

SUBJECT 7 : ITAFORT AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

AR - 60%, H - 35%, GEO - 05%,

The Itafort is one of the exclusive evidence of history of Arunachal Pradesh which gets mention in Kautilyas 'Arthasastra'. These ref documents show the hands of different kingdoms and kings in the construction of the fort. The bricks are similar to the ones used in rest of India during the contemporary era. This is a major evidence to establish archeological linkage of Arunachal Pradesh with mainland India.

Reference:-

1. Tada, Tags (2011); Archeological Remains of Arunachal Pradesh (up to 16th Century): Dept of History, RGU; pn -118,119 &120
2. Itafort; <https://en.m.wikipedia.org>.

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- AR - Archaeology
- H - History
- GEO - Geography

SUBJECT 7 : ITAFORT AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

Refer Attachment 1

(Tada, Tags (2011); Archeological remains of Arunachal Pradesh (up to 16th Century): Dept of History RGU; pn -118, 119 & 120)

Itafort

The Itafort, from which the modern name Itanagar originated, is an important medieval archaeological site of the state. The earliest reference to remains of Itafort is noticed in the writings of B.C. Allen in the Lakhimpur Gazetteer of Assam of 1901 which mentions that in the valley of Barapani, about two days journey from Harmoti garden into the Nyishi country, there are the ruins of an old city. He further narrates that two brick wall about one meter in breadth runs parallel to one another at a distance of about a mile.⁴³ Captain G.S. Lightfoot, the then Political Officer, visited the Ita area in 1929 and 1941, but did not mention anything about the Itafort ruins⁴⁴ In 1942 D.N. Das had visited the site and tells us about a fort on Hita, where in ancient times a refugee king from Assam built the fort.⁴⁵ Later on the Research Department of Arunachal Pradesh, had surveyed and excavated the remains of the fort. The excavation was undertaken by Y.A. Raiker (1974-77), followed by D.K. Bora (1996).⁴⁶

This monument, which is in ruins at present, is the part of a big fort complex. It is a brick built fortified area of an irregular shape, partly man-made and partly natural. It is enclosed by natural ridges and brick ramparts, closing the western and eastern flanks. To the north and south are the ridges and steep cliff, affording adequate defence to the fort. Of the two ramparts, the western one runs for almost one and half kilometer long. The eastern rampart is having only one gate, while the western one has two gates. The average width of the rampart is 11.5 mtrs and the original height could be 5 mtrs. In the north and south, irregular steep ridge of more than a kilometer length each, provide

natural defence. The area of more than a square kilometer, thus fortified, is sloping from south to north.

Three gates of varying sizes are noticed in eastern, southern and western direction. The eastern gate, the highest point of the fort is heavily damaged one. Built on stone masonry, this gate overlooks Dolmukh in the Dikrong Valley. The southern gate facing Gohpur and Ramghat area in the south is built largely in bricks and with limited use of stone and stone slabs. Animated and floral designs were used for the doorways. The southern gate, most probably being the main entrance to the fort, was heavily built having provisions for round the clock sentry. Two cells on either side of the interior face of the southern gate were having opening passage with corridor parallel to the wall of the gate. Most probably high wooden doors were fixed at the gates which have perished so far. The eastern gate probably remained closed unless situation demanded, otherwise, as one does not find any provision of sentry, as noticed near the southern gate. The western gate faces the river Senkhi and the ruins at the gate reveals that comparatively less defence arrangements existed in this area. Out of the three gates, the eastern and the western gates are so strategically located that one can have a commanding view of Assam plain below. From the southern gate, one could command a view upto Gohpur Ramghat and Pisoka, which definitely would have helped to detect any attack from these area concerned.

No standing structure of any sort is noticed inside the fort are. However, scattered brickbats in various parts of Itafort area provide some ideas regarding ruins of some medieval settlements inside the fort. The fort is built of bricks as well as of stones. The bricks are of variety of sizes, including the ornamental bricks. The stones used are mainly sand stone. The bricks used are typically medieval and few of pre-Ahom period as well. One of the significant aspects is that no binding material such as like mortar was used except the mud. The entire brick rampart laid on mud mortar tells the story of a developed engineering feat. Iron clamp and nails were used in the construction of fort.

Among the remains, mention may be made of a few potteries recovered from the site. The pottery from Itafort site is of a coarse variety and is heavily damaged; shapes like bowls, pots, spouted vessel etc. can be identified. A pieces of pottery (spout) unearthed from the site, has a large content of kaolin in it. It may be mentioned here that kaolin pottery is one of the basic characteristic of medieval pottery of Brahmaputra valley.⁴⁷ The fort belongs to the category of forest (hill) fort and has an elongated semi-circular shape as prescribed by Kautilya in his work *Arthasastra*.⁴⁸ The remains of the fort indeed provide an idea fort architecture in the foot hills of Arunachal Pradesh.

There are no literary or archaeological evidences, which provide information about the date and the builder of the Itafort. Scholars generally ascribe the Itafort to *Ramachandra*, a king of Jitari dynasty of Assam who is said to have constructed the fort in between 1350 to 1450 AD.⁴⁹ Some other scholar believe that the Itafort was built by the Ahom king *Chakradhvaj Simha* in 1668 AD.⁵⁰ However, amidst different opinions, it may be certainly told that the fort was constructed during 16th-17th century, as a scrutiny of archaeological data makes us to believe.

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Refer Attachment 2

(Itafort

<https://en.m.wikipedia.org>)

The Ita Fort is thought to be one of the early forts which the great Chutia king Ratnadhvajpal initially built all around his kingdom from Biswanath till Disang.^[4] The bricks used in the fort hint to later repairs in the 14th-15th century. The ruins of a hill fort on the banks of the Buroi river bear the same builder's marks as the ones found in the ruins of the Tamreswari temple (Mukta-Dharmanarayan, 1442 A.D.) which indicate that the Chutia fortifications were spread till Biswanath.^[5] The location of Ita fort well to the east of Buroi shows that the Ita fort was also one of the Chutia hill forts.

In the year 1941, the political officer of former Balipara frontier tract, Mr. D.N. Das, in an article published in the Journal of Assam Research Society, claimed the fort to be the capital of Ramachandra/Mayamatta Mayapur.^[6] But, from Assamese chronicles, we get to know that Ramachandra had his capital in Pratappura, due to which, he was also known as Pratappuriya. Pratappura has been identified to be located near Biswanath.^[7] The Pratapgarh ruins may have formed the eastern borders of the kingdom as evident from the Uma-tumani island (near Biswanath) stone inscription which mentions the ruler as Pratapuradhikari.^[8] Moreover, it is also
