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## A description of prosperous cities established beside the rivers in pañca mahākāvyas

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### Abstract

The poets of *Pañca Mahākāvyas* depict in their respective works, prosperous cities which were established on the banks of different rivers. *i.e.* Oṣadhiprastha, Mathurā, Māhiśmatī, Ayodhyā, Ujjayinī, Vārāṇasī etc. Rivers have various kind of importance for the development of these cities. *i.e.* pilgrimage, which salvage people for sins they have committed in their lives, affluent segment of the society, any ordinary person to subsist on hunting are also portrayed in their literary composition.

**Key words:** *pañca mahākāvyas*, cities, oṣadhiprastha, mathurā, māhiśmatī, ayodhyā, ujjayinī, vārāṇasī, rivers, banks

### Introduction

*Pañca Mahākāvyas* are very popular in classical Sanskrit literature. In *Pañca Mahākāvyas* the poets are fancied prosperous cities which were developed in the bank of the rivers. The five *Mahākāvyas* are the *Kumārasambhavam* (KS), The *Raghuvañśam* (RV) of Kālidāsa, the *Kirātārjunīyam* (KJ) of Bhāravī, the *Śiśupālavadham* (SV) of Māgha and the *Naiṣadhiyacaritam* (NC) of Śīharṣa. In these *kāvyas* the poets have described about very important cities which were well developed beside the different rivers during their times.

### Some famous cities

#### Oṣadhiprastha

The poets mentioned several towns which were established beside different rivers. According to KS (6.38)<sup>[1]</sup> the town named Oṣadhiprastha encircled by the stream of the Ganges was rich with medicinal herbs shining in the rampart, which was built with gems; beautiful though hidden. This town is situated in the Himālaya range.

#### Mathurā

Mathurā is the city which was established by Śatruघna according to the RV (15.28)<sup>[2]</sup>. It was established beside the river Kālindī *i.e.* Yamunā. The people of this city were rich and happy to the extent that it is fancied that people from the heaven came to live here to avoid crowd in the heaven. It is further described that this city was decked with high mansions (RV.15.29, 30)<sup>[3]</sup>. The antiquity of this city is known from its reference in the *Mahābhāṣya* of Patañjali (I, P.13)<sup>[4]</sup>. In connection with the prosperity of this city the Ādiparva (221.45) of the *Mahābhārata* (MBH) indicates that it was famous for having qualitative cows.

#### Māhiśmatī

Beside the river Revā the RV(6.43)<sup>[5]</sup> mentions the location of the city Māhiśmatī. The beautiful sight of this river can be noticed from the royal palace. This is indicated by Sunandā to Indumatī in her *svayamvara*. The city is so named because it had been founded by the king Māhiśmat or Mucukunda (*Monier William Dictionary* (MWD), P.815b). This city is mentioned in the *Udyogaparva* (19.23-24,166) of the MBH. According to the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (BhP) (9.15.22) Śahasrārjuna imprisoned Rāvaṇa at Māhiśmatī.

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### Ayodhyā

The city of Ayodhyā is situated beside the river Sarayū. According to RV (14.28, 29)<sup>[6]</sup> Sītā Ujjayinī expressed her desire to pay a visit to the hermitage beside the river Gaṅgā. Rāma advised her to see the beauty of the city of Ayodhyā first. Along with Sītā, Rāma ascended the top of the royal palace and saw the market on both sides of the royal highway where shops were full of various kinds of valuable commodities displayed for sale. In the parks of Ayodhyā young connoisseurs were passing their time in pleasure (*ibid*, 30)<sup>[7]</sup>. Situated in the Fyzabad district of UttaraPradesh, it is included as one among the seven famous holy cities according to the *Brahmānda Purāṇa* (BrP.4.40.91)<sup>[8]</sup>. The Atharva Veda (AthV. X.2.31) mentions about the city of Ayodhyā<sup>[9]</sup>. According to *Rāmāyaṇa* (Ram, 1.5.5-7) the river Sarayū flows through the country of Kośala. As described in the RV (9.1)<sup>[10]</sup>. Ayodhyā as the capital of UttaraKośala. The *Tīrthapratikāśa* of Vīramitrodaya written by Mitra Misra (p.496) describes it as Sāketa. According to Kane (*History of Dharmasātra* (HDS-IV, p.736) Ayodhyā is also a place of pilgrimage for Jains. Some Jaina saints were born here.

### Vārāṇasī

The NC (14.72)<sup>[11]</sup> mentions about the city of Vārāṇasī which is also known as Kāśī. It mentions that this city which is situated on the bank of the river Aśī is preferred by the people to live because of their belief that he who dies here attains salvation. Kāśī is a very ancient city claiming a long heritage of prosperity. There is hardly any city in the world that can claim greater antiquity, greater continuity and greater popular appreciation than Kāśī. Known also as Benaras, it is famous as a holy city for a period of at least thirty centuries. Several Vedic texts including the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (SB 2.1.1) and the *Kauśitakī Upaniṣad* (KU 4.1) refer to the city of Kāśī which has also been mentioned in several *Purāṇas*. Kāśī has been there lauded at great length. The *Skanda Purāṇa* (SKP, Kāśī Khanda. 26.67,30.5) says that the city of Kāśī became famous for it sheds light on *nirvāṇa* (i.e. final release). It is unique in having indescribable fulgence. Lord Śiva shines forth here. The word Kāśī is derived from the root Kāś meaning “to shine”. The *Purāṇas* derive the name Vārāṇasī from the names of two streams viz, Varanā and Aśī which flow respectively on the northern and southern sides of Vārāṇasī. According to the *Jāvālopaniṣad* (JU, 2nd para) mentions that Varanā and Nāśī are the two words which join together to make the word Vārāṇasī, Varanā is so called because it words off all faults committed due to the sense organs of a person. Nāśī is so called because it destroyed all sins committed through the sense organs (HDS-IV, pp.618-642). The above explanation seems to be advanced till date to strengthen the belief of people who seek to die in Kāśī. Many people from various corner of India come to Kāśī to breathe their last so as to attain liberation. By doing so, they contribute to its economy.

### Ujjayinī

According to NC (11.89)<sup>[12]</sup> the friend Sarasvatī introduces the king of Avantī country to Damayantī in her *svayamivvara* and in his favour she says that if Damayantī would marry him, she would have the opportunity to have bathing sports in the river Śiprā which flows beside the city of Ujjayinī. Similarly in the RV (6.35)<sup>[13]</sup>. Sunandā introducing the kings participating in the *svayamivvara* of Indumatī says that in case she marries the king of the Avantī country she will have the change of enjoining the cool breeze blowing over the waves

of the river Śiprā while she would be spending in her time in the pleasure garden of Ujjayinī in company with her husband. Sunandā also described the significance of Ujjayinī which become famous for the temple of Mahākāla. It is situated adjacent to the royal palace. In the darker half of the month (*Kṛṣṇapakṣa*), the city is special in being flooded with the rays of the moon residing on the crest lord Śiva (*ibid*, 34). The prosperity of the city of Ujjayinī has been clearly indicated in the MD (1.34)<sup>[14]</sup>. It is stated here that in the market of Ujjayinī the necklaces of pearls in various types with jems studded into them can be seen in plenty and also ornaments of shapphire and other valuable metals are noticed in such abundance that one fails to call the sea as the store of jewels (Ratnākara). It is fancied that all the jewels have been taken out from the sea to make them displayed for sale in the market of Ujjayinī. Hence the sea now contains water only and is void of jewel. In the *Meghadūtam* (MD, 1.37-40) the poet Kālidāsa describes the worship of lord Śiva in the Mahākāla temple and the cloud is advised to participate in the prayer held at the evening. In the MD (1.30) Ujjayinī is mentioned as Viśālā. Amarāvatī, Padmāvatī, Kuśasthalī, Kanakasṛngā, Kumudvatī are also the names by which Ujjayinī is famous according to the *Bṛhannāradīya Purāṇa* (BrNP, 2.78.35-36). According to the *Brahmānda Purāṇa* (BrP. 194.19) and the *Liṅga Purāṇa* (LiP, 1.92.7-8) Sandīpanī, the teacher of lord Kṛṣṇa lived here<sup>[15]</sup>.

River sides were suitable places for establishing towns and cities. Some of were glorious and prosperous as it is seen above. Moreover several spot beside the river Gaṅgā became renowned by the time of these poets. The NC (15.54)<sup>[16]</sup> indicates that special cities of pilgrimage had emerged beside the river Gaṅgā which added to its renown.

The rivers possess valuable jems. Bhāravi mentions that rivers originating from the Himālaya mountain carry valuable jems with them KJ (5.7)<sup>[17]</sup>. The NC also mentions that the bank of the river Tāmrāparni stored beautiful pearls (19.21)<sup>[18]</sup>.

The poets of these five *Mahākāvyas* were not partial in their outlook. They not only narrate the choice and demand of the rich aristocrats and affluent segment of the society, they also remain conscious of the life style of the poor people who survived with rearing of the cows. In RV (2.26)<sup>[19]</sup>. Kālidāsa mentions how Nandinī was attracted toward the green grass in the cave of Himālaya which grew being watered by the waterfalls of the river Gaṅgā. The condition of Rāma during his exile was no better than any ordinary person to subsist on hunting. The vast stretch land lying beside the river Godāvarī was suitable for this purpose (RV.13.35)<sup>[20]</sup>.

Boats were used to cross the rivers. Hence Kuśa crossed Gaṅgā by a boat (RV.16.34)<sup>[21]</sup>. Moreover Rāma observed that the people of Ayodhyā were crossing the river Sarayū by boats (RV.14.30)<sup>[22]</sup>. When boat was considered as a means for transport, members of the Niṣāda class earned expertise in rowing over the rivers across their current and earned their livelihood by carrying the passengers in their boat.

Hence it appears that rivers had their contributions to strengthen the economic condition of the people, both rich and poor.

### Conclusion

The poets of *Pañca Mahākāvy* displayed their talent in various discipline of knowledge in the ancient Sanskrit literature. Rivers are the blessing for a country like India, People depend on these rivers for their livelihood and prosperity. The cities were the centres where people can

carried on their business and were taking part in upholding the cultural heritage of this country.

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1. गाङ्गास्त्रोतः परिक्षितं वप्रान्तजर्जलितौषधि । बृह्मणिशिलासालं गुप्तावपि मनोहरम् ॥ (KS.6.38)
2. उपकूलं स कलिन्द्या: पुरीं पौरुषभूषणः । निर्ममे निर्ममोर्धेषु मधुरां मधुराकृतिः ॥ (RV.15.28)
3. या सौराज्यप्रकाशाभिर्भौ पैरविभूतिभिः । स्वर्गाभिष्यन्दवमनं कृत्वेवोपनिवेशिता ॥ (RV.15.29) स्वर्गाभिष्यन्दवमनं कृत्वेवोपनिवेशिता ॥ (RV.15.29) हेमक्तिमतों भूमे: प्रवेणीमिव पिप्रिये ॥ (RV.15.30)
4. न हयेको देवदत्तो युगपत् सुघ्ने च भवति मधुरायां च । (*Mahābhāṣya*. I.p.13) See also P.V. Kane, "Ancient cities and towns mentioned in the *Mahābhārata*" JBBRAS, 27, 1951, PP.39-42
5. अस्याद्गङ्गालक्ष्मीर्थव दीर्घबाहोर्महिष्मतीवप्रनितम्बकाञ्चीम् । प्रासादजालैर्जलबेणिरप्य रेवां यदि प्रेक्षितुमस्ति कामः ॥ (RV.6.43)
6. सा दृष्टीवारबलीनि हिंसैः सम्बद्धवैखानसकन्यकानि । इयेष भूयः कुशवन्ति गन्तुं भागीरथीतीरतपोवनानि ॥ (RV.14.28) थस्यै प्रतिश्रुत्य रघुप्रवीरसत्दीप्तिं पार्श्वचरामुयातः आलोकयिष्यन्मुदितामयोध्यां प्रासादमध्रुविलहमारुरोह ॥ (Rv.14.29)
7. (RV.14.30) See, n-25
8. अयोध्या मधुरा माया काशी काञ्ची ह्यवन्तिका । एताः पुण्यतमा प्रोक्ताः पुरीणामुत्तमोत्तमाः ॥ (BrP.4.40.91) see also *Skanda Purāṇa*, काशी खण्ड, 6.68. काशी कान्ती च मायाख्या त्वयाध्या दूरवत्यपि । मधुरावन्तिका चैता सप्तपूर्योय मोक्षदाः ॥ (SkP.6.68)
9. अष्टाचक्रा नवद्वारा देवानां पुरयोध्या, तस्यां हिरण्ययः कोशः स्वर्गो ज्योतिशाऽऽवृतः ॥ (Ath.V.X.2.31) cf. *Taittiriya Āranyaka*, 1.27.2 (RV.9.1) (NC.14.72)
10. पितुरनन्तरमुत्तरकोसलान्समधिगम्य समाधिजितेन्द्रियः । दशरथ प्रशशास्त महरथो यमवतामवतां च धुरिस्थितः ॥ (RV.9.1).
11. (NC.14.72)
12. तत्रानुतीरवनवासितपस्त्विविप्रा सिप्रा तत्वोर्मिभुजया जलकेलिकाले । अलिङ्गनानि दधती भविता वयस्या हास्यानुबन्धरमणीयसरोरुहाऽस्या ॥ (NC.11.89)
13. अनेन यूना सह पार्थिवने रम्भोरु कञ्चिन्मनसो रचिस्ते । सिप्रातङ्गानिलकम्पितासु विर्हुमुद्यानपरम्परासु ॥ (RV.6.35)
14. ह्यरांस्तारांस्तरलगुटिकान् कोटिशः शङ्खशूक्तीः । शस्पश्यामान्मरकतमणीनुम्यूखप्ररोहान् ॥ दृष्टा यस्यां विपणिरचितान् बिद्वामाणां च भङ्गान् । संलिङ्गन्ते सलिलनिधयस्तोयमात्रावशेषाः ॥ (MD.1.34)
15. HDS.4.pp.736,815
16. विशेषतीर्थैरव जहुनन्दिनी गुणैरिवाजानिकरागभूमिता । जगाम भाग्यैरिव नीतिरुज्जवलैर्विभूषणैस्तसुषमा महार्घताम् ॥ (NC.15.54)
17. दधतमाकरिभिः करिभिः क्षतैः समवतारसमैरसमैस्तैः विविधकामहिता महिताम्भसः स्फुटसरोजवना जवना नदीः ॥ (KJ.5.7)
18. तामपर्णीतोत्पन्नैर्मौकितकैरिन्दकुक्षिजैः । । वधदस्पर्धदतरावर्णाः प्रसन्नाः स्वादवस्तव ॥ (NC.19.21)

19. अन्येद्युरात्मानुचरस्य भावं जिज्ञासमाना मुनिहोमधेनुः । गङ्गाप्रपातान्तविरुद्धशाष्टं गौरीगुरोर्गङ्गरमाविवेश ॥ (RV.2.26)
20. अत्रानुगोदं मृगयानिवृत्तस्तरङ्गवातेन विनीतखेदः । रहस्त्वदुत्सङ्गनिषण्णामधुर्मा स्मरामि वानीरगृहेषु सुप्तः ॥ (RV.13.35)
21. स पूर्वजानां कपिलेन रोषाद्वस्मावशेषी कृतविग्रहाणाम् । सुरालयप्राप्तिनिमित्तमध्यस्त्रैसातसं नौलुलितं वन्दे ॥ (RV.16.34)
22. ऋद्धागणं राजपथं स पश्यन्विग्रहयमानां सरयूं च नैषिः । विलासिभिश्चाध्युषितानि पौरैः पुरोपकण्ठोपवनानि रेमे ॥ (RV.14.30)

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