The Historical Geography of Pre-Colonial Bhagalpur

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It has been rightly observed that, “the limits of the present district of Bhagalpur being purely artificial, no connected account of the territory that now bears this name can be expected. Its history must be sought for in the history of the large areas of which it forms a part.”

In length about 140 miles and breadth varying from 14 to 45 miles, and situated in the rich and fertile valley of the Ganga and it is divided by it into two almost equal portions kingdoms of Anga and Mithila. During this period it was bounded on the north by Nepal; on the east, north of the Ganga, by the district of Purnea; on the south and east, south of the Ganga, by the Santahal Parganas and on the west by the districts of Darbhanga and Mongyr. The northern and the southern portions of the district, afford different physical characteristics. The north is the playground of rivers that flow from the Nepal hills, and the south has old alluvium soils, laterite uplands and hills. The northern portion is, therefore, subject of floods and the changing beds of the capricious hilly rivers, whereas the south is more stable, except the north-eastern corner, which is subject to occasional excesses of the two hill streams.

In his journal (P. 73) Buchanan observes "... the name is said to have been given by the Mughal officers who collected a number of fugitives and defended them in the plains from the violence and depredations of the disorderly chiefs of the interior".

The people of Anga unknown to the Rig Veda are mentioned in the Atharaveda. There is lack of evidence in Vedic literature that Angas were non-Aryan people that came overseas to eastern India. They were, in fact, the district’s the earlier Aryan immigrants Titikshu, the second son of Mahamanas, who was seventh in descent from Anu, founded the Kingdom of Anava in the East and named it after his ancestor. The Asura King Bali begot by his wife Sudesna five Ksetraja sons, viz., Anga, Vanga, Kalinga, Pundra and Sumha, and the Anava kingdom that expanded and developed under the asura king was named after his sons, and the five kingdoms thus formed were named Anga, Vanga, Kalinga, Pundra and Sumha. Separated from Magadha by the river Campa, Anga comprised the modern districts of Bhagalpur and Monghyr. The capital of Anga was Malini, also called Campa Malini in the Puranas situated at a distance from the pilgrimage centre. No particulars are available about the kings in the Anga genealogy till we come to Lomapada, also called Romapala, who is placed seventh in the genealogical list. Lomapada was a well known archer, and a great friend of king Dasarath of Ayodhya. Lomapada’s great grandson Champa gave the name Chapa to the Anga capital, which was till then known as Malini, Champa, also called Champapur, was surrounded by groves of Champaka at the time of the Mahabharata. The Buddhist works mention one queen Gaggara as...
having excavated an artificial lake, containing groves of Champaka trees on its banks. From the Ghampaka Sreshthi Katha a Jaina work, it appears that the town was in a flourishing condition. There were perfumer, spice-seller, weaver, washer man, etc. this fair and fortified city, with its ramparts, gates and watch towers was regarded as one of the six great cities of northern India. Champa was a very sacred place to the Jainas and the Buddhists. Parsva, the immediate predecessor of Mahabir, is associated with Champa. It was visited by Lord Mahavira who spent here three parjusanas (rani season retirement). It was also birth place of Biraja-Jina author of Tankavatara Sutra, and also that of Palakapya Muni; birth place and the place of death of Basupujya, the 12th Jaina Tirthankara. Sona Kolaviza, the author of one of the Theragathas was a resident of Champa. At the time of Buddha, Champa was regarded as one of the six great unities of norther India, the other five being Rajagriha, Sravasti, Saketa, Kausambi and Benares. Ananda, the first and favourite disciple of Buddha, exhorted the later to give up his earthly body in one of such cities. Subhadrangi, the mother of Asoka, was born at Champa. Her father was a poor Brahmin who took her to Pataliputra and presented her to Bindusara, King of Magdha (347 to 319 B.C.). Champa is also traditionally the abode of Chand Sadagar the story of whose son Lakshmana and his wife Behula is graphically mentioned in the Bengali poem called Mansar Bhasan. Snake worship and Behula Puja are still performed and a big Champa mela. The king of Champapuri had two beautiful places, one called Gandalata at Kuruchatter now called Karpat, seven miles east of Bhagalpur, near the Goghnala, and the other at Kridasthali near Pathargata on the confluence of the Ganga and the Kosi. A number of Jakata stories mention merchants taking ships at Champa, and then either coasting to Ceylon or adventuring may days without sight of land to Suvarnabhumi. The Periplus of the Erythrean Sea proves that Bengal (which included Bihar) maintained an active overseas trade with south India and Ceylon in the first century A.D. The commodities exported are said to have consisted of Malabathrum, pearls and muslins of the finest parts.

After Lomapada the next famous king of Anga was Karna who built and held his court in Karnagarh. Major Welford and Buchanan Hamilton, being lost in the maze of the royal dynastic list with about half a dozen of kings having the name of Karna, failed to determine Karna of the Bharat war and the builder of Karnagarh. Karna was a faithful ally of the Kauravas and a sincere friend of Duryodhana, the chief of the Kauravas. He was a pathetic victim of misfortune throughout his whole life. In reality the eldest of the Pandavas, he was never regarded as such by the Pandava brothers. Being deserted just after his birth by his mother Kunti, because he was born during her maidenhood by the Sun God, he was brought up by a worker in wood, who adopted him as his son. In spite of the social stigma of birth out of marriage, Karna was admitted to be one of the great heroes of the epic age almost unrivalled in war and bravery. It was not for the want of ingenuity in war, or lack of bravery, but out of sheer adverse fortune he was killed by the third Pandava, his adversary.

II

During the Buddhist age, we learn that Satanika Parantap, the king of the Vatsyas, whose capital was Kausambi, near Allahabad, attacked Champa, then under the rule of
King Dadibahana but particulars about the results of which are not known. It, however, transpires that sometime later, Anga grew powerful and there was no love lost between her and Magadha. For sometime Magadha remained an integral part of Anga. King Bhattiya of Magadha was defeated in war by Brahmadatta of Anga. But at a subsequent date the Goddess of Fortune frowned upon Anga and her prosperity was on the wane. Bimbisara (C. 603-551 B.C.), son of Bhattiya, revenged his father’s defeat by putting Brahmadatta to death and annexing Anga to his empire. Champa passed to the hands of the Magadhan victor and remained as an appendage for centuries to come. After the death of Bimbisara, Ajatsatru (Kunika) (C. 551-519 B.C.) made Champa his capital but his son Udayin (C. 519-503 B.C.) transferred the seat of Government to Pataliputra. With the loss of independence, the people of Champa lost all their morals and strength of character so much so, that in course of time they became notorious for their bad character. 15

As a province of Magadha, Anga witnessed along with the other parts of the Empire, vicissitudes of fortune and an change of ruling dynasties. The Sisunagas, the Nandas, the Mauryas, the Sungas and the Guptas ruled in chronological succession over Anga. The country must have felt the brunt of Kalings, Satavahana, Greek (Menander) and Kushana invasions. The end of the Kushana rule towards the first half of the 2nd century A.D. synchronizes with the rise of the Bharasiya Naga, who originally issued from Bagahelkhand, set up their rule in the Uttar Pradesh and east and west Bihar, of the or Champa. The Gupta rule that extended over Anga witnessed the renaissance of Indian art and a brilliant development of works in metals, such as iron and copper. A copper statue of Buddha about 2½ feet in height, delicately executed, discovered at Sultanganj, testify to the place and its vicinity as producing marvellous specimen of handiwork in bronze and other metals. Fa-Hien, the Chinese pilgrim, who visited Magadha in the beginning of the 5th century A.D. while following the course of the Ganga descending eastwards, found on the southern bank the great Kingdom of Champa. 16 With the break up of the Gupta Empire, the later Guptas of Magadha, whose connections with the imperial Guptas have not been ascertained till now, established supremacy over Magadha. Adityasena, son of Madhava Gupta and the eighth king of the line possessed administrative talents and military skill that won for him the title of the “guardian of the world, by whose white umbrella the whole circuit of the earth was covered”. An inscription of Adityasena discovered on the Mandara Hill 17 relates that both he and his queen Shri Kondadevi installed an image of Narahari (Man-lion), an incarnation of Vishnu, on the hill, and that the queen performed an act of piety by excavating a tank named Papaharini 18 at the foot of the said hill. Adityasena was, as stated in the aforesaid inscription, “a ruler of the earth up to the shores of the oceans and a performer of Aswamedha and other great sacrifices”. His kingdom included Magadha, Anga and VAnga. The political destiny of Anga next passed to Sasanka, the king of Karnasuvarna (near Berhampur in Bengal). Originally a military adventurer and a feudal chief entitled Mahasamanta, he extended his sphere of political influence in south Bihar, Benates and Ganjam (south Orissa).

After Sasanka, the sovereignty of Anga passed to Harshavardhana, of Sthanisvara, who possessed undying reputation for warlike and peaceful activities. Hieun-Tsang, the Chinese pilgrim, visited India during the rule of this monarch and visited main Buddhist
centres. He had visited Champa, or Chen-po as he calls it, situated at a distance of 300 li or 50 miles east of Monghyr. About Champa he writes\(^\text{19}\) the Capital has the river Ganga to the north, the soil is level and fertile, regularly cultivated and productive; the temperature is wild and warm; the manners of the people are simple and honest. There are several sets *sangharumas* (Viharas) mostly in ruins, with about 200 priests. They follow the teaching of the little Vehicle (*hinajana*). There are some twenty Deva temples. The walls of the capital are built of brick, and are several feet high. The foundations of the wall are raised on a lofty embankment, so that by their high escarpment, they can defy the attack of enemies.

To the east of the city 140 or 150 li the south of the river Gah Ganga is a solitary detached rock, craggy and steep and surrounded by water\(^\text{20}\). On the top of the peak is a Deva temple.

From what I read in Hiuen-Tsang’s account Cunningham concluded, that the political boundary of Anga then extended from Lakhiterai (Lakhisai) to Rajmahal on the Ganga, and from Paresnath Hill to Kalna on the Bhagirathi\(^\text{21}\).

At this time Champa was under the rule of the Khetauris of Malorigin and was a powerful kingdom\(^\text{22}\).

Gopala (C. 750—770 A.D.) the elected Pala King of Bengal, conquered Magadh and South Bihar in the third decade of the eighth century. Under Dharmapala (C. 770 A.D.) the son of Gopala the frontier of the empire extended to the west of the Sone river. As a Buddhist and a patron of education and scholarship, the Emperor of Bengal founded Shri Vikramsila Vihara on a hillock on the bank of the Ganga in Northern Magadh\(^\text{23}\).

Surrounded by a strong wall, the Vihara was constructed after a good design. With the central temple adorned with Mahabodhi image, there were all told 108 teachers inside the enclosure\(^\text{24}\). The outer wall surrounding the whole monastery was embellished with artistic work, with a painted portrait of the famous scholar Nagarjuna adorning the right hand side of the principal entrance and that of Atisa on the left. The University of Vikramasila, also founded by Dharmapala included six colleges, and a central hall. Called the House of Science with its six gates opening on the six colleges. The gates of the University like those of Nalanda, it is said, were guarded by most learned scholars called D’vara-Pandits, who were the custodians of scholarship. Students were admitted to the university on the recommendations of these erudite gatekeepers. We come across the names of these six keepers of the gates, who worked as such, during the period 955—83 A.D. Ratna-kara Santi, E. Gate: Vagisvarakirti of Banaras, W. Gate: Naropa, N. Gate: Prajnakaramati, S. Gate: Ratnavajra of Kashmir, First central Gate: Janasrimitra of Gauda, Second Gate. The President of the University was not only a scholar of outstanding merit but also a religious sage. Buddha-Jnana-pada, was the President during the time of Dharmapala: Dipankara of Srijnana Atisa was the head of the institution between 834—38 A. D. As an important feature of the administration of the University it should be noted, that the teaching was controlled and conducted by a Board of prominent teachers and that there was one joint Board for both the Universities of Vikramasila and Nalanda. The utility of maintaining one
uniform standard of teaching in the different Indian Universities that form the chief problem of the present day educationists was very ably solved in India more than one thousand years ago. Thus we find there was an exchange of teachers between the Vikramshila and Nalanda University and scholars like Dipankara and Abhayakara working at both the places. As regards the working of the university, the rules and regulations governing the daily life of the resident studies and allied matters, nothing definite in details may be said. Nalanda is better off in this respect, the detailed working having been laid down by Hiuen Tsang, who was supplemented by I-Tsing. But no similar account of Vikramshila is available. Nevertheless, it goes without saying that "the success of the work of Vikramshila as a seat of learning is amply demonstrated by the quality and quantity of its output, the prodigies of piety and learning it produced, and the profound contributions they made to knowledge and region by their numerous writings which practically built up the culture and civilization of another country, Tibet." 25

It is worthwhile to refer to those eminent scholars of the Vikramshila University who were deputed to Tibet for working, and wrote outstanding works in Tibetan. Acharya Buddha Jnanapada, who held the post of, Acharya for ordination at Vikramshila, developed the study of Mantra-Vajra Acharya, that was taught only at this University and nowhere else. The nine works that he wrote in Sanskrit on Tantra are lost but are preserved in Tibetan: Vairachana Rakshita, who wrote several works in Sanskrit and translated into Tibetan several Tantrika works, accompanied his Guru Padmasambhava to Tibet about 750 A. D. He was known as Mahapandita and Mahacharya: Jetari, an inhabitant of Varendra, and originally a student and later a professor won the title of Pandita: Prajakaramati, already referred to as the keeper of the south gate, wrote several works in Sanskrit and Tibetan: Ratnakara, the keeper of the East Gate, having first obtained ordination at Odantapura University,26 entered Vikramshila as a pupil of Jetari. He was the author of thirteen works in Sanskrit, and went to Ceylon at the invitation of the King to preach Buddhism. Jnana Sri, a native of Gauda and the keeper of the second Gate mentioned before, wrote several works in Sanskrit, that were later rendered into Tibetan by him; Ratnavajra of Kashmir, another gate-keeper, came to Vikramshila at the age of thirty-six or so, and by virtue of his scholarship won the title of Pandit: Vagisvara of Banaras, also a gate-keeper of the University wrote in Sanskrit, and his famous work Hrityubanchanopadesa was translated into Tibetan. Dipankara Sri Jnana, also known as one of the greatest of Indian scholars, was born in 980 A. D. in a wealthy family of Gauda. Having renounced his riches at an early age of 19, he entered a monastery at Odantapuri, and completing his education and obtaining mastery over Hinayana, Mahayana, Vaiseslikas and Tantras sailed off to Suvarnadvipa (in Pegu) for further studies. There he passed the next twelve years of his life and then returned to India and was elected Head of the community of Buddhist Monks of Magadha and Gauda, as a result of the victory that he had won over the monks in a discussion held at Bodhgaya. In reward of his merit King Nayapala made him the head of the Vikramshila University. At the invitation of the Tibetan King Ohm Chub, Dipankara proceeded to Tibet to purge Tibetan Buddhism of its many corruptions. He thus worked in Tibet for 13 years (1040—1053 A. D.) and passed away near Lhasa at the age of 73. Some 200 works on Tibetan and Buddhism
are ascribed to him. Viryasimha was an associate of Atisa and he helped the latter to translate his works in Tibetan. Athayakaragupta, a native of Gauda and a monk, began his life as the family priest of the King Rampala. A great writer in Sanskrit and a translator in Tibetan, he obtained the title of Arya-Mahapandita. He was present at Vikramasila at the time of the first Turkish invasion of Magadha. Tathagata Rakshita, a native of Orissa, and a Kayastha by birth, was at first a student and then a professor of Vikramasila, obtained by dint of merit the titles of “Mahapandita” and “Upadhyaya”. He wrote on Tantra shastra in Sanskrit and later translated them into Tibetan. Ratnakirti, was a student of Vikramasila who was known as Updhyaya, Pandit and Mahapandit. His Tibetan translations are an asset to Tibetan literature. Manjusri, was another celebrated Pandit of Vikramasila who produced Tibetan translations of Sanskrit works. Dharmakirti, was a native of Tibet and a student of Vikramasila University. He translated many Sanskrit works into Tibetan: Sakya Shri Bhadra, was native of Kashmir and a reputed logician. He was at Vikramasila when the Muslims destroyed it.

By virtue of their military conquests the Palas became the inheritors of Vanga (Eastern Bengal) and Gauda (Western Bengal). Anga forming a component part of the latter in those days. The Anargha-raghava of Murari, who flourished in the latter part of the eighth century A.D., refers to Champa as the Capital of Gauda. This connection of Champa with a Pala King of Gauda has been inferred from the study of the Jaynagar image inscription also. The glory of the Pala empire won under Gopala and his two immediate successors, Dharmapal and Devapala (C. 810—815 A.D.) suffered a wane after the death of the last named sovereign, and during the reign of Narayanapala (C. 854—908), Anga, Vanga and Magadha paid homage to the Rastrakuta King Amoghavarsa I (814—877 A.D.) and to his son Krishna II (877—913 A.D.). In addition to this defeat Narnyanpala had also to eat the humble pie at the hands of the Pratihara King Mahendrapala I (C. 885—910 A.D.). An attempt however, was made by Narayanapala to regain his lost prestige, and for sometime at least, he recovered north Bengal and Bihar and acquired sovereignty over Kanauj. An inscription dated the sixth year of the reign of Gopala II, the successor of Narayanapala, found at Jajilpara, in Maldah District, refers to the victorious camp of the King at Vataparvatika on the Ganga, referring obviously to Vateshwarasthana at Patharghata, near Colgong. There are epigraphic references to some Chandella and Kalachuri incursions into Bengal in the 11th century A.D. In the 11th Century as well, Bagal and Anga suffered at the hands of Jatavaran the founder of the Jadava dynasty of East Bengal, and the Gangeya King of Dehala (C.P.). Mathana also called Mahana, the maternal uncle of Rampala, the king of Bengal, became the feudatory ruler of the principality of Anga, paying obedience to the ruler of Bengal. Lakhshman Deva, the Paramara king of Maiwa, and the great grandson of Bhoja, is said to have defeated them.

Under the suzerainty of the Palas, Anga was influenced by the culture that developed under them. The Vedic culture that gathered strength in Bengal, received an impetus in Anga as well. Brahmins well-versed in the Vedas and the Vedangas, and adept in the performance of sacrifices received stipends and royal grants. Saivism or the cult of Siva, which developed in Bengal in those days, was that of the Pasupata sect.
It was by means of conquest that the Senas, who were originally Karnata Kshatriyas coming to Bengal in the train of Vikramaditya VI, Chalukya, became the legal successors of the Palas in Bengal and *Anga. Lakshmanasena* (1185—1206), the son of *Ballalasen*, and an important and powerful king consolidated the Sena Kingdom. But the last days of his rule were unhappy and tragic. Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khilji, a follower of Muhammad of Ghor, being attracted by the prevalent conditions in Bihar, than almost unprotected as a result of the fall of the Gahadvllas, marched his Turkish troops to Bihar and Bengal and brought them under Muslim sway. The effects of this conquest over the country and particularly over Nalanda, and Vikramasila Universities has been fully narrated by the author of *Tabakat-i-Nasiri*, and need no reiteration here. In fact, the two Universities stated above were levelled to the ground, their students were either put to sword or scattered pell-mell and a great number of books put to the flames.

Thus were by, *Vanga* and *Anga* brought under the sway of the Muslim rulers of Delhi, and were ruled by the Turko-Afghans, Saiyyads, Lodis and the Mughals in chronological succession. Bhagalpur formed part of *Sarkar Monghyr*, one of the seven *Sarkars* into which Bihar was divided at the time of Muslim conquest. Towards the close of the 14th century, Bihar was incorporated to the kingdom of Jaunpur and remained as its appendage for about a century when it was conquered by Hussain shah of Bengal and later by the rulers of Delhi.

III

The geography of this region played a significant role in pacing up the growth and development of the urban centers. The mushrooming of the marketing centers owes its allegiance to the keen interest shown by the Mughal rulers because of its strategic location. This region was the only military route from western India to Eastern India. The Uniqueness was the two Hill passes one connecting Sarker Munget via the the Kharagpur hill and the other leading to Bengal called Sakrigali.

Bengal was considered to be a prized *subha* during the Mughal times. The only route to enter this area was though Bhagalpur via *Teliagarhi fort*. This fort stands on a plateau on the lower slope of the Rajmahal hills at the foot of which the Ganges flowed. Owing to its positions it was a placed of great strategic importance’s and was known as, “The key of Bengal”. Ives gives the following account of *Teliagarhi* fort as it appeared in 1757—"This is the only a wall carried on from the brink of the river which at this places is prodigiously rapid to the foot of the mountain and is almost un passable, like that at *sicarigully*, with thick woods and jungle and hat this further impediment, that very near to the wall runs a rivulet, on the side of the will, seemingly in practicable to pass over. The bastions are without parapets, having eight sides that are not eight feet wide and they have contrived to guild the walls so artfully, that the rivulets serves for a ditch in front. The bastion wall, which is alert 14 feet high and 50 yard long, entirely commands the river, which though it be thee fourth is a mile broad here, yet the current is such as the carry all boats close under the platform.

In *Siyar ul Mutakharin* it is mentioned that “*Telia-Garry* is a fort that shuts up the passage into Bengal. It consists of a wall, strengthened with towers that expand from the
foot of the rocky bank of the Ganges. It was neither ditch nor rampart, and yet answers well enough the purpose in a country where they know nothing of sieges, and hardly any artillery.” In the 16th and 17th Century Man Singh led his troops and made Bhagalpar military headquarter. 41

The geographical location was also a boon for the traders. The Jain traders concentrated on the western outskirts of the towns. This was due to Champa Nala which flows on the western boundary of the present city near Nathnagar. 42 The geographical location of Champangar was significant since it was an important transit point for traders coming from North East Bihar and Nepal. 43

Another important advantage was that Bhagalpur was attached to jungle area inhabited by santhals. The first ruler who by passed this route was Shershah in 1538 AD. The importance of the route is that it is considered as the neck which connects southern portion of Bihar and west Bengal. The new immigration of the hilly people was through this route who got settled in the out skirt of Bhagalpur. The fort was been described by Howell in his book “Interesting historical events.”

In the medieval times the availability of good transport facility in Bhagalpur was an important feature that barged trade and commerce. There was a chain of good roads. An important highway from Delhi to Lakhanauti passed through Bhagalpur. Another important route that touched Bhagalpur was from Varanashi via sahabad. A rood also originated from Bhagalpur that connected Bengal. Caption sherwill gives the prescription of an old Mughal road located on the banks of Ganges leading from Calcutta Via Rajmahal, Bhagalpur, Munger to Patna. 44 George Dickinson in his report dated August 31, 1794 AD gave observation on the condition of road rout in Bhagalpur. He writes that the first rood went ward to the banks of river kiul. He also gives communication between Bhagalpur and Rajmahal, the road constructed by Prince Shuja. 45 In the 18th century, the Marathas used this pass and invaded Bhagalpur.

Until the recent modern age, the best means of transport was the waterways compared to the other modes of transport. All the world civilization flourished on the banks of great rivers. 46 In case of Bhagalpur, the Principal River was the Ganges flowing on the Northern side of the town. Most of the travelers between 1640 and 1810 sailed at Bhagalpur as a break journey. The Mughals were not very much interested in the maintaining Navy, however during the Mughal period Golaghat was the chief station of Bhagalpur town. The maritime activities led to the emergence of a small sarai near this Ghat Mayaganj and Barari were the two important ghats but afterwords due to the change of the river course Barari came to occupy the principal position.

A survey of the English document also reveals us important of the ghats. An important Ghat described by Ann Deane as “the best one in the town” was located at Bilri Gunj. 47 The judicial records of the English East India Company mentions Khunjapur as a Prominent Ghat in the town. 48 The concept of “Nallas” was unique for Bhagalpur. Many Nallas connected the interior of the town with the river. These Nallas acted as the network of
transport in the town. The breadth of the nalla was quite large enough to accommodate large boats and small ships. One such example is the stream christened Chandei. To the south of the Ganges small stream descended from the highland to the south and flow in the north direction into the Ganges. One such stream called Chandu, was used for transport and communication purpose.49

The climate of Bhagalpur to assisted in the growth of urban culture in the town. The round season started from June and Continued until September. The prevailing North Eastern wind tempted the travellers from Calcutta to sail in this direction. The season from October to March was very much suitable for the Europeans.50 This type of climate boosted the cultivation of rice. The surpluses production of rice was used for export purpose.

The bank of Kankar was ten miles broad and had dense growth of mango, bamboos, Jack, Palm, date trees etc.51 these dense forests was also a great boon because it allowed the immigration of the hilly people. These new immigration settled in the outskirt of the town and established their household out of the wooden material. A European visitor described the town Bhagalpur as a “great town of thatch houses and a place of bows and arrows.52 Another important advantage was the network of hills that surrounded Bhagalpur.53

In retrospect we can say that the past is not a dead past, but a past which is still living in present.54 However, in case of Bhagalpur the rich and juicy ancient past awaits for the scholars and historians of Ancient-India. Believed to be the old Hindu Kingdom of Anga, with its capital Champa, it is identified with modern Champa nagar.55 That historian who identifies, the plateau known as Karnagarh with the site of the ancient Capital, question this association of the capital with Champanagar. It is stated to have been built by a Raja Varma, but nothing definite is known about him, as Kings of these names are numerous in the lists of kings of Magadha.56 Major Wellford, tries to reconstruct the names of the kings of Magadha. As the name Karna occurs frequently in this list, at eras varying from thirteen or fourteen century BC to four or five centuries.57 AD, it is obviously impossible to determine from which the fort of Karangarh took its name. Buchanan-Hamilton Concluded that there were at least seven important kings named karna who began to reign not long after the downfall of the Mauryan dynasty founded by Chandragupta Maurya,58 who rendered Magadha the beading province of India. It is believed tha the Chinese traveller. Heaven Tsang, after his term of years in the Buddhist monastery at Nalanda, travelled through South Bihar in the 7th C. A.D. Omitting the purely will tracts of to the south, of which we have little or no mention in ancient times, the country land which Buchannan has surveyed. Called as Angadesh, the land of Aug as of Atharva Veda, the territory of King Lomapada of the Ramayan, of king Karna of Mahabharata, saw the rule of the Pala dynasty in the first half of the 9th Century. The Sen Kings gradually ousted them from Bengal and ultimately conquered Mithila, only to be vanquished by the Muhammandans under Muhammad Bakhtayar at the end of the twelfth century. About 1197 we conquered Bihar and about 1200 took possession of Gaur. When Babar’s son Humayan tried to invade Bengal Shershah in the narrow defile between the Ganges and Rajmahal Hills, must have traversed Bhagalpur on this expedition, which ended in his disastrous retreat and flight to Persia where he remained
in exile till 1555 AD. From onwards continuous war fare were raged till the defeat of the last Afghan King, Daud khan, near Rajmahal in 1576 AD. The history of these areas is one of constant vicissitude. Order is restored to great extent under the strong hand of a great soldier-administrator, Man Singh and there fort these districts from part of the suba Bihar under the emperor Akbar. The Sarkar of Munger, with its 31 Mahals, which developed into the revenue parganas, as described in the Ain-i-Akbari from the details, given in todar Mal’s rent roll of circa 1582, practically covered the ancient Kingdom of Anga, that is to say, it extended from the kiul river on the western boundary of Mahal surajgarh to the “strong wall……extending from the Ganges to the hills... became restricted to the pass of Garhi (the modern Telyagarhi). The history of a place owes very much to the geographical patterns. The growth of urbanization in Bhagalpur was attributed to the political patronage given by Akbar. However, it goes well to an English proverb that there is peace only after war. During the reign of Akbar this town on several occasions was made military station to conduct military expeditions for example in 1575 AD, Munim Khan and Raja Todar Mall, to flush out the Afghans from this region, carried out a military expedition.

Notes and References

1 J. Byrne Bengal District, Gazetteer Bhagalpur, Calcutta, 1911, p.26.(also referred in P.C. Roy Chaudhary, Bihar District, Gazetteer Bhagalpur, Patna 1962).
2 Ibid. p.1. 4,226 square miles in area. Towards the beginning of the 19th century at the time when Buchanan visited it, the district comprised an area of 8,225 square miles.

Referring to the extent of the district, Cap. Sherwill in his Geographical and Statistical Report of the District of Bhagalpur (1869) remarks that it comprised of the larger portion lying to the north of the river.

In Murphy’s Report on the Survey and Settlement Operation in the Bhagalpur District (1902-10), the total area of the district given is 4,158 square miles of which 2,374 are comprised is North Bhagalpur and 1,784 in south Bhagalpur.

Rennell’s map of the south-east part of Bihar drawn in 1773AD portrays the district of Bhagalpur, and is the earliest of its and so far known. Next comes, the map drawn by Francis Buchanan in 1811, and published in Buchanan’s Journal. There is another map of Bhagalpur town drawn in 1824, 1st November, by one Gopinath with sites indicated in a Persian Script. The map has been preserved in the Magistrate’s Record Room, Bhagalpur. N.S. Sherwill’s map of the district of “Bhagalpur” on 4m.=1 inch and drawn in 1852 and his map of Rajmahal Hills on a scale of 2 miles=1 inch and drawn in 1855 are also preserved in the above record room. The Survey of Bhagalpur by Major J. Macdonald and Capt. N. J. Steward was published in 1902. This map deals with the civil station and the environments in the 1866-67, 1869 and 1870.

3 P.C. Roy Chaudhary, Bihar District Gazetteer, Bhagalpur, Patna 1962. pp. no. 35.
4 Vedic Age, by Mozumdar and Pusalker, George Allen, Unwin, 1951, p. 256.
5 Ibid, p.279
6 P.C. Roy Chaudhary, Bihar District Gazetteer Bhagalpur, Patna 1962. pp. no. 35
7 P.C. Roy Chaudhary, Bihar District Gazetteer Bhagalpur, Patna 1962. pp. no. 35 also see The Mahabharat, Vana Parva Chap. 85.
8 Bihar District Gazetteer, op.cit pp. no. 37 Anusasana Parva. Chap. 42.
9 May be identified with the large silted up tank called sarovara.

10 Palakapaya Muni was the author of Hasty-Ayurveda, also called Gajachikitsa, etc. (Anandasrama Sanskrit series), a work on elephant ivory. After the maner of Purananas and in the form of a dialogue he in Champa between king Lomapada of Anga and the Sage, Plalkapaya gives in 4 secs. an elaborate account of the ailments peculiar to elephants.

11 At Nathnagar, a quarter of Champanagar, exists a temple of Digambara sect which is dedicated to Basupujya.

12 Geographical Dictionary of Ancient and Medieval India by N. Dey, London, 1927, p.44.

13 Maha-Janaka-Jataka: Jatska VI, 34, no. 539.

14 Asiatic Researches, Vol. IX, Buchanan, p.74.

15 Champa has been described in the Dasakumara Charita as abounding in rogues.


17 Mandar Hill or Mandargir, is situated near Baunsi in the Banka subdivision, and at a distance of 30 miles south of Bhagalpur, the head quarters station. Besides being a place of pilgrimage, the hill on account of many interesting ruins possesses value in the eye of the antiquarian.

According to the Pauranic version, Vishnu defeated the notorious giant Madhukaitab in a battle that had continued for 10,000 years, and ultimately piled the Mandar hill over his body, for preventing the monster from doing any harm to the world. There is also a story in the Mahabharata to the effect that the hill was used by the Gods and the Asura in churning the ocean.

18 At first called Manohar Kund. The tradition runs that a Raja of Kanchipur called Chola was cured of his leprosy by taking a dip into its water. In gratefulness, the Raja windened and deepened the tank, and since his days, a fair is held here every year in the month of Pous.


20 Cunninghum identifies it with the picturesque rocky island off Patharghata with its temple-crowned summit. See Ancient Geography of India, p.477, also Archaeological Survey, Vol. XV, p.34.

21 Cunninghum's Ancient Geography of India, Edited by S.N. Mozumdar, Calcutta 1924, p.546. 
22 Bhagalpur District Gazetteer, p.27.

23 Cunningham identified it with the village of Silao near Baragaon. (A.S.R. VIII, 75) Dr. S.C. Vidyabhushan with Sultanganj in Bhagalpur District; N.L. De with Patharaghata hill near Colgong (J.A.S.B. VI. 7) Dr. Banerjee shastri takes it to be Keur, near Ausalgunj, "Indirect line with Nalanda (within a distance of 15 miles) and Adantapur. J.B.C.S XV, p 276. Some favour the modern villages of Oriap, Antichak and Modhorampur near Vateshwarsthan, 6 miles north of Colgong Railway station, as being the site.


26 Located in Bihar Sharif, Patna district.


28 This line of Kings usually described as Rastrakutas of Manyakheta (Mankhed, in the Nizamis dominions). Their original home was Karnatak, and their mother tongue Kanarese. Narayanpala’s submission to the rastrakutas has been referred to in the Nilgund ans Sirar stone inscriptions of Amoghavarasa, See Dynastic History of N. India, Vol. I, 301.

29 The Deoli grant of Krishna III. Dynastic History of N. India, Vol. I, 301.

30 Bhagalpur Copper plate of Narayanpala.

31 The Khajuraho epigraph tells us that the wives of the kings of Kanchi, andra, Radha and angaligered in the prison of King Dhanga, son of Yasovarman of Jeja Bhukti (Bundel Khund). Ibid, p.678.

32 The Belava Copper plate of Bhojvarman, Ibid, pp. 331-33, Jatavarman was a Rajput of the Yadava class, and he migrated from the Punjab.

33 P.C. Roy Choudhary op. cit. pp. no. 45 See Dynastic History of N. India, p.772.

34 Saranath inscription of Kumardevi, queen of the Gahadvala King Govinda Chandra (C.1114-55 A.D.).

35 P.C. Roy Choudhary op. cit. pp. no. 45, See History of the Paramara Dynasty by D.C. ganguly.


37 Ibid.

38 William Hodges, Travels in India, (London 1793) pg-24 Sakrigali: was famous for its fortifications called teliagarhi. Hodges mentions the remains of the strong wall and gate of Telliyagarhi fort.


42 Bhagalpur had a big harbor on the Ganges River at a place called Champanagar, now called as Champanala.
46 The Mesopotamia civilization flourished on the banks of Tigris and Euphrates the Indus valley civilization flourished on the banks of river Indus.
52 Ibid. p 121-133.
53 Ibid. p 96
54 R.G. Collingwood, The Idea of History,
56 See Asiatic Researchers, Vol. IX.
57 Ibid Vol. IX.
58 Chandragupta, grandfather of the famous Ashoka (reigned B.C. 271-231) was, it will be remembered, a refugee at the time of Alexander. The Greek called him sandrakothes. Possessed the crown of Magdha with the help of Kautily he married the daughter.
59 See Bengal Secretariat, Bengal District Gazetteer, Pg 185.
61 Ibid; pp-143,44.