

DWARKA – HISTORY, MYSTERY AND REPOSITORY – CONFIRMING THE EXISTENCE OF THE MYTHICAL CITY

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Abstract:

Krishna, the eighth avatar of Vishnu, the one who is viewed by everyone in a different way – as the almighty lord, as a friend, as a child, as a savior, as the beloved, as the king and much more – is said to have built the legendary golden city of Dwarka at the westernmost coast of India. Dwarka, also known as Dwarika or Dwaravati, is one of the seven holy cities (sapta puris) of India. It is believed that the beautiful and well-planned city was built by Vishwakarma, the deity of craftsmanship and the celestial architect, on the land recovered from the ocean, as requested by Krishna to Samudra-dev, the lord of the ocean. Mentioned in the ancient Hindu scriptures like Shrimad Bhagvad Gita, Mahabharata, Skand Purana, Vishnu Purana, Harivamsa and others, the city was believed to be mythical, because of its structure, location and disappearance. However, with the archaeological developments, the mysteries surrounding the mythology gave way to the city's presence in history, making Dwarka a repository of evidences, strengthening faith and confirming logic. The paper focuses on the folklores of Krishna associated with Dwarka and the evidences collected by the department of archaeology and architecture, weaving fables with facts and proving the existence of the mythical city of Dwarka.

Keywords: Dwarka, Archaeology, Architecture, Mystery, Existence

INTRODUCTION:

Turning the pages of history, we come across many cities that have been built across the globe – so majestic, so wonderful, so divine – that they are mentioned in the scriptures and literature. Some were thought of to be so grand, that it is believed that the Gods have built them. The Mexican city of Teotihuacan is one such place, Dwarka being the other. Similarly, there are magnificent historical cities that have disappeared and are the reason for research across civilizations and cultures. Atlantis is one such city, Dwarka is another. Included in mythology, scriptures, cultures, folk tales as well as archaeology and modern science, the city of Dwarka attracts spirituality, tourism and science.

Presently a coastal town in the Devbhumi Dwarka district of Gujarat, the city of Dwarka is believed to be the first capital of Gujarat. Dwarka gets its name from Sanskrit and it reflects the name of a city that has many gates or the city which is the gate towards the divinity / heaven. One of the important religious places of Hinduism, Dwarka is one of the seven sacred cities of India, called the Sapta Puris – the other six being Mathura, Kashi, Ayodhya, Kanchipuram, Ujjain and Puri and one of the Char Dhaam – the four sacred Hindu pilgrimage sites.

As per the legends, the city of Dwarka was built on a piece of land reclaimed from the sea by Lord Krishna, considered to be the incarnation of Lord Vishnu. The present city of Dwarka is believed to be the seventh city – it has sunk six times, over a period of centuries. The present paper focuses on the Dwarka built by Krishna – believed by some to be a mythical city, the archaeological surveys done in the city and around, along with that done on the ocean bed, proves the existence of the magnificent city. The amalgamation of history and archaeology produces a strong confirmation regarding mythology and the existence of the city.

THE BIRTH OF DWARKA

Krishna, the eighth incarnation of Lord Vishnu, was born in Mathura, spent his childhood in Gokul and Vrindavan and then he went to Mathura again. There, he had a duel with his uncle Kansa, the dictatorial ruler of Mathura at that time and killed him. Hearing about the death, the father-in-law of Kansa, the king of Magadha, Jarasandh, got furious and attacked Mathura multiple times to avenge the death. However, though Mathura did not fall to the attacks, there was a great loss of resources. Krishna decided that his clan, the Yadavas, will not be able to withstand another attack from Magadha and it would be better to shift to another place, far away and establish a city on an island on the western coast of India. That is when the thought of the city of Dwarka was conceived.

It is believed that Krishna asked for 12 yojanas of land, which is equivalent to 773 square kilometres or 298.5 square miles of land from Samudradev, the Lord of the Sea. When that was granted, Krishna requested Vishwakarma, the deity of construction, to conceptualize, design and construct Dwarka. Pargiter, a noted historian, was the first one to suggest that Dwarka was located near the Raivatika mountains and that the city was constructed on the remains of Kushasthali.

STRUCTURE OF DWARKA IN THE SCRIPTURES

Dwarka was a well planned city, which was divided into six sectors comprising residential and commercial areas. There were wide roads, plazas, palaces, public facilities, gardens, lakes and public halls. The city was an island and thus had to be connected to the mainland through bridges and a port.

In Harivamsa, Dwarka is described as a city that was the former sporting ground of the king Raivataka called Dwaravati, which was squared like a chessboard (2.56.29). The city was measured by Brahmins, the foundation of the houses were laid and at least some of the houses were built by the Yadavas (2.58.9 – 15). The city was 'mentally' built by Vishwakarma in one day. (2.58.40, 2.58.41, 2.58.44) and had surrounding walls with four main gates (2.58.16). The fort walls of the city were shining with the colour of the sun and pots of gold. Sounds emanated from grand houses sparkling with golden colour (2.58.53) The houses in Dwarka were arranged in lines (2.58.41) and the city had high buildings which almost touched the sky and had doors that had the colour of white clouds. The city was told to be beautified on Earth by the ocean like Indra's heavenly city is beautified by an assembly of important jewels. There was a temple area with a palace for Krishna himself, which had a separate bathroom. (Contributors, 2023)

The following description of Dwarka during the era of Krishna appears in Bhagavata Purana (Srimad-Bhagavatam; 10.69.1-12) in connection with the visit of Sage Narada:

The city was filled with the sounds of birds flying about the parks and pleasure gardens, while its lakes, crowded with blooming indivara, kahlara, kumuda and Utpala lotuses, resounded with the calls of the swans and cranes. Dwarka boasted of 9,00,000 royal palaces, all constructed with crystal and silver and splendidly decorated with huge emeralds. Inside these palaces, the furnishings were beckoned with gold and jewels. Traffic moved along a well laid-out system boulevards, roads, intersections and marketplaces, and many assembly houses and temples of demigods graced the charming city. The roads, courtyards, commercial streets, and residential patios were all sprinkled with water and shaded from the sun's heat by banners waving from flagpoles. In the city of Dwarka was a beautiful private quarter worshipped by the planetary rulers. This district, where Vishwakarma had shown all his divine skills, was the residential area of Krishna and thus it was gorgeously decorated by the sixteen thousand palaces of Lord Krishna's queens. The palaces were supported by coral pillars which were decorated with vaidurya gems. The walls were adorned with sapphires and the floors were brilliantly aglow. Canopies with hanging strands of pearls and seats and beds of ivory and precious jewels were set.

THE CURSE OF GANDHARI AND THE SINKING OF THE CITY:

It is believed that Queen Gandhari, the mother of Kauravas, had cursed Krishna after the Mahabharata war. She had blamed Krishna for the war as she knew he could have stopped it but did not, and the war resulted in the death of her 99 sons. She cursed that Krishna and his lineage will also face a similar catastrophic end. The Yadavas will kill one another and die a horrid death, very much before Krishna.

On the line of the curse, a feud started amongst the Yadavas on the beach near Somnath, where they had gone for a picnic. The feud soon turned into a massive fight and all the sons and grandsons of Krishna were killed. Knowing the course of the events, Krishna went into the forest and his brother, Balram, the incarnation of the Seshnaag, disappeared into the ocean. In the forest, Krishna was stuck by an arrow by a hunter, who had mistaken Krishna's foot for a deer. Later, the city of Dwarka submerged into the sea.

In the Mausala Parv of the Mahabharata, the sinking of the city of Dwarka is mentioned, as seen by Arjuna: "The sea, which has been beating against the shores, suddenly broke the boundary that was imposed on it by nature. it rushed into the city, coursing through the beautiful city streets, and covered up everything in the city. I saw the beautiful buildings becoming submerged on by one. In a matter of a few moments, it was all over. The sea had now become as placid as a lake. There was no trace of the city. Dwarka was just a name, just a memory..." This supposedly happened almost 36 years after the great war of the Kurukshetra – The Mahabharata. In the Vishnu Purana, it is mentioned as:

"On the same day that Krishna departed from the Earth, the powerful dark-bodied Kali Yug descended. The oceans rose and submerged the whole of Dwarka"

It is believed that over the centuries, several cities were built at the place where Dwarka once stood. The modern Dwarka is the seventh one to be built there.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY:

For many, many years, the golden city of Dwarka and its fate and submergence in the ocean was believed to be a myth by many, due to the lack of evidences. However, the recent archaeological surveys done over a period of time have a history to narrate, a mystery to reveal and a repository to present. Excavations have been done near the present Dwarkadheesh temple and in and around the present day Dwarka. Even the ocean bed near Dwarka has been a part of the survey and many artefacts have been obtained to ascertain the presence of a magnificent city that existed in the 15th century.

The excavations began in the 1930s but they were soon stopped. However, there were a few ruins that were excavated, around the island of Beyt Dwarka – the residential island of Krishna, around 30 kilometres north of Dwarka. Almost around 40 years later, during 1969-1970, another set of explorations began, which yielded a lot of informative evidences. The later set of explorations, done in 2017, led to several findings dating to around 1528 BC – the era of late Harappan civilization.

A team of expert underwater explorers was formed under the guidance of an able marine archaeologist, Dr. S. R. Rao. Trained diver photographers and archaeologists were added to the team. The Marine Archaeological Unit (MAU) of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) conducted the second round of excavations in 1979 under his supervision.

The project for underwater exploration was sanctioned in 1984, directly by the then Prime Minister for three years. Between 1983 and 1990, S.R.Rao's team came across discoveries that cemented the existence of a submerged city. In January 2007, the Underwater Archaeology Wing (UAW) of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) began excavations at Dwarka again. Alok Tripathi, Superintending Archaeologist, UAW, said the ancient underwater structures found in the Arabian Sea were yet to be identified. "We have to find out what they are. They are fragments. I would not like to call them a wall or a temple. They are part of some structure," said Dr. Tripathi, himself a trained diver. Dr. Tripathi had said: "To study the antiquity of the site holistically, excavations are being conducted simultaneously both on land close to the Dwarakadhish temple and undersea so that finds from both the places can be co-related and analysed scientifically." (Editors)

Offshore explorations of Dwarka, initiated in 1982, have resulted in recovery of a large number of dressed semicircular and rectangular stone blocks and structures. Blocks of these have an L-shape cut and a provision for dowels. A few still retain the hard cementing material that had bounded them. These structures have 2 to 3 courses with a 60 to 80 cm height. The average size of a block is 95 × 55 × 25 cm. Many rectangular blocks of various sizes are also scattered in a large area in the vicinity and are evidently part of a single structure. These blocks are lying on a rocky seabed and a few of them are buried in sand.

A few structures were noticed in a channel on the northern side of this zone. Among the important findings is a rectangular stone block bearing Gujarati scripts, which suggests that the structure may not be very old.

Among 75 stone anchors found in the area, 34 composite stone anchors have a circular upper hole and two lower holes are square or rectangular. The other types include Indo-Arabian and ring stone anchors. These are mostly made of limestone and very similar to those found in Oman, East African coastal countries, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Tamil Nadu, Goa, Maharashtra, Kerala and Minicoy in context of early to late medieval period.

Evidently, Dwarka was a very active port town during medieval period. The dates of these anchors are assigned between 10th and 14th century AD. (K.H.Vora, n.d.)

CONCLUSION AND SCOPE:

Many scholars belonging to the science of Archaeoastronomy, referred the celestial activities mentioned in the Mahabharata, like the eclipses and asteroids mentioned in the epic and concluded that the war of the Mahabharata started in 6 November 3126 BC. (Gupta) Some results of the excavations done in and around Dwarka also date to that era, confirming the presence of the mythical city.

A research shows that around 14,500 years ago, the sea level on the western coast of India was about 100 metres lower than today and rose to a depth of 80 metres with a rate of around 10 metres per 1000 years. Then the level remained unchanged for around 2,500 years, which provided time for a civilization to flourish. From 10,000 to 7,000 years ago, the sea level rose at a very high rate, which was about 20 metres per 1000 years and from then to the present times, the fluctuations are minor. (N.H. Hashmi, 1995)

Between 1983 and 1990, the well-fortified township of Dwaraka was discovered, extending more than half a mile from the shore. (Rao, 1999)

All these researches confirm the existence of the city of Dwarka. However, much needs to be done.

When SR Rao was asked about how sure he was about the city being Krishna's Dwarka, he had said "Only the name board is missing". He had submitted a proposal to the Ministry of Culture to preserve the underwater cultural heritage of India Dwarka in January 2020. He had quoted an expense of Rs. 14 crores. The proposal was not taken up.

The important highlights of the proposal are:

1. Further excavations in Bet Dwarka is required. An access to the submerged city of Dwarka can also be given to visitors during fair season through underwater acrylic tubes or viewing chambers at specific points.
2. Maritime Museum of Antiquities found in the excavations at Dwarka could be arranged.
3. The underwater excavations can only be done with total help from the Government. Many levels of permissions, special machinery, equipment, camera and skilled divers are also required.

If further research is done in this area, a lot of valid, important and vital information could be obtained.

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