

PATALIPUTRA (PART-1)

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INTRODUCTION (परिचय)

In Ancient times modern Patna was known as Pataliputra. Ancient glory of Patna can be seen from the remnants of various sites of this city as a result of a few excavations undertaken so far. Indeed few cities in India can claim such a chequered and continuous history of nearly 2500 years as this city. Once taking into the roads of triumphant march under the patronage of first ever empire builders of Magadha, it never looked behind till the end of Gupta period when certainly a sort of decline was set in its imperial glory.

HISTORY OF PATALIPUTRA

The earliest traces of this city is evident from the Buddhist sources. According to *Maha-Parinibhana-Sutta* Buddha had witnessed the construction of a fort in the village *Patali*, while he was crossing through it sometimes just before his death. This piece of evidence when seen in the light of the references of this city from other sources it becomes abundantly clear that fort was being constructed in the village Patali by the order of the king *Ajatsatru* ruling over Magadha at this time from *Girivraja* a place identified with modern Rajgir in the vicinity of Patna.

HISTORY OF PATALIPUTRA

It is also known to us from the available sources of this period that construction of this fort was in the anticipation of impending invasion of warlike *Licchavis of Vajjian republic*. This had strategic location for it occupied an important position commanding communications on all sides. It being situated on the confluence of *Ganga-Son-Gandak* rivers and a fourth river *Saryu* joining Ganga not far from Pataliputra, this site was ideally suited for defence communications as armies could move in all the four directions by following the course of these rivers.

HISTORY OF PATALIPUTRA

In 5th Century B.C. *Udayin*, the grandson and successor of Ajatsatru, shifted the capital to Pataliputra. This is known to us from Jaina tradition and confirmed by the *Purana*. According to tradition Pataliputra in the days of *Nandas*, was known through various nomenclatures, The most common of these was *Padmavati*, though other names such as *Kusumpura* of the *Vayu-Purana*, and *Pushpapura* and *Kusumdhvaja* of some other literary texts were also in vogue.

HISTORY OF PATALIPUTRA

Although the credit of laying the foundation of the capital of the then biggest empire in India goes to *Nandas*, yet it were the *Mauryan rulers* who added to its real greatness. The prestige of the Patliputra rose to pinnacle of glory with Mauryas. We get a fairly vivid picture of Pataliputra at about 300 B.C. from accounts of *Megasthenes*. According to his description, the ancient city of Pataliputra was long but narrow; it was nearly 9 miles long and 1 mile broad and in the form of a parallelogram.

HISTORY OF PATALIPUTRA

The circumference of the city was nearly 22.5 miles. It was protected by massive timber palisades pierced by 64 gates, and crowned by 570 towers, and further defended by a broad and deep moat.

As a result of a series of excavations the remains of the pillared Hall of Ashoka, the great wooden platforms and of antiquities such as fragments of Ashokan pillars, coins, art objects of interest and others have come to light. Fa-Hien, the Chinese traveller mentions the palace of Ashoka which was centrally located in the citadel section.

HISTORY OF PATALIPUTRA

The prosperity of Pataliputra must have rapidly increased with the growth of Mauryan empire. With the growth in prosperity there must have come the problem of administration of the city which owing to its heterogeneous nature would have the nerve centre of country's politics. Thus what Megasthenes notices in Pataliputra was its unique municipal administration.

HISTORY OF PATALIPUTRA

Pataliputra was also a great centre of religious activities. The two most important protest movement of 6th century B.C. *Jainism* and *Buddhism* were patronized by Mauryan rulers like *Chandragupta* and *Ashoka* respectively. The first collection of Jaina scriptures was made here in 4th century B.C. Moreover, their famous teacher '*Sthalabhadra*' was born and brought up in Pataliputra at a spot which they still point out near *Gulzarbagh station of Patna*.

HISTORY OF PATALIPUTRA

The earliest Buddhist tradition says that the 'third Buddhist Council' was held at Pataliputra during Ashoka's reign and Buddhist text of 'Kathavatthu' was composed at this time here. The *strategic location* of Pataliputra was one of the major causes of its development as an imperial capital in the 6th century B.C.

(To be continued)