

## Parvatadwarak: An Ancient Historic Site of Kalahandi

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**Abstract:** Parvatadwaraka which is identified with Asurgarh-Narla of modern Kalahandi district is a significant historical site of Kalahandi, Odisha. It maintained its status in bygone days from 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E to 6<sup>th</sup> C.E. The site was first reported by S.N.Rajguru in 1946 C.E. It comprises the fort and habitational area or civil township. It is a fort area having four mammoth walls, surrounded by moat on three sides (east, north and south) and on west side river Sandol is flourishing. A great water reservoir named Asurasagar on east side and a water tank known as Rahdasagar is on south-west side. After published the report of S.N.Rajguru, the site had taken for excavation in 1973 under N.K.Sahu on behalf of Sambalpur University. They had taken two trial trenches. From the excavation they recovered a large brick structure of Goddess Stambheswari Temple, palace presently indistinct, some precious and semi-precious stone beads, some iron objects red slipped ware etc. All this suggests about the existence of ruling class, and metropolitan status of the site.

**Keywords:** Excavation, Stambheswari, Metropolitan, Mammoth, Habitation, Beads.

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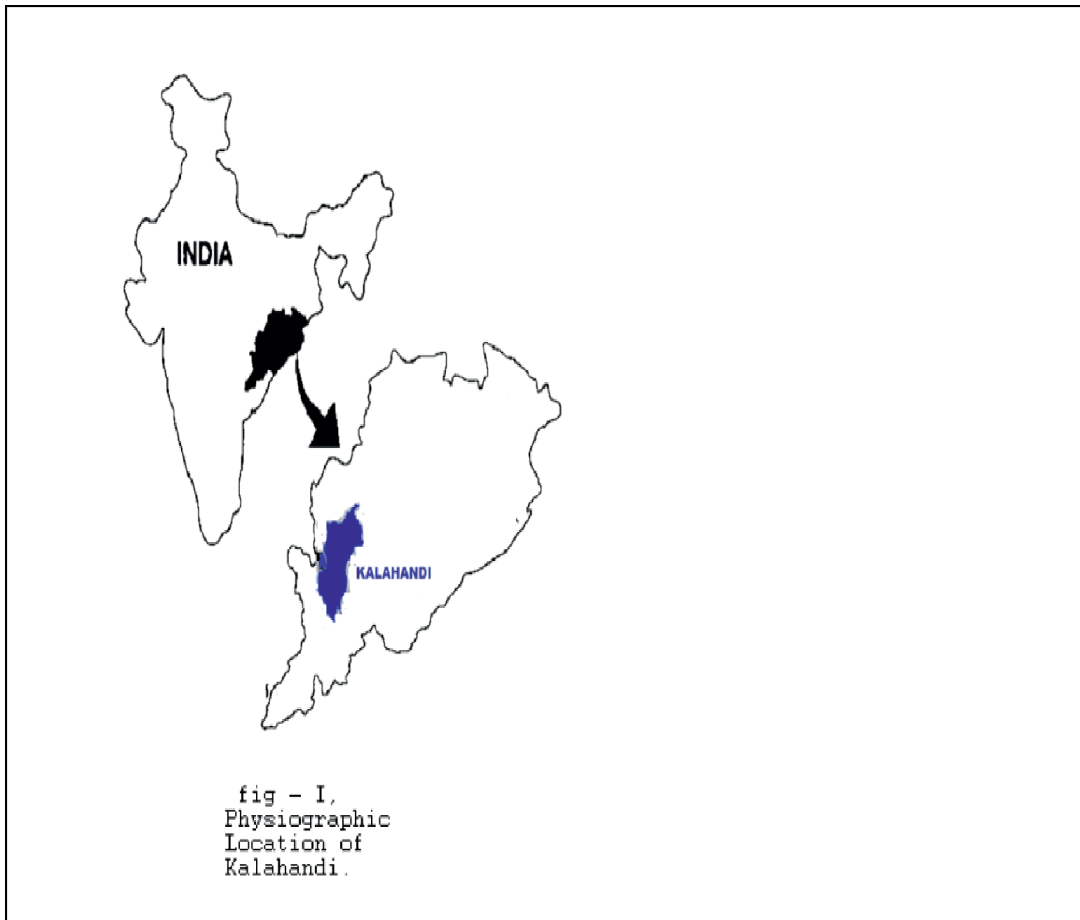
This paper deals with the fort settlement and the reign period of kings. In post-Samudragupta period, various dynasties ruled over Kalahandi. Among them, Parvatadwāraka dynasty happened to be the early ruling family. The epigraphic records, like *Terāsiṅgā copper plate of Tuṣṭikāra* and *Baradiapadar* or *Pippalpadar* copper plate of Śrī Nandarāj Deva reveals the reign of these two kings viz, Tuṣṭikāra and Śrī Nandarāja Deva over the landmass (Sahu 1997: 65). Moreover, the findings of a hoard of copper coin from *Gandibeda* of Balasore district, ascribed to Śrī Nandarāja Deva further lends substantial support to the reign of Śrī Nandarāja Deva of the Parvatadwāraka.

### GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION OF KALAHANDI

The district Kalahandi is situated on the South-Western part of Orissa State in between 190.3' N and 210.5' N longitude and 820.20' and 830.47' E latitude. It is bounded by the districts like Bolangir, Kondhmal, Nawarangpur, Rayagada and Nuapada respectively on the north, South, west, and east.1 (**fig. 1**).

### EARLY HISTORY (FIG-VI)

The periods from the 6th century B.C to 6th century A.D, have been designated as Early or Ancient Indian History. Kalahandi constituted the middle valley of the Tel. The Tel was famous in ancient



**Fig. 1: Physiographic Location of Kalahandi**

India by its name *Telavāha*. The literary reference to the Tel River undoubtedly goes back to 5th/4th century B.C. *Telavāha* was extolled in classical literature for trade of a particular luxurious article called *Kadru*, which has been identified with *Rhinoceros hide*. This *Telavaha River* is identical with the river Tel. Its valley segment was designated as *Taitilaka Janapada*, which has been identified with the middle valley of the Tel.<sup>31</sup> (Senapati 1980: 42) Sahu, (Senapati 1980: 130-131) thus, point out that the origin of the name viz, *Telavāha*, *Tela* and *Tel* are due to the oil traffic on this river. Indravana was another piece of land in the 4th century B.C. (Kangle 1972: 100) The site had yielded diamonds during the Maurya rule over Kalinga. The land Indravana has been identified with the land (Senapati 1980: 42) located in between the rivers like the Tel and the Indravati in the Historical Atlas of South Asia. (Schwartz 1978: ) However, *Rock Edict-XIII* (Sircar 1998: 42-45) and the *M.R.E – II [Jaugad version]* of Asoka further refers to this region as *Ātavika* or *Ātavi* or forest country. Epigraphic records enlist the displeasure of the monarch towards the *Ātavikas* or the forest dwellers. Though the cause of the dissatisfaction of the emperor is not known, it can be presumed that the emperor desired free trade policy with the *Atavikas* and exploitation of diamond from the Indravana land during the 4th/3rd centuries B.C, which the peoples did not supported. (Thapar 1973: 256) Asurgarh excavation has brought to light some interesting relics of 3rd century B.C. Finding of a broken piece of Chunar sand stone with Ashokan polish on it indicates that the people of *Ātavika*, who were known as forest dwellers were well civilized and brave. (Rangarajan 1992: 52-53) The region Kalahandi was prosperous in the days of Ashok. (Senapati 1980: 42)

During the 1st century A.D, Asurgarh probably served as the hub of the Vidyādhara tribe. King Kharavela of Kalinga enlisted the support of this tribe during his southward march. (Sahu 1997 : 145)

Kalahandi constituted core area of the *Mahākāntāra* kingdom, when Samudragupta invaded on it in the 4th century A.D, in course of his Deccan campaign. After crossing the Vindhyas, he entered into South Kośala and then proceeded to Mahākāntāra. (Senapati 1980: 41-43) Allahabad Prasasti mentions that Vyāghrarāja was a king of Mahakantara. Samudragupta subjugated him. The *Brhatsamhita* (Sastri 1986 : 61) of Varahamihira (6th century A.D) also mentions about the territory called *Kāntāra*. The region Kāntāra or Mahakantara comprised modern Kalahandi Koraput and Bastar districts of Orissa and Chattisgarh States. It has been held that Asurgarh-Narla was the capital city of Mahākāntāra at that time. It possess such a huge fortified urban complex, concomitant with technology, Literary, art, craft and trade beginning from 3rd century B.C to 5th century A.D. (Mishra 2009 : 28) Mahākāntāra was not annexed with the Gupta empire and Samudragupta returned back the territory and allowed Vyāghrarāja to rule over Mahākāntāra as per the principle of *Mūksha* and *Amugraha*.

Kāntāra was extended from the east of Kośala up to the bank of *Vena* a tributary of Godavari. (Sahu 1964 :433-439) Katyayana mentions a full complement of trade routes leading through forest (*Kāntāra patha*), jungle - thickets (*jangalpatha*) or trade-routes connected with land (*sthalapatha*) and others which were used for riverine and sea-borne trade (*vāripatha*). The Kāntāra patha seems to be the name trade-rout leadings across the forest belt of central India which is identified by

N.K.Sahu. (Agrawal 2014 : 143) (fig-II)

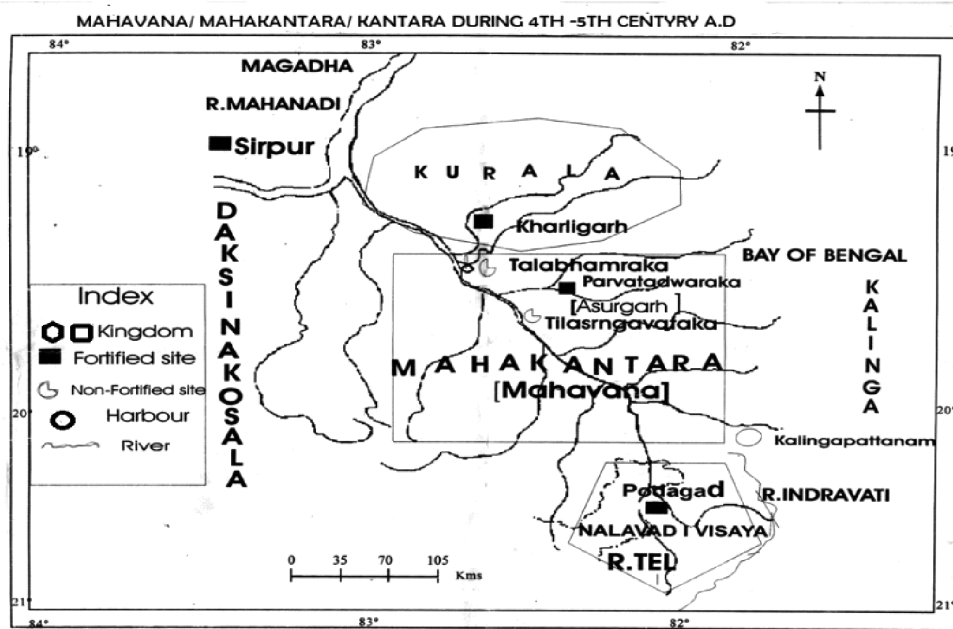


Fig. II Mahavana/ Mahakantara During 4th Century C.E  
(Courtesy: B. Mishra)

## KALAHANDI AFTER SAMUDRAGUPTA'S INVASION

After the departure of Samudragupta, Kāntāra was not the same again. It was divided into two halves. One part was ruled by the Nalas, its forest land went to the possession of the Nala dynasty at least during the early part of 5th century A.D. (Mishra 2011 : 81) . While the Parvatadwāraka dynasty ruled over former *Mahākāntāra janapada* by the Parvatadwārakas. (Mishra 2011: 94)

Nalas ruled over Koraput region comprising the upper Tel and the Indravati valley. Where as, middle and the lower Tel valley, to which belongs Kalahandi and part of Bolangir districts, remained under the so – called Parvatadwāraka dynasty, to which Raja Tuṣṭikāra and Sri Nandarāja Deva belonged during the 5th – 6th century AD. (Mishra 2009: 68).

### PARVATADWĀRAKA AS CAPITAL AND DYNASTIC NAME

From the epigraphic records, it is known that Parvatadwāraka was the capital city or head quarter from where the land donation was made by the rulers.<sup>3</sup> (Sahu 1980: 76) As early as 1973, Sahu had presumed Asurgarh - Narla as *Parvatadwāraka* of the copper plates.

The Archaeological potentiality of Asurgarh was first reported by S.N.Rajguru in 1st April 1947, (Rajguru 1950: 45-46) who mentioned in his report that *at a distance of three miles from Narla police station there is an old fort called Asuragarh or 'the fort of giants'*. After that many investigators like N.K. Sahu, ( Sahu 1980: 77) B. Mishra, (Mishra 2008: 193-197) P. Mohanty, (Mohanty 2001: 18-19) P.Yule and M.Brandtner etc, (Yule 2006: 16) made their best effort to shed light on this Early Historic site. As stated previously, Asurgarh was the capital city of Vyāghrarāja of Mahākāntāra, who was defeated by Samudragupta during his Southward campaign in 4th A.D. (Yule 2009: 9)

Moreover in the Tel Valley of Odisha, there are more than one Asurgarh or *fort of Demon*, out of which one is Asurgarh located in the Kalahandi district in between 190 54' 32 N and 830 21' 02 E of Orissa Province. The settlement exactly configured on the South-west basin of Tel and its distance from the Tel River is hardly 20 km. (Mishra 2009: 51) It is also 8 km distance from the Narla Railway station. The location of Asurgarh - Narla on the traditional trade route spanning from Kaliṅgapatnam to Mahākāntāra and South Kośala was very significant. Even today, the ancient port Kaliṅgapatnam nestled is nearer to Asurgarh. (Mishra 2011: 82) The present Asurgarh - Narla is bounded on the North-West by Tel, on the South-east by the Mohangiri - Kandhmal, on the South-West by Lanjigarh mountain Zone. (Mishra 2015: 3) Close to the right bank of the Sandol river, the fort was erected. (Mishra 2011: 82-83).

The fort is almost rectangular in shape having four gates piercing the surrounding mammoth wall. The wall is made of brick, rubble and earth. After the wall, a wide and deep moat has surrounded the fort on three sides: north, south and east respectively. (Mishra 2009: 51-52) Asurgarh urban complex occupied an area of about 224.29 hectares and during its glorious days four temples were constructed at its four cardinal points. Now only two ruined stone temples are survived, one at Bhimkela and another one is at Daheli. (Mishra 2011: 85).

Mishra (Ibid) has provided a bird – eyes view on the fortification at Asurgarh. Four mammoth walls have surrounded it on all sides. The present height and width of the wall differs from one another due to the soil erosion. As such, the walls measure - *southern wall* , 385 x 12 m, *northern wall* , 410 x 20 m, *eastern wall* , 310 x 11 m, *western wall* , 300 x 13 m.

Besides, the width of the wall ranges from 3, 20 m, to 4 m, or even less than 3 m, at various points. (Ibid) Four gates fixed on the walls are also uneven and far from being symmetrical. Northern and southern gate differs considerably from their cardinal axis. Thus, Northern gate is situated in between 280 m and 130 m length of the wall and width of the gate is 23 m, whereas the southern gate is located in between 285 m and 100m length of the wall and its width is 22 m. On the other hand, the entrance of the eastern wall is determined with the equal length of the wall between 60 m and 240 m and its width is 21 m at present. Northern gate was the main entrance into the fort. (Ibid)

The design of the gateway were three-arched type, which is found embossed on the punch-marked coins of Asurgerh-Narla. Four guardian deities formerly installed at the four gates of the

fort. According to Deo (Deo 1995: 29) *Buddharaja, Ganga, Dokri and Kalapahada* installed on the eastern, western, southern and northern respectively.

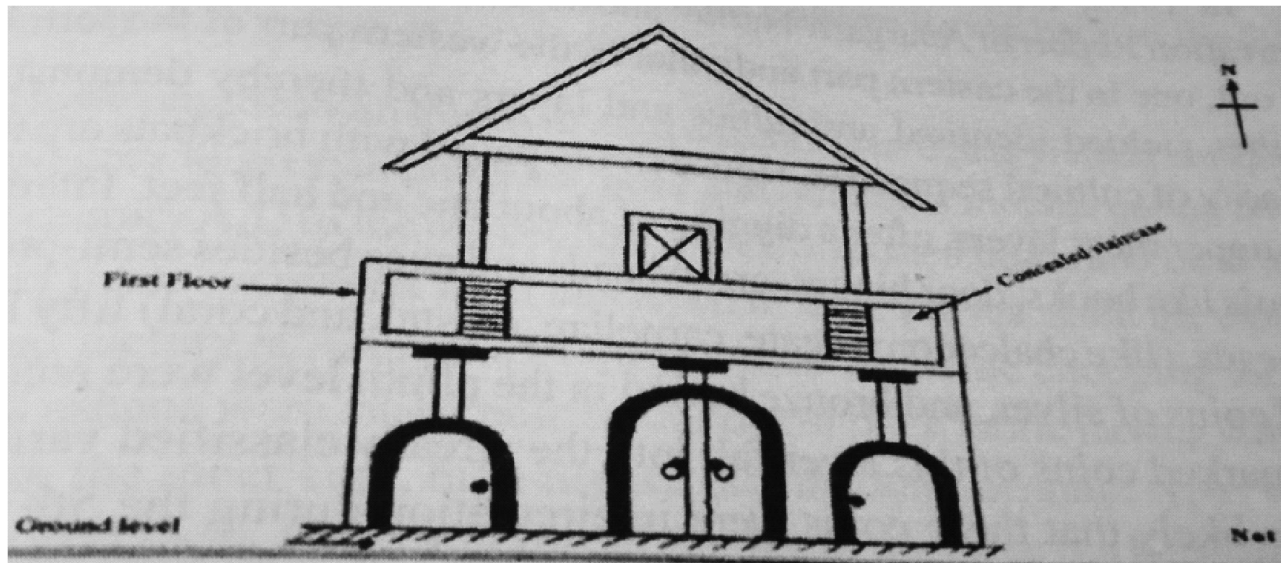


Fig. III: Hypothetical three-arched gate at Asurgarh-Narla, Kalahandi  
Courtsey-B.Mishra

After the wall, a wide and deep moat girdled the fort on three sides except western side. On the west of the fort the river Sandol flows close to the western rampart towards north to meet the river Utei at a distance of 5k.m from the fort area. Water course of the river Sandol seems to fill up the remaining part of the moat. Sanskrit Pali Literature as well as Vāstu Śāstra exhibit moat, ditch or natural water barrier as safety valve of defense for the fort or the capital city. (Bhattacharya 1963: 37).

At present moat area on each side is 32 m in width and the depth is indistinct in view of the fact that ditches are considerably silted and converted into a farming land. (Bishra 2009: 51-52).

Close to the eastern ditch the huge water body measuring 200 acres of the land has been existed. The reservoir is known as 'Asursāgar'. In 19th century, the Nāgavaṁśī king Udit Pratap Deo of Kalahandi district renovated the tank. Thus the water tank has been called as 'Udit sāgar' after the name of the king. (Ibid) However, the hydraulic wonder marked at Asurgarh-Narla. It was constructed amidst water bodies like *Asursāgar*, Moat and the Sandol River and below the sāgar the eastern moat spans towards north-south axis, joined by the southern moat which extended from east to west and northern ditch with east west wing. Moat of the capital city, exhibited on the relief of Sāñchi is indicated by growing Lotuses. (Kumarswamy 2002: 11)

S.N.Rajguru thus (Rajguru 1950: 246) points out that -

*"The tank was so arranged that when the fort was surrounded by the enemies a secret sluice might have been opened so that the whole area inside and outside the fort would be flooded with water and consequently the army of the enemy would be washed away by the water current, which would be increased the main course of the stream, the sandol, which flows to the opposite side of the tank. In that case the central part of the fort would remain as an island, if such a flood is created, because this portion is situated on the higher level".* (Rajguru 1950: 246) *Probably the palace was constructed at the centre of the fort.*

Towards the south-west wall of the fort, another small pond was excavated, which is popularly known as '*Rādhāsāgar*' that is now a shallow land. Presumably the aforesaid tank was used for the ritual

purpose or was specially marked for use of royal people during the time of 'Abhisek' or the coronation ceremony of the prince. (Mishra 2011: 86)

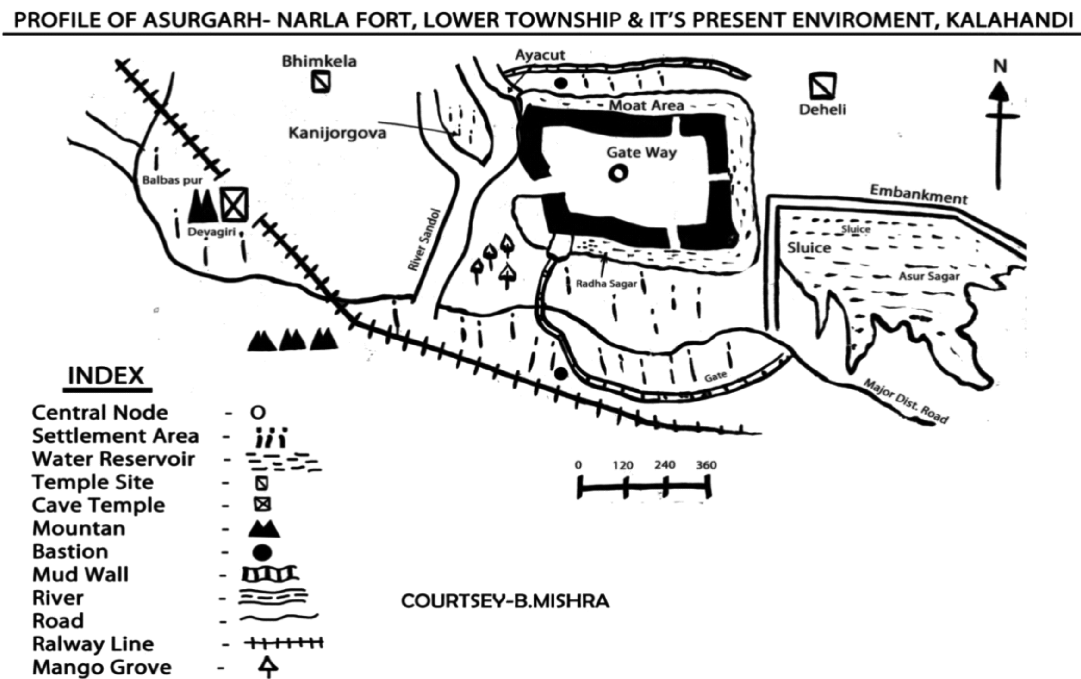


Fig. IV: Profile of Asurgarh-Narla, Lower Township It's Present Environment, Kalahandi

Hence, Asurgarh-Narla fulfills the basic traits of ancient Indian metropolis or capital city. *Parvatadwāraka* as political headquarter has been thus identified with Asurgarh – Narla on the basis of the following facts –

1. The reference of goddess Stambheśwarī in the Terāsiṅgā C.P of Rājā Tuṣṭikāra. (Sircar 1954: 275-278)
2. Discovery of a circular brick plinth of a temple having 40' diameter with fertility figurine and some ritual articles from layer no-1 assigned to the period 5th century A.D. (Behera 1982: 6-7)

Mishra (Mishra 2015: 7) has proposed the geometrical town planning at Asurgarh. Though the enclosure wall of Asurgarh shows rectangular shape, 3600 square inside, may be postulated to form the grid pattern of planning. The square may be divided into nine grids. The palace was located on a central point of the square, within the fort. According to *Arthaśāstra* (Rangarajan 1992: 190) the number of grids should be 81 or 64, with this area the residential area of chief, vehicular traffic and the other structure ought to be erected. Again Kautilya mentions in his *Arthaśāstra* about residential area of the different categories. An excellent building site fit for the four varnas to live on. (Kangle 1972: 68) (Fig-v)

On the north and south of the fort, the habitation area or lower town of the people being detected in closeness of the fortified wall, this is further surrounded by another mud wall within 100 hectares of radius at each settlement zone. (Mishra 2009: 52) This mud wall measuring 1.5k.m in north-south, 1 km east-west alignment and 20m in width and 8 m in height has encased the southern sector township. It had a single gate way. This is a usual plan of an ancient fortified city. (Ibid: 193)



(PI-1)-Brick Structure of Goddess Stambheswari Temple -Asurgarh-Narla,Kalahandi. Courtsey-B.Mishra

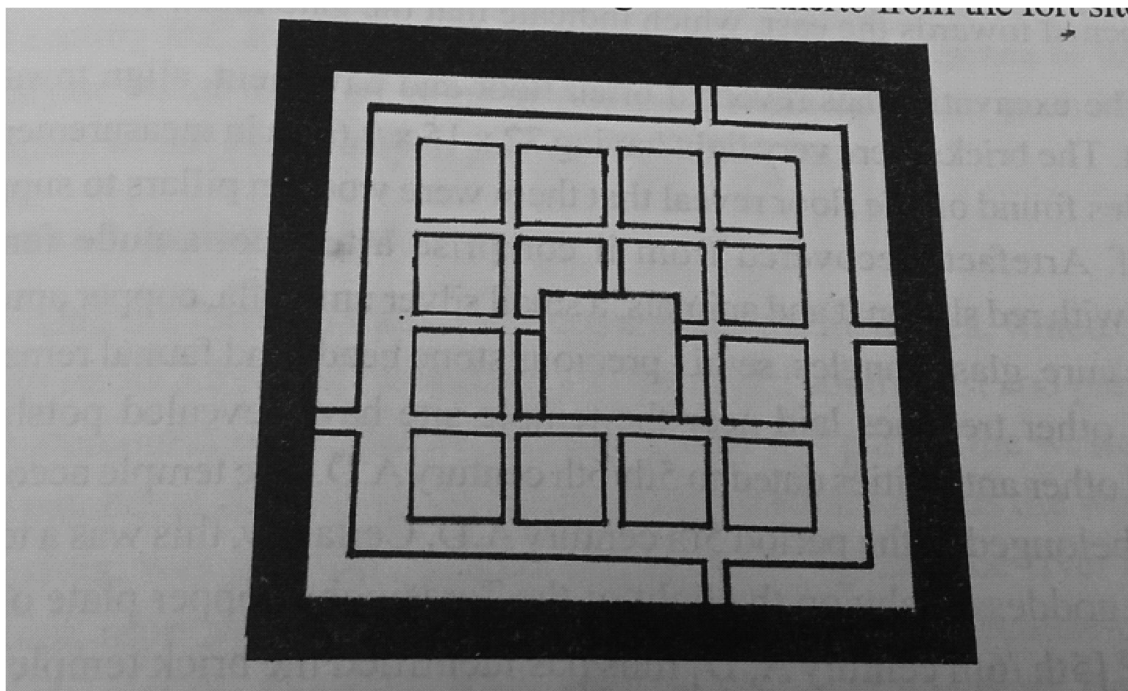


Fig. V: Probable square form with Grid Pattern inside Asurgarh-Narla Fort-  
Courtsey-B. Mishra

Thus Asurgarh has been projected as the hub of the Āṭavikas and Kāntārakas. It has also been identified by Sahu, as no other than Parvatadwāraka or “Gate way to Hills”. Panini mentions in his *Asṭādhyāyī* (Ghosh 1973: 52) that in ancient India, the capital city was named according to the significant gateways. The western gate of Asurgarh – Narla- Narla fort orients just at 90° towards Devagiri hill

or *Parvata* which is located nearby it at a distance of 1.5 km from the fort. Devagiri hill carries its sacredness and even today it is a well known holy place among the people. Moreover the gateway was designated as *Parvatadwāraka* or *opening to hill* during the hey days of Asurgarh - Narla. Hence, Asurgarh - Narla has been accentuated in Odisha History and Archaeology as ‘Parvatadwāraka’.

As the epigraphic source does not mentions the dynastic pedigree of these two rulers, Sahu, (Behera 1982: 6-7)therefore, has bestowed the dynastic name *Parvatadwāraka* of the kings. Thus, in Orissa history ‘Parvatadwāraka’ nomenclature has been used in the sense of capital as well as dynastic identity.

## REIGN OF KINGS

### Rājā Tuṣṭikāra

The Terāsiṅgā copper plate is our chief source of information about Rājā Tuṣṭikāra. The copper plate was discovered from the village Terāsiṅgā on the right bank of the Tel. The village is nearly 7km distance from Asurgarh as the bird flows. The copper plate, which bears two grants mentions about king Tuṣṭikāra and sheds light on the political and cultural aspect of his reign. In the said copper plate, Rājā Tuṣṭikāra proudly declares himself as “Stambheśwarī Padabhakta” or ‘devotees at the feet of goddess Stambheswari’. (Sahu 1980: 78)The striking point to note is that, like the Gupta charter, the Terāsiṅgā copper plate mentions the name of the queen mother “Kaustumbeśwarī”. The first grant was issued from the capital Parvatadwāraka by the queen who was devoted to goddess Stambheswari.

(Tripathy 1997: 155)(Ibid)The donated village was “*Deobhoga Kshetra*”, identified with modern “*Deobhoga*” [now in Raipur district of the Tel valley] to the Brāhmaṇa named *Dronaswāmī* of *Kāshyapa gōtra*. Sircar, however, thinks that the queen was probably lying on the bed and suffering from burning fever at the time when the endorsement portion of the plate was recorded, on behalf of the minor king *Sobhanna* or *Sobhimna*, who was probably the son of Rājā Tuṣṭikāra.(Ibid)

The second grant was issued by Rājā Tuṣṭikāra from his capital or head quarter *Tarabhramaraka*, identified with Tālabhramara of modern Kalahandi district. He was also a devotee worshipper at the feet of goddess *Stambheśwarī* who mediated at the feet of his parents. The gifted village “Prastara-Vāṭaka” has been identified with modern village *Patharala* in Kalahandi district to the same donee Brāhmaṇa “Ārya Dronaswāmī” of *Kāshyapa gotra* from his capital / head quarter *Tarabhramaraka*. (Mishra 2009: 95-97)The land donation to the Brāhmaṇas further suggest the process of “Hinduization” in the tribal hinterland due to the Gupta influence and a system of legitimization of power. (Rajguru 1958: 85).

According to Sircar, Tuṣṭikāra was ruling over a small Principality.(Sircar 1954: 278) Mishra, (Mishra 2011: 94)however, points out the limitation of Tuṣṭikāra’s sovereignty within the south-north basin of the Tel Valley. Thus, the kingdom of the Parvatadwāraka family probably remained static during the reign of Tuṣṭikāra unlike the expansion of the Nalas of Puskari. As stated already, the Nalas ruled over the forest clad zone of Mahākāntāra after Samudraguta’s invasion. These areas are modern Koraput and Bastar. Gradually they subjugated some portion of South-Kośala. Their capital was known as Puskari identified with modern Podagad in the Papadahandi block of Navarangpur district, Orissa.(Patel 1990: 38).

However, it can be said that the Gupta influence after the Deccan campaign of Samudragupta was more of cultural than political. (Senapati 1980: 44)Moreover, the credit goes to Rājā Tuṣṭikāra as being the first king who supported orthodox creed by patronizing temple building activity along with Sanskrit language in ancient Kalahandi after Samudragupta’s intervention. (Mishra 2009: 59)

Similarly, the spread of Sanskrit culture and language was the result of the Gupta impact, which was used in the official records of Rājā Tuṣṭikāra. (Mishra 2011: 94) Terāsiṅgha copper plate further mentions Sobhana Deva who appears as the son of Tuṣṭikāra, but nothing is known about him further.

### Śrī Nandarāja Deva

Probably Śrī Nandarāja Deva succeeded to Tuṣṭikāra. Not only the epigraphic record such as Baradiapadar or Pippalpadar charter found from Baradiapadar village of Kalahandi district, assigned to the 5th century A.D, (Plt-2) but also a hoard of Copper Coins recovered from Balasore district and a solitary gold coin discovered from Raipur of the Chhatisgarh state enlighten us about the reign of Śrī Nandarājā Deva. (Tripathy 1983: 55-63)

The charter was issued from the capital city *Parvatadwāraka* by Śrī Nandarāja Deva on the 9th day of his 3rd regional year. He was also the devotee of goddess “Stambheśwarī”, who was the tutelary deity or “Kuladevatā” of the Parvatadwāraka family. (Tripathy 1997: 152) He donated the village “Prajñanapadraka” to three Brāhmaṇas named: “Bhānuserman”, “Saurisarman” and “Māṭṛsarman” of various gōtras, caranas and pravaras. The donated villages were declared as permanent “Agrahāra” or rent free land known from the copper plate of Raja Tustikara and Sri Nandarāja Deva. (Ibid)

In 1952 a hoard of 147 copper coins was discovered from the village Nandur, which is situated at a distance of 11 mile to the south-west of Soro railway station in Balasore district of Orissa. These were collected and classified by S.N.Rājāguru (Rajguru 1958: 57) Interesting point is to note that, the script used on the obverse of the coin was of *box headed script*. The coin carries legend lik, Śrī Nandabu on the obverse and a couchant bull on the reverse. These coins have been ascribed to Śrī



(Pl-2) Baradia Padar Plate of Sri Nandarajdrv



(Pl-3) Copper Coin of Sri Nandarajdev

Nandarāja of Parvatadwāraka family. Two other gold coins discovered in Durg district of Madhya Pradesh bears the same legend *Śrī Nandarāja*, like the copper coin of *Śrī Nanda*. These gold coins are also ascribed to *Śrī Nandarāja Deva*. The finding of these coins in a distance place, far away from the kingdom of *Śrī Nandarāja Deva*, undoubtedly points out that these coins were distributed into the far off place through trade and commerce. This shows the commercial transaction between Kāntāra and Uttara Toshali and Kāntāra and Nala realm (chhatisagr state) during the 6th century A.D. These coins, therefore, shed light on the ruling family, economic prosperity and the use of box headed script. (Tripathy 1980: 84-89).

Thus, source belonging to the 5th century A.D provides valuable account about the existence of Parvatadwāraka family to which Rājā Tuṣṭikāra and *Śrī Nandarāja Deva* were descendants. The Terāsiṅgā copper plate of Rājā Tuṣṭikāra indicates that he was a devotee of goddess Stambheśwarī who was installed in his capital Parvatadwāraka. (Senapati 1980:-44) Like that the economic condition of the kingdom was also prosperous. Inter – regional trade was in vogue as the finding of coins of *Śrī Nandarāja Deva* shows. (Rajguru 1958: 57).

### OBSERVATION

Striking point is that temple building activity in Kāntāra land was first started by Rājā Tuṣṭikāra. The recovery of plinth of a brick temple identified as the shrine of goddess Stambheśwarī, from the excavation of Asurgarh-Narla from layer no-1, probably proves that it was build during the rule of Rājā Tuṣṭikāra. This was the largest brick structure ever built in Eastern India and first of its kind during 5/6th century A.D. The earliest bricks used in the monument of Rājpadar-Belkhandi and the

bricks used in the temple of Asurgarh-Narla bears a close similarity in size, shape and texture and thus both type of bricks belonged to the 5/6th century A.D. No information, however is available about this dynasty after Rājā Tuṣṭikāra and Śrī Nandarāja Deva .

## CONCLUSION

However spread of Sanskrit language in the Tribal-hinter land was result of the Gupta impact, which was used in the official records of Rājā Tuṣṭikāra. (Mishra 2011: 94) Similarly, the land donation or Hinduization was espoused by Tuṣṭikāra for the consolidation and legitimization of his kingship. Thus the Royal Patronage of autochthonous deities seems to have been an essential presupposition for the consolidation of political power and its legitimization in the Hindu-Tribal zone of Odisha. (Kulki 1978: 129).

Moreover royal patronage to Brāhmanas and deities, temple construction and cultivation of Sanskrit language at court level were clever device of administration to strengthen the political power during the rule of the Parvatadwārakas.

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