INDRAPRASTHA: THE FIRST CITY OF DELHI

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ABSTRACT

The city of Delhi is as old as Rome. It is the capital city for most of the empires in Indian subcontinent. From Mahabharta to British India, it had served as the most important and one of the great cities of the world. The Delhi has been made out of the seven cities from past to present and the stepping stone or the first city on which the modern Delhi is standing is Indraprastha- the city mentioned in Mahabharta. This city had its foundation laid by the Pandavas who were exiled by their cousins Kauravas from Hastinapur.

INTRODUCTION

Delhi is the city which has seen the most destructive as well as the most constructive phases of the history. It has been destroyed several times by the invaders but whosoever stayed here in this magnificent city always constructed it in fabulous way and most of the rulers made it as their capital city. Different historians gave different count of cities of Delhi. Some say there are seven cities in Delhi and some say there are eleven. The first major city was the Khandavprastha, Inderprastha (Plain of Indra or City of Indra)[2],(Indrapatta) established by Pandavas in around 800 B.C. The epic of Mahabharta tells that five villages, Sonprastha, Paniprastha, Baghprastha, Tilprastha and Khandavprastha were given by Kauravas to Pandavas.

The forest of Khandva (Khandavprastha) was chosen by the Pandavas to built their capital and where they built a palace comparable to the empire of Lord Indra, hence called Indraprastha. The date of the existence of the Pandavas is highly debatable but historians have put their existence somewhere between 1500 and 800 B.C. The legend says that the Rishi Ved Vyasa led Pandavas to measure the land for the city. They choose the land on the western bank of river Yamuna. This location was ideal as Aravali on the western side gave natural protection to city. Deep trenches were built around the city and were filled with water which gave deceptive appearance of ocean. The city had 32 gates. Ancient form of canons (Satahini and Isupa), capable of shooting 100 stones and arrows at a time were mounted on the walls at certain intervals. The city faced drought and took flood prevention measures. During some major occasions the king entered the city, the drums were beaten to announce the entry. It is said that the palace built by Pandavas was the main cause of the Mahabharta war, which took place some 80kms away from the city of Pandavas. Brahmin, Buddhist and Jain literature of 6th century shed some light on this magnificent city. Buddhist text mentions "Indapatta" or "Indapattana" as the capital of Kuru

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[2] Upinder Singh (25 September 2017), Political Violence in Ancient India, Havard University Press. P. 401.

kingdom[3] situated on the Yamuna River[4].Shams Siraj Afif in his work Tarikh-i-Firuzshahi mentions Indraprastha being headquarters of pargana. A 14th century inscription was found in Narayana village of Delhi which mentions the name of the Indraprastha. Abul Fazal mentioned in Ain-i-Akbari that Humayun repaired this Purana Qila and renamed it as Dinpanah. There was a village named 'Inderpat'[5] located inside the walls of Old Fort till the end of 19th century. Excavations of Old Fort brought to light the Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW) of 7th–6th century to 1st century B.C. The excavations reveal that people lived here in houses made of mud brick and kiln fired bricks. Terracota figurines have also been recovered here which belong to that period. Michael Witzel, in a study of ancient Indian place names considers that Purana Qila is one of the many places from the Sanskrit epics whose name have been retained into modern times such as Kaushambi/Kosam.[6] The historian Upinder Singh notes that despite the academic debate, "Ultimately, there is no way of conclusively proving or disproving whether the Pandavas or Kauravas ever lived…"[7]However it is possible that the main part of the ancient city has not been excavated so far. Indraprastha may have been known to the Greco-Roman world as well, it is thought to be mentioned in Ptolemy's Geography dating from the 2nd century CE as the city " Indabara", possibly derived from the Prakrit form "Indabatta", and which was probably in the vicinity of Delhi.[8]Indraprastha is mentioned as pratigana in a Sanskrit inscription dated to 1327 CE, discovered in Raisina area of New Delhi.[9]D.C. Sircar, an epigraphist believed that it was a magnificent city in the Mauryan period, based on analysis of a stone carving found in the Delhi area at Sriniwaspuri which records the reign of the Mauryan emperor Ashoka, but this view is refuted by the Upinder Singh. Remains of the Gupta period have been discovered on the Purana Qila site of the fourth century A.D. and to the same period belongs the Iron Pillar now at the Qutub, which records the victories of 'Chandra' believed to be the Gupta emperor 'Chandragupta II' who took the title of 'Vikramaditya'.[10]

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[9] Singh (ed., 2006),p.186.

[10] E.B. Havell, The History of Aryan Rule in India,p.164.

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