, the Dutch and the Portuguese merchants in Balasore. G. F. Lackie who went on deputation (deputed by Lord Cornwallis) to Nagpur through Balasore on March 22, 1790 observed that Balasore formerly was a flourishing port town (*Early European Travellers in Nagpur Territories*, 1930, pp.52-53). This flourishing port was rediscovered by the British when they entered into the town in 1803 and found the port in a dilapidated condition. They also discovered the ruins of a house at Barabati village which they identified with the factory building of the English. (The Barabati village was situated on the right bank of the river Burhabalanga, a mile below the site of the modern Balasore town.) (Wilson, 1895, pp. 19-20). In spite of dilapidated condition, this port was declared as a port of Orissa in 1858. Following the years of famine, the British Government decided to improve the ports of Orissa. However, nothing concrete was done to develop this port as it involved great engineering difficulties. The Government spent only a very small amount in buoying channels and dredging sand bars. Further, the opening of coast canal to traffic in 1887 not only facilitated the silting of Balasore port at the mouth of the Burhabalanga river but also diverted large portion of seaborne trade of the district carried out through it (Maddox, 1900 VIL-I, p.43). The Government also diverted its attention towards Chandabali port and False Point which also led to the decline of the Balasore port.

HARIHARPUR

Hariharpur was another port of the colonial Orissa. In May 1633, the English sailors reached Hariharpur port (in the modern Jagatsinghpur district of Orissa) in the hope of establishing a settlement there. However, soon they found that the river that served the port had a habit of getting silted; so the port was no longer suitable for any commercial activities. The English merchants thereupon decided to confine their sea-borne trade to Balasore instead of Hariharpur. And Hariharpur as a port town vanished from the map of eastern seacoast of India by the end of 17th century (*Bengal District Gazetteer*, 1907, p.39).

DHAMARA

Dhamara was another important port of Orissa during the 19th century CE. It was formed as a guard to the estuary on the mouths of the rivers Brahmani and Baitarani. Its suitable condition attracted the English settlers to use it as port of importance. They declared it as an important port of Orissa in 1858. Dhamara was also served as a useful port at the time of British conquest of Orissa in 1803, from where rice and salt were exported to Bengal (Toynbee, 1873, pp.88-89). There existed a customs house and a pilot house to give shelter to the pilots of the vessels coming to the port (*Board of Revenue, Commissioner of Customs to Board of Revenue*, File No. 159/1894). Dhamara continued to serve as an important port of Odisha up to 1894 after which it declined gradually.

SUBARNAREKHA

The port of Suvarnarekha, which was situated on the mouth of the river of same name, was another important port of the 19th century CE Orissa. It was very near to the port of Pipili. Hence, after the decline of Pipili port, the Europeans shifted their centre of activities to this port with an objective to reach a vast interior region of Orissa. According to the Act II of 1858, it was declared a port of Orissa in the year 1858. However, owing to sand siltation on the river mouth it would be difficult on the part of the Government to maintain it permanently. The smuggling and piratical activities which became a regular feature around the port due to the dense forests on the banks of the river led to its decline. The abandonment of salt manufacture factories on the Orissa coast also led to the decline of this port. The port was found to be not very useful during the period of famine as it afforded no facility for food supply to Orissa. However, in 1882-83 an amount of Rs. 20 was spent towards the cost of repairing of this port (*Proceedings of Board of Customs, Salt and Opium*, March 1882, No. 131) which indicate that Suvarnarekha existed as a port of Orissa in 1882-82. Anyway, as P. C. Das (1989, p. 252) says, "Owing to the silting of the river mouth and the construction of Coast Canal and the abandonment of salt manufacture in Orissa, Subarnarekha port ceased to operate any sea-borne trade."

SARATHA

Saratha was another port of 19th century Orissa. It was situated at the confluence of two rivers, Panchapara and Saratha, which flowed into the Bay of Bengal a few miles south of the Subarnarekha. The Government declared it as a port of Orissa in the year 1858 (Maddox, 1900, p.43.). However, with the march of time, due to the silting of the rivers this port became unsuitable for accommodating vessels. The Government had not given proper attention to improve this port. In the course of time, Panchapara had taken the place of Saratha port.

CHURAMANI

Churamani was an open roadstead on the mouth of the river Gummere, a branch of the river Kansbas. Before their conquest of Orissa in 1803, the British had chosen this port as a centre of their business activities. In 1803, considerable quantities of rice and salt were exported from this port. According to the provisions of Act II of 1858, it was included in the list of ports. In 1874, Mathormohan Padhi, a rich merchant of repute, tried to improve the condition of the port by removing the silt that had accumulated there. He was partly successful. However, continuous deposit of silt and mud led to the disuse and decline of this port (*Bengal Revenue Proceedings*, November 1875.).

LYCHANPORE

Lychanpore was another active port of Orissa during the 19th century. It was located a little south of the Churamani port on a small creek of the river Lychanpore. It played an important role in the growth of the sea-borne trade in Balasore district as well as in north Orissa. This port was included in the list of ports prepared under Act II of 1858. However, it could not afford any help to the Government during the period of the famine of 1866. Hence, gradually, the Government did not like to spend money further on this port, which led to the decline of this port by the end of the 19th century.

CHHANOA

Chhanoa was one of the important ports of Orissa by the time of the British conquest of Orissa. It was situated on the mouth of the river of that name. However, by the time of the introduction of the Act of 1858 which aimed at better management and administration of the ports, the port of Chhanoa was completely declined (Das, 1997, p. 220).

CHANDBALI

Chandbali was an inland port on the bank of the river Baitarani. It was situated 15 miles lower down the river Dhamara at the confluence of the river Matai and Baitarani (Maddox, 1900, p.43). After the outbreak of the great famine of 1866, the British Government wanted to expedite the supply of food grains for the people of Orissa. At that time, they found all other important ports were not so useful to supply the food grains. Hence, to supply the food grains successfully to the people of Orissa they opened this port in the year 1872 (*General Administration Report of Orissa Division, 1873-74, p.10*). In the second half of the nineteenth century, the port became an active centre of trade in Orissa and absorbed the trade of the old port of Dhamara. During the period of famine, this port had helped the Government in the import of food grains to Balasore and Cuttack districts (Das, 1997, p. 220.). It is here to mention that when the importance of other ports on the Balasore coast declined, the importance of Chandabali port increased significantly. In the words of P. C. Das, "When Orissa was isolated from the rest of the world, Chandabali helped the people as well as the Government to keep up the standard of the sea-borne trade in Orissa." Due to the landing problem in the port at False Point, all big vessels were directed to Chandabali. Light steamers ran almost daily to and from Calcutta. Chandabali port, in fact, flourished as an important place for sea-borne trade of Odisha (*General Administration Report of Orissa Division, 1873-74, p.10*). As a consequence of the formation of the Chandabali port, Bhadrak emerged as an important market. Bhadrak was connected with the port by a road, which passed through Rukunadeipur. However, unfortunately, the storm which passed over coastal Odisha on September 22, 1885, completely devastated this port (Buckland, 1902, p.822-823). This port was also called as Ravens port after the name of T. E. Ravenshaw.

PORTS ON THE PURI COAST

Puri, Devee, Sahandu, Mettacoah, Futtypore and Nundla were some of the ports on the coast of Puri district (*Bengal Revenue Proceedings, November 1868, No. 3345*). These ports were opened for navigation in 1860 and were in a good position during the nineteenth century. However, later on due to the lack of proper maintenance and supervision these ports gradually turned into roadsteads. These ports did not allow vessels during the North-west monsoon (October-December) (*Bengal Revenue Proceedings, July 1877, No.600*). It was only the port of Puri which continued to function till the dawn of the twentieth century though the operations of loading and unloading were difficult here. The town of Puri, however, had considerable commercial activity because of the large number of pilgrims who flocked there to visit Lord Jagannath. Puri port was brought under the port Act of 1858 and continued till the dawn of 20th century.

FALSE POINT

False point was the most important port in the Cuttack district of Orissa. It was situated near the mouth of the river Mahanadi at a distance of 70 miles from the Cuttack town. The port was opened in the year 1860 for sea-borne trade with places outside Orissa. It was by far the best harbour on the entire coast of India between the Hoogli and Bombay [Mumbai] (*Report of the Commissioners appointed to enquire into famine in Bengal and Orissa, 1866, Para 30*). The False point, however, had never had a fair chance prior

to the great famine of 1866. There were no means of communication except in the rainy season. Between 1860 and 1862, an Agency was established there only to export rice from Cuttack. Messrs Robert Charriol commenced the rice trade there (*Bengal Revenue Proceedings (Customs)*, December 1, 1879, No. 56). But there was no means of disembarking the cargo and passengers at the place of anchorage. Hence, the Agency, which was established there, was abandoned. The horrors of famine, however, forced the Government to take notice of this port, which was in a neglected condition. In complying with the demands of the Famine Commissioner, which regarded it as one of the best harbours in the whole of India, the Government decided to make it navigable all the year round. The harbour was properly surveyed and deepened and the channels were clearly buoyed off. As a consequence, the port remained open throughout the year (*Bengal Revenue Proceedings*, November 1868, No.3345; *Bengal Revenue Proceedings*, Nov.1868; *Utkal Dipika*, 3 July 1869, No.27.). The port was connected with Cuttack, through the Kendrapara canal (Das, 1997, p.222). In those days, Cuttack was an important centre of commerce. During the years of famine, it (Cuttack) became a very important centre of the rice trade. Over the Kendrapara canal were sent out the chief articles of export just as over this canal were brought in the main items of import like cotton, kerosene oil, various types of metals, gunny bags, etc. Kendrapara being very near to the False Point also developed as a market town, which was connected with False Point through Taladanda and Kendrapara canals (*General Administration Report of Orissa Division (Annual)*, 1873-74, p.10). The Government was confident that False Point would grow into an important harbour in Odisha that would afford facilities for import and export of articles. In 1862, the Government appointed an officer in the custom office at False Point to regulate and supervise the trading activities of this port. The Act II of 1858, however, did not recognize the False Point, and as such, duties were not levied on the import and export of articles into and from this port. The Board of Revenue, however, passed a set of special rules to regulate trade at False Point from 1861 (*Bengal Revenue Proceedings (Customs)*, April 1871, No.2A). Rs. 2,33,000 was recommended to the Government for the development of this port (O'Malley, 1933, p. 168). The Government also decided to acquire a vast area for the construction of the port. But when the Government found that it would be impossible to prevent the silting up of the harbor, they gave up the idea of the development of the port. Gradually the trading activities of this port were diverted towards Chandbali and Coast canal. S.L. Maddox stated that for practical and commercial purposes, the port lost its utility by the end of the 19th century (Maddox, 1890 to 1900, Vol-I, p.10.). However, the False Point served as an important port of Orissa in the second half of the 19th century. It had attracted the Government for its better administration. It was here the quantity of import and export increased year after year. It was famous for the export of rice. A large quantity of rice was exported to different foreign places from the False Point. A quantity of 400 bags of rice was exported in the year 1867-68 and it increased to 68,421 bags in 1869-70. Similarly, while in the year 1867-68 there was not a single piece of hide exported to any other port of India or of foreign countries, in 1869-70, about 13,979 pieces of hide were exported from this port (*Bengal Revenue Proceedings (Customs)*, July 1870, No. 21). From the analysis of data, it reveals that this port continued as a busy port of Orissa in the seventies of the nineteenth century.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From the above analysis, it gleans that there was a remarkable progress in the sea-borne trade of 19th century Orissa through its ports and port-towns. The vessels frequently plied from these ports to different ports of India and even to mainland Southeast Asia. In spite of many handicaps, the ports like Chandbali and False Point received the attention of the Government. Towards the later part of the 19th century, foreign trade became more active. The British Indian Stream Company made False Point a place of their business activities. French ships from Mauritius visited Orissan ports to import rice and oil-seeds into their country. In the year 1868-69, the total transaction of foreign trade was Rs. 6, 39,031 which rose to its highest point in the year 1877-78 (Das, 1997, p.224). During the years from 1881-82 to 1888-89 the ports of Orissa were busy in handling foreign trade. The flourishing maritime trade of Orissa had a great impact on the economic prosperity of the people of Orissa. The main articles of export were food grains, agricultural and forest products while the articles of import included metals, gunny bags, kerosene oil, sugar, tobacco, lead, copper, zinc, glassware, liquor, spices, gold, silver and other machine made fancy goods including cloths (Das, 1997, p.224).

It is here to mention that the value of import of foreign goods in 1881-82 was Rs. 66, 99,026 and the value of the export was Rs. 68, 42,784. In the year 1884-85, the figure increased to Rs. 91, 15,021 for the import trade and Rs. 96, 53,531 for export trade. The value of import and export in the ports of Orissa was Rs. 1, 19, 73,792 in the year 1894-95 against the previous year's figure of Rs. 1, 14, 59,770. Towards the end of the 19th century in 1899-1900, the value of the total communication (export and import) was Rs. 1, 20, 75,438, showing an increasing over the value of 1894-95.

However, though the maritime trade of Orissa was flourishing, towards the closing years of the 19th century due to various factors it faced its decline. The ports were deteriorated. The extension of railway lines contributed significantly to the decline of the portal trade of Orissa. In addition to this, the apathy and callousness of the Government in the matter of the development of ports and their maritime activities, the heavy rate of duty on the articles of import and export and the abandonment of the manufacture of salt accelerated the process of the decline of the sea-borne trade of Orissa towards the end of the nineteenth century. Social taboos and the restrictions imposed on the adoption of the profession of the maritime trade also led to the decline of the maritime trade in Orissa in the ending years of the nineteenth century.

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