

15. A Preliminary Study of Ship Wrecks on the East Coast of India - Orissa and Andhra Pradesh

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ABSTRACT

During the last five thousand years a large number of ships of various countries were lost in Indian waters due to natural calamities like cyclone, human error and warfare. So far no proper record of ancient ships and cargo lost before the 16th century is available, but a few references to shipwrecks are found in Jataka stories and inscriptions. Indian art also depicts a few scenes of wrecks. The marine records of the archives at Delhi, Calcutta, Bhubaneswar and Madras provide information about the ships that sank on the Andhra and Orissa coast.

In this paper an attempt is made to describe the shipwrecks and causes of their loss, their destination and cargo. Some suggestions are made here for underwater exploration and excavation of the shipwrecks of Andhra and Orissa coast.

The peninsular India is dotted with convenient anchorages. The ports of Orissa and Andhra coast like Balasore, Puri, Konark, Khalkatapatna, Manikapatna, Chilika, Palur, Ganjam, Kalingapatnam, Vengipura, Machilipatnam, and Durgarajapatnam were flourishing from the preBuddhist time upto the East India Company rule in India. The navigators and wealth-seeking merchants of Orissa and Andhra Pradesh accompanied by teachers and saints sailed to Southeast Asian countries. The Bay of Bengal provided a highway to embark on cultural and commercial missions in which some sailors lost their life and ship in cyclones and other accidents. Buddhist and Jaina texts make a passing mention of the incidents of wrecks but are silent about the crucial information needed namely the location of the wreck, names of captains, types of ship lost and cargo carried.

The marine records of the British, French, Portuguese and the Danes in the Madras and Bhubaneswar archives were studied by the MAC for details. Two wrecks of historical and archaeological significance namely the *Dart Mouth* which carried "treasure" and sank off Masulipatna in 1719 as also *Fattee Salem* carrying guns and goods which sank in 1761 near Ganjam deserve to be explored.

CAUSE OF SHIPWRECKS

Ancient shipping was based on the skilled manual manoeuvre depending upon the wind and weather. Sailors used to take the birds with them to find the distance from the land. Broadly causes of shipwrecks can be classified into following categories,

I. Natural : Cyclone and foul weather.

II. Manmade : Unskilled sailing, fire, overloading and technical fault.

III. Warfare : Naval battle.

IV. Sea organisms : Wood borers and Sea animals.

SHIPWRECKS ON ORISSA AND ANDHRA PRADESH COAST

The British ship *Fattee Salem* bound to Meruee is reported to have sunk in 1761 near Ganjam in a violent wind. Though 300 men on board were saved, no guns or goods could be salvaged, (NAD, MD : 1761). Two more wooden sailing ships of East India Company named *Industry* and *Princess Royal* were wrecked on the coast of Ganjam in 1850, (TSAM, MD : 1850). Another ship named *Sir John Lawrence* carrying more than 735 passengers sank in Orissa coast in 1887 due to cyclone, or (Behera 1989).

The ship *Hopewell* sailed from Masulipatnam to Pipli in Orissa in 1631. At Calapara coast the British were received by Baqir Khan Subahdar of Orissa and from there the ship sailed towards Manikapatnam. The British lost one big boat at Calapara and faced considerable problem while crossing the sand bar at Manikapatnam; then they decided to return to Masulipatnam (Raut 1989 : 168-214).

Marine record also mentions articles saved from the wrecks e.g. from the *Brig Admiral Drusy* which contained Modera wine, one trunk of missionary books and one box of silk made of skein (OSAB, DM : 1819-1822).

The wooden sailing vessel *St. Helena* of East India company carrying cotton bales from St. Thomas to Madras wrecked in 1714 about 40 miles north of Pulicat. (TSAM,

MD: 1714). Out of 608 bales 383 were recovered. *Dart Mouth* carrying treasure is said to have sunk off Masulipatnam in 1719 (TSAM, MD : 1719). *Governor Keating* another ship which sank due to storm in 1812 near Nellore was carrying Kings stores (TSAM, MD :1812). Another sloop class ship *Wielhelminah* wrecked on the shore of Krishnapatna, (Nellore) on 30th June 1814 but part of the cargo of the ship was salvaged (TSAM, MD:1814). On 1st January 1819 the wooden sailing ship *General Brown* wrecked on the sunken rocks off Bimlipatnam of Vizagapatnam district due to human error (TSAM, MD : 1820) and the steamer class ship *Emma* wrecked at the southward point of Divy off Masulipatnam on 12th June 1849. The East India Company wooden sailing ship *Alfred* sailing from Madras is said to have sunk off Kalingapatnam (Kalingapatnam) on 27th January 1853 (TSAM, MD : 1853). A barque carrying iron and a great quantity of private valuable property wrecked in 1853 on the sand bank off the mouth near the southern bank of the Krishna river (TSAM, MD :1853). The French ship *Le Monarque* wrecked off Coringa in 1859 lost a few of its crew members (TSAM, MD : 1859). A wooden sailing private Aberdeen Ship *Kindrochat* of 1856 sailing from Calcutta to Madras wrecked in 1859 due to human error (TSAM, MD: 1859). *Mohideen Abdul Kader Nasar Rulla Thyca* Schooner class of Indian vessel is said to have sunk near Masulipatnam in 1912 (TSAM, MD : 1912).

THE AFTERMATH

It is obvious that when a vessel disintegrates after wrecking, metals and heavy objects sink soon and light objects float. But if the whole ship sinks intact then all objects are trapped in the deck. The survival of the objects depends upon the environment of the area.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The British, Dutch, Portuguese and French came by sea route to establish trade centres in Orissa and Andhra the availability of cargo and market facilities were important factors for brisk overseas trade. The *Brahmanda Purana* of 10th century AD mentions that thousands of ships sailed to Southeast Asian countries from Chilika lake (Das, 1975:6-15).

A few ships have sunk in naval battles or due to unskilled sailing and natural factors. Naval battles between

Cholas and Sailendras (Mukerjee 1956: 372-386) and the British and French took a heavy toll.

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ABBREVIATION

- NAD, MD = National Archives, Delhi, Marine Department.
- TSAM, MD = Tamil Nadu State Archives, Madras, Marine Department.
- OSAB, DM = Orissa State Archives, Bhubaneswar, Marine Department.