CHAPTER 5
STAMBHATIRTHA

The Pauranik Stambhatirtha (Fig:35) has been variously described as Khambhayat, Khambhat or Cambay (N 22°19'E 72°37'). It was an important port in the early medieval period, at least from c.9th -10th cent. to the 17th century AD. It is extensively reported by the foreigners – the Arabs, the Italian, the Protugese, the Dutch and the English. Although a perusal of these references indicate some aspects of its town but its personality part does not emerge from it. It is also mentioned in the scriptures and inscriptions.

The earliest archaeological evidence of its settlement has been excavated at Nagara1, a site located 3 kms to the north of Cambay or Khambhat. Interestingly the Kaumārikā khand -a part of the Skanda Purana2 vividly describes the tirthas in and around Cambay and specifically refers to Nagara the same ancient Nagara situated to the north of it. It is mentioned as Nagaraka in the Maitraka copper plate3 as well.

Geographically Nagara is situated along the Gulf of Cambay, in the coastal plain of Gujarat on the junction of the Bhal and Charotara two important areas of agriculture in this area. The site was occupied from the c.5th century BC onwards. Period III of this site is dated to the Kshatrapa period. Towards the early centuries of the Christian era Nagara began expanding to become a large town due to the commercial interests. Debris of brick buildings, some fragments of imported objects from the Roman world like Amphora sherds, objects of chank/shells and ivory unearthed at this site
indicate the importance of Nagara as a manufacturing centre and point out its urban character.

Nagarak (Nagara) (Fig: 36) was a port site on account of its location on the gulf of Khambhat (Cambay), but the Periplus of the Erythrean Sea does not mention it. Besides being a port, the site of Nagara reveals unfinished beads of agate-carnelian etc. and is, therefore, a bead manufacturing site. Shell waste indicates beads and bangles made of shell. Glass slag too was found in the early historic layers. Therefore glass was manufactured to produce bangles and beads. Moreover the site has yielded evidence of making ringwells which was provided to early and urban centers.

The site of Nagara though not mentioned in the chronicles of the time like the Periplus of the Erythrean sea etc. has proved to be archaeologically very important and shows traces of maritime trade due to the presence of amphora shreds and various imports-exports. It is the only site, which survived up till the early medieval times after which the sea channel was so silted due to riverine changes that the site of Nagara was no longer usable as a port. The site of Nagara is the starting point of the trade routes to Rajasthan which goes via Shamalaji and Vadnagar.

The silting of sea channel adversely affected the maritime activity of its port and prosperity as well. Therefore it seems the people of Nagaraka involved in maritime activities, arts crafts and allied industries which brought prosperity here were compelled to shift their settlement to the similar area for the continuity of seafaring and related activities. The people
SITE PLAN OF NAGARAK

Nagarak (Nagara)

Stambhltirtha (Kambhat)

Gulf of Khambhat

Swhhramati (sabarmati) river

Alang Canal

Mahi river

COURTESY: SURENDRA VYAS

FIG: 36
of Nagaraka found similar situation some 3kms to its south a place which is described in the Puranas as Mahisagar sangam and Stambhatirtha.

The new settlement at Cambay seems to have begun by the end of the Maitraka period. The earliest reference to Stambhatirtha is perhaps in the Kavi grant of Rashtrakuta Govinda III, when local dynasty came to an end. During the Solanki period the town was annexed to the Solanki kingdom of Anhilpur Patan. Now the town of Stambhatirtha (Cambay) became a natural outlet for the export and import trade of the mighty Chalukyan power. The extensive trade of Anhilapura Patan, Agra and Delhi was all carried through its port; it was from here that Muslim pilgrims from northern India used to go to Mecca. There were several markets in the city, merchants of the city were very rich; it was one of the chief money markets of Gujarat. So many Muhammadan merchants had domiciled at this port.

Al Masudi visited Cambay in 913-14AD, and records that Khambhat was famous in Baghdad for its sandals. Tejapal had appointed a special officer of the naval squadron at Stambhatirtha to control sea pirates of gulf of Cambay. Several temples were built by Vastupal. Siddharaja Jaysimha had liberated special grant for the restoration of minarets of the mosque at Cambay. The Solanki minister, Udyant Mehta with his powerful management developed this town as a largest commercial port town. The Jains also contributed a lot in the development of this town. A lot of sculptural and architectural fragments of Solanki period have been found from Camby. With Muhammadan annexation of Gujarat, the city's fortune declined. Nusarat Khan plundered the rich and ancient seaport of Khambhat. The inhabitants of this beautiful city noted by Ibanu Battutah for its excellent city
architecture, were mostly foreign merchants and most of them were Arab merchants.

During the regime of the Sultanate period due to riverine activity the port area of the gulf was getting silted up. Yet Cambay continued to be the port and head quarter of the naval army during the Mughal rule. However, it was several time plundered during 16th to 18th century A.D. It also suffered at the hand of Marathas. Its prestige, prosperity and power as a port town was vanishing rapidly. The Britishers occupied the town of Cambay in 1802 A.D.

Stambhatirtha, Khambhat (Cambay) has been vividly described in the Kaumarika Khand of Skanda Purana. It describes the location of various shrines and tirthas located in the environs of Stambhatirtha. Khambhat is situated on an uneven land topographically on the northern bank of the river Mahi near its confluence with the sea. This is the deposition side of the last meander of the Mahi. So on the flood plain, mud flats have developed at the height of about 11 mts., from the main sea level on the side of Cambay. The cliff height on the topmost of first terrace of the river is about 11 mts. This western area of the town is also marked by a number of deep cutting, rain gullies running from north-south in curvilinear way having uneven lands both sides. These gullies are the cause of sand deposition in the marshy lands on south, south-western areas of the port town.

Topographically, the town can be divided in to two main parts by broad roads that runs from Lal darwaja to Makkai Darwaja. The western part of this road is featured by uneven lands.
TOPONOMY

A perusal of the place-names of Khambhat is also important to understand its townscape and history. The name of this town has the sense of a place on the pillar-like cliff. Such cliffs are known as Khambha, Khababhlú in Gujarat. Stambha tirth name was given after tirthas became popular. Khambhat had a fort with gates and each gate indicate either its function or history. Makkai darwaja was exit gate for Muslim pilgrims. Furja gate is near toll station and it was a custom gate—the place used to collect duties for export and import goods and which was the main entry to the town from the sea. Bhoibari gate where Bhois-the palanquin-bearer lived. Ghasgavara suggest presence of grass bending and gavara signifies goods brought here. It suggest mercantile tradition. Paniyarigate indicates water sources. Outside this gate, there are three step wells and large Madla tank. Chokamligate. Through Vohrabari gate Imam from Yamen came here in 1067 AD, entered the town. Fateh gate, Mehmudi gate and Laldarwaja seem to be Perso-Arabic derivation, Chokamli gate suggest the area outside gate with wide open court, with full of tamerind trees.

Saturchhana is the place where camel can rest. Parking space for camel cart always found near the market place. Kolam pada means area on the shore. Kolam mata means goddess on sea shore. The term “Rana” signifies the slaves, i.e., Ranavas Pith seems to be the market area, i.e., Kelapith, Mandai also indicates a toll station and a market. Gheemati indicates a market for Ghee. Gheekanta, Kapas mandi, Golemandi, Khuskei mandi are names of markets, streets, lanes and habitation areas. Place names are based
on caste and community, some of them based on people’s profession, and few related to their religion also.

TOWN PLANNING

The earliest settlement had developed on high cliff partly leveled area suitable for habitation on south-east corner of the town. There was a water tank known as Madla talav and three huge step wells to its proximity. Perhaps, this play important source of water for early settlement. Several Brahmanical and Jain temples well integrated in this area. Earliest settlement goes back to Maitraka period. Several architectural and cultural fragments of Hindu temples noted from this area. Thereafter it continued to retain its brahmanical culture and character. Columpada, Bhavanipada, Chok and Brahminvada are the oldest areas of this settlement. It was developed about 6th /7th century AD by mercantile communities from Nagara. According to Vastusastra, it was a Putabedana town. Evidences of ring-wells found at this place suggests urban development.

Phase I

Due to mercantile activities, a lot prosperities are poured in Khambat during the time of Solanki rule. The Jain merchants used their prosperity to the development of learning. The celebrated scholar Hemachandrachārya was initiated at Sagar Vasahika in Khambhat. Jain bussiness community promoted and contributed a lot to international trade and maritime activities. It had gained a status of international port. Arab merchants domiciled at Khambhat and they had erected their mosque. During Solanki rule Khambhat had already grew as an important centre of maritime activities of
Western India and was a stronghold of the Naval army. Further, it is said that Khambhat was protected by a strong fort, from the attack of sea pirates. Ship building and wood craft was one of the main industry of this town. Armours, vessels, cargo and ferry ships were manufactured at this place. Allied raw material were brought from inner land areas and from Bharuch also. Sultan Mehmud III of Gujarat had placed the order to supply “Gurab” type armors, warships at Khambhat and Bharuch. Precious and semiprecious stones were brought from Rajpipla hills and Ratanpura. From these materials various objects, ornaments and beads were manufactured from agate, chalcidoni, tigerstone, dimond stones etc. Solanki minister Udyan Mehta and in Vaghela time Vastupal was appointed as the chief administrator of this port town. Travels account of Marcopolo describe Cambay as a large port town of western India. Ivory objects and ivory(chudo)/shell bangles and ornament were manufactured at this place. Maniyarbada street, place name indicates the same. Land route was passing from Khambhat was Bahulod, Petlad, Khetakmandal, Kapadvanj and Shamalaji.

Textile industries were prominent at this town. Best quality cotton and silk cloth were manufactured and exported. This fortified town was rectangular in shape with nine gates and was surrounded by deep moat. It was divided into four sectors by two main roads crossing each other at the centre of the town. The main east west road starts from Ghasgarvara gate and ends at Chokamli gate. The second main south north road starts from Makkai gate ends on the center gate along north side fort wall. Along with such gate’s name were lost. The gates on east wall were Paniyarigate and Ghasgavara gate. The gates on south side fort wall toward sea shore were
Bhoibari and Makkai gate. The gates on west side fort wall were Furja and Chokamli gate. There were three gates on north fort wall and they vanished along with time after the end of Rajput rule in Gujarat. This town was plundered through land routes hence northern fort wall was damaged along with gates. As per principles of town planning, shops and markets are located along with main road side. Mandai, Pith, Gheevata and Hatdi are located on main road side. Saturkhana? always found near market area. It is parking place in which goods were brought through animal driven carts (i.e., camels, ox etc.) The administrator of town was living between Makkai gate and Furja gate to control trade activity. Administrator's place was protected by a small fort just like royal enclosure. Khambhat town planning have partial character like Karnavati town planning of Solanki period. Administrator area at Khambhat can be approached through teen darwaja. After entering through these gates, we can find an open court like Karanj medan of Karnavati. Within this medan/court small fort with gates suggest administrative place. It is similar to Bhadra fort in Karanj medan of Karnavati. It is to be noted that the town planning characters are similar and both the towns developed during Solanki rule. To the east of administrator's premises near Makkai gate Jumma mosque was situated. Out side teen gate towards north junction of two main roads from east to west and south to north the place is known as Manek Chowk (i.e., Manekchok of Karnavati ) which is market area of Khambhat. Various types of skilled men and professionals connected with industries, maritime activities and mercantile activities were settled in Khambhat. Study of toponomy provides information regarding people, its caste system professions and its religion.
MAP OF STAMBH TIRTH (KHAMBHAT)

COURTESY: KHAMBHAT MUNICIPALITY.
Phase II

The second stage in the growth seems to be town's expansion towards north where it developed its markets (Fig:37). This area is north of Alang. The Mandvi seems to be old toll station beyond which the markets might not have existed. The old fort line on north with gates destructed during the invader's attack. The expansion of town grew to the north upto presently extended new fortification with four gates. Fatehgate, Lalgate etc were on north wall while Vohra bari on east and Mehmudi gate on west side of the extended town. The name of gates was found during Muslim rule.

The above study of Cambay reveals its earliest settlement at Nagaranka-Nagara., dating from c.500BC-c.800AD. It seems to be a 'Dronamukha' port town as referred to in ancient scriptures on Vastusāstra. The shifting of this settlement grew up some three kilometers to its south on the high cliff of the river, Mahisagar and the gulf of Cambay. During the course of its development c.8th cent.AD to the 16th cent.AD, a rectangular fort was built during Solanki period which was extended during 1473 AD. However this nucleus port town having rectangular fort with gridiron road-pattern can be identified as Sarvatbhadra nagar as per Visvakarma Vastusāstra(ch-9-10). Vadapadraka, Dabhoi and Zinzuwada also follow similar townscape.
REFERENCES

7. Motichandra, 1977, Trade and trade routes in Ancient India. p. 25


17. Shukla, D.N. *Samarangana Sutradhara*, ch.22-23, p.99

