

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF MEERUT DISTRICT

Dr. Vijay Kumar, Assistant Professor, Department of History
Jai Minesh Adivasi University, Ranpur, Kota (Raj.)

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Abstract

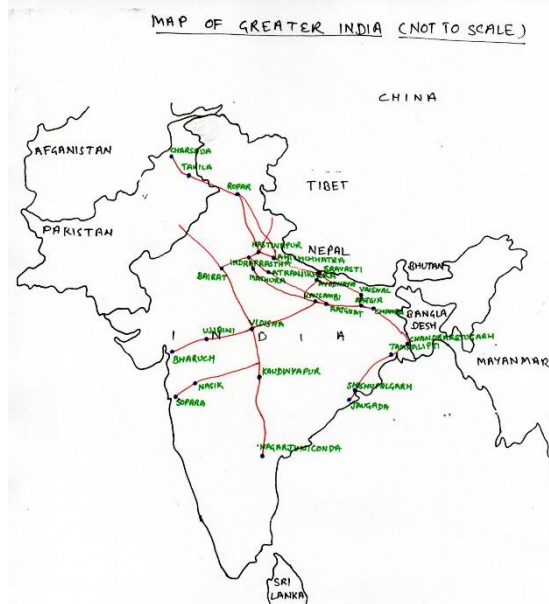
Meerut is a city and district Headquarter situated in western Uttar Pradesh. Its historicity goes back to the Harappan period. The archaeology of Meerut goes back to the Harappan period. There is an excavated site called 'Alamgirpur'. Which is situated about 17 mile west from the Meerut city. This village is actually known by the name 'Alamgirpur-Ukhleena'. The whole story of Mahabharata revolves around Hastinapur. Many places described in Mahabharata are associated with the modern places in Meerut district. Hastinapur described as the best city of that period in Mahabharata. The first war of independence was also started on 10th of May 1857 from the Meerut cantt. Meerut region played a major role in the struggle for freedom from the Britishers. So, we can say that, the importance of history has always been valid, because man can learn from the past and make their future better. Meerut's place has been important in the history from the Harappan period to the present era. It is not feasible to present the whole story of Meerut, So, we are tried to show a glimpse of it here.

Historical Significance-

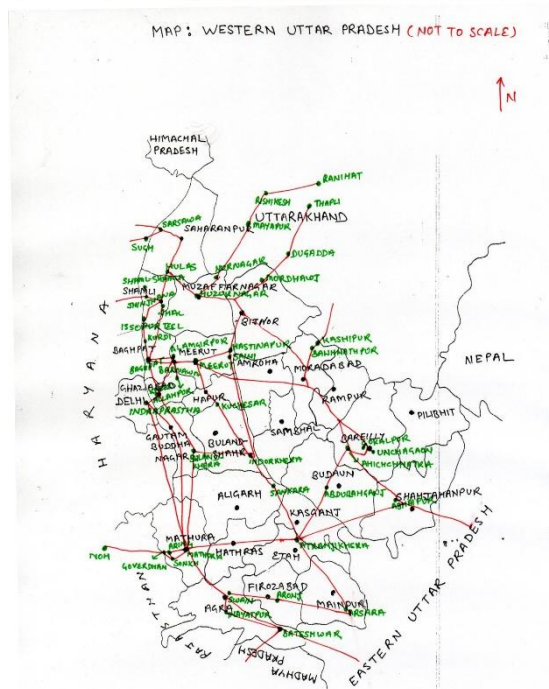
Meerut is a city and district Headquarter situated in western Uttar Pradesh. Its historicity goes back to the Harappan period. There are several stories about the origin of its name. According to one tradition, word 'Meerut' derived from word 'Mayarashtra' of Sanskrit, means the 'kingdom of Mayasura', Ravan's Father-in-Law. According to another story, 'Maya' was a demon architect in Mahabharata period, this period belongs to him and after his name this place known as Meerut.

The archaeology of Meerut goes back to the Harappan period. There is an excavated site called 'Alamgirpur'. Which is situated about 17 mile west from the Meerut city. This village is actually known by the name 'Alamgirpur-Ukhleena'. There is a high mound in the vicinity of the village. River Hindon was flowed along the mound in the ancient period, but today it is flowing approximately 1.5 mile away from the mound. In 1958, a local NGO named, 'Bharat Sewak Samaj' was setup a temporary camp on the mound and they become curious after the listening of stories related to the mound from the villagers. They dig a small trench here and sent excavated material to the ASI. After the investigation of the material, a team of ASI, under the direction of Y.D. Sharma started the excavation on the mound of Alamgirpur. In the excavation, four cultural period came to the light. The cultural sequence of the site from lowest to upper most is- Harappan period, PGW period, early historical period, and late medieval period. With the help of this site Meerut become a part of great Harappan Civilization. This site is nowadays known as the easternmost site of Harappan civilization. Another famous Harappan sites nearby the Meerut district are Hulas (Saharanpur), Mandi (Muzaffarnagar), Sinauli (Baghpat). This region was also the cradle of Indian culture. Major trade routes passed through this region. It was basically along the rivers Ganga and the Yamuna that the upper Gangetic plains had opened out. It is possible that land routes were significant in the intraregional traffic of the region and may have intersected these rivers at various places. It was the rivers Ganga and Yamuna that were the lifelines of the region and the major trade routes. One major line along which we find numerous OCP settlements, copper hoards and some B & R ware sites stretches from Saharanpur- Shamli- Muzaffarnagar- Meerut- Baghpat- Ghaziabad- Gautam Buddha Nagar- Hapur- Bulandshahr- Aligarh- Etah- Mainpuri- Bijnor- Moradabad- Bareilly- Badaun- Shajahanpur. In this region, the Ganga was crucial and the highest point on the Ganga where boats had ever reached was Shukartal (Muzaffarnagar) from above this point, the navigation was completely restricted to timber rafts. Interaction with Roorkee where OCP sites occur may therefore have followed a land route. Going through Muzaffarnagar and Bulandshahr the Ganges passed along the boundary of Aligarh to reach Mainpuri and Kanpur districts. From the

Moradabad area a route also went to Bareilly from where Shajahanpur was reached and a land route does exist from Bareilly (Ahichhatra) to Budaun.



MAP SHOWING TRADE ROUTE DURING PGW AND LATER PHASE



PROPOSED TRADE-ROUTE DURING PGW & LATER PERIOD
(BASED ON THE GEOGRAPHY & ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCES)

Hastinapur is another very important site situated in the district. It is situated on the old bank of river Ganga nearly 34 kms North-east of the Meerut City. Hastinapur was excavated by B.B. Lal, between 1950-52. The significance of the site is in that, it is mentioned in great epics of Ramayana And Mahabharata, Puranas, Jain and Buddhist literature as the capital of Kaurava kingdom. In

excavation, lowest level of the mound reveals Ochre Colored Pottery ware. This pottery superimposed by another pottery knowns as Painted Grey Ware. There was a gap between all the five periods at the site. PGW culture is superimposed by the pottery name Northern Polished Ware culture. It is a early historical age pottery. The third period at the site is known as the the Sunga-Kusana period from second century BCE. to third century CE and after that site is inhabited for a long period approximately 700 years. It was habited again the late eleventh century to fifteenth century.

The importance of the site is that, it was mentioned in a large number of ancient literatures as a great city. We got references of Hastinapur in Ramayana and Mahabharata both. In Valmiki's Ramayana, we have a reference of Hastinapur, after the death of king Dasrath, sage Vashistha sent messengers to Kekaya country to bring back Bharat and Shatrughna and on the way to Kekaya country messengers cross the river Ganga at Hastinapur as-

Te Hastinapure tirtawa Gangapratyangamukha yayu:

The whole story of Mahabharata revolves around Hastinapur. Many places described in Mahabharata are associated with the modern places in Meerut district. Hastinapur described as the best city of that period in Mahabharata as-

Veerprasuta Kasi, Devanam Kurujanglam
Sarvdharmvidam Bhism, Puranam Gajashayam

Means, King of Kasi's daughter are well known for give birth to brave man, Kuru country is well known in the countries. Bhishma is well known for the knowledge of dharma, Hastinapur is the most famous city. Kalidasa also mentioned Hastinapur in the book as 'Hastinapur'. According to 'Abhigyan Shakuntalam' King Bharat (after whose name our country is known as Bharat) was the king of Hastinapur. According to Srimadbhagwat, Bharat (India) is known as Bharat after the name of Rishabhdev's first son named Bharat as-

Tesham vai Bharto Jayeshtho Narayanparayana:
Vikhyatam Vrashametadyatramna Bharatmuttamam

A. Fuhrer, in his book "The monumental Antiquities and Inscriptions in the North Western Provinces and Awadh (Allahabad, 1891), pp. 11" wrote about the history of Hastinapur before Mahabharata.

In ancient times, Meerut region was known as Kuru kingdom and Hastinapur was the capital of Kuru kingdom. We found the reference of word 'Kuru' in vedic literature also, In Rigveda as-

Kuru Sravanmavrini Rajan Trasdasyavam|
Mahistham Vadhatamrishi

In Atharvaveda as-

Kulayan Krinvan Kaurvya Patirvadati Jayya

Jaina literature like, Jinasen's Adipurana, Pushpadant's Mahapurana, Hemachandra's Trishtishalakapurushcharita also mentioned Hastinapur. In Buddhist literature, Anguttar Nikaya described Kuru Mahajanapada with the capital Hastinapur among the Sixteen Mahajanapadas. Kuru region is an important region of the country in Buddhist period. According to Jataka literature, the expansion of Kuru kingdom was spread nearly 300 Kosa. According to Panchsudani, in the times of Jambudwip's king Mandhata, the people of Uttar-Kuru came here to live and this place is known as 'Kuruttam' after those name. We got knowledge about the Hastinapur and Kuru kingdom from foreign literature. Ptolemy described Hastinapur as 'Bastinora' (~Hastinora). Hamilton & Rittor also accepted the significance of Hastinapur in the history of India and wrote about it in their books.

In the fourth century BCE., Meerut is a part of Nanda empire. In the reign of Mahapadma, Kuru kingdom was defeated and mixed up in the Magadha empire. it is also proved by the punched marked coins of Nanda rulers found from the Hastinapur. After Nanda's empire, Meerut also become a part of Mauryan Empire. During the reign of Bindusara, whole Hastinapur was burnt. We found an Asoken inscription from Meerut. It was fixed during the 26th year of his reign. Evidences of Sunga period also found from the Meerut area from time to time. Terracotta figurine of upper

part of a lady is a beautiful example of Sunga art. During the Sunga period, Meerut region fall under the subordinates of Sungas, whose name ended with the 'Dutta'. B.B. Lal also got Five coins of Mathura rulers in the excavation from Hastinapur. Among these coins, two coins have name 'Sheshdutt' on them. After Sungas, Meerut region was ruled by a warrior clan named 'Yaudheyas'. Excavation in Hastinapur revealed six Yaudheya coins. Yaudheyas kingdom was spreaded from Meerut to eastern Punjab. Yaudheyas were defeated by Kusanas. But again in third century CE. they become free country. In fourth century CE., Samudragupta defeats Yaudheyas and the region of Meerut fall under the Gupta empire. During the period of later Guptas, Meerut area was falls under the rule of Huna rulers Tormana and Mihirkula. After Hunas, Maukharis ruled the region for some time.

In seventh century, Meerut area becomes a part of Harshavardhan's empire. There is a reference in which Chakrayudh of Ayudh clan was the chief ruler of the area and the rulers of Bhoja, Matsya, Madra, Kuru, Yavan, Avanti, Gandhar and Kira accept the superiority of Chakrayudh. During the reign of Pratihara king Nagbhatta II, Meerut region ruler by Tomars of Delhi as the subordinates of Pratiharas. One copper plate inscription of Nagbhatta II has also been received from Sambhal. During the clash between Tomars and Chauhans, Hardutta of Bhar clan captured the area and establish his kingdom. He is the one who laid down the foundation of Harpur. He also build a strong fort at Meerut. This fort was a famous fort of the period. Hasan Nizami wrote in his book 'Taj-ul-Masir' about the Meerut fort that- "Meerut fort was very famous for its foundation and upper construction. A very deep and broad moat was digged around the fort. This moat is huge and looks like a Sea." In twelfth century CE., Chauhans overthrow Tomars from Delhi and captured it. That time they also captured Meerut from them. One Copper plate inscription of Chauhans was found from the village Ratol near Baghpat.

After the defeat of Prithviraj Chauhan in the battle of Tarain, in 1192, Gauri's Commander Aibak moves towards the Meerut and siege the Meerut fort. Here the chief warriors fought bravely but they could not save Meerut from the invaders and Meerut was captured by the Aibak. During Sultanate period, the people of Meerut faced both economical and social discrimination. We can know about the economical condition of the region by the Barani's 'Tarikh-e-Firozshahi'. People of Doab had to pay heavy taxes. Muhammad Tughlaq has imposed a lot of taxes on the people here. These heavy taxes broke the back of people here and destroyed it financially. After this manmade calamity in the region this area also suffered from natural calamities in 1314 CE., this year there was a terrible famine in Meerut. In 1364 CE., Firoz Shah came to the Meerut and saw a beautiful Asoken pillar inscription. He ordered to carry inscription from the Meerut to Delhi. In 1398 CE. Meerut faced terrible attack of Timur. The inhabitants here were brutally looted. Timur burnt down standing crops and houses. In this way the people of Meerut had to take iron from the propeller alien invaders. In which Meerut had to face severe economic disaster and nursing defeat. But still, the people of Meerut not bowed in front of the foreign invaders to protect their self-respect. In the time of Mughal king Akbar, almost all the area of Meerut was became a part of Delhi diocese. A mint of copper coins was also set up in Meerut during Akbar's reign. In Aurangzeb's reign, people of the area were forced to change their religion. Economical condition of the people was also severe after the imposition of jiziya tax. After the weakness of Mughals, Meerut area became the arena of the attacks of Marathas, Jats, Sikhs, Gurjars etc. Sindhiyas became the rulers of Meerut in 1789 CE. On 30th December 1803, under the treaty of Surjiarjan village, Sindhiyas handed over Meerut to the East India Company. During that period, Sardhana was not a part of Meerut district but a free unit and Begum Samaru ruled there. The first war of independence was also started on 10th of May 1857 from the Meerut cantt. Meerut region played a major role in the struggle for freedom from the Britishers. So, in the conclusion we can say that, the importance of history has always been valid, because man can learn from the past and make their future better. Meerut's place has been important in the history from the Harappan period to the present era. It is not feasible to present the whole story of Meerut, So, we are tried to show a glimpse of it here.

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