

INTANGIBLE INDRAPRASTHA-3

Countering Fallacious History

Politics in history submerged the history of a vibrant city—Indraprastha. It is misleading to refer to Indraprastha as limited to Indrapat Quila and also incorrect to ignore the evidence of its existence

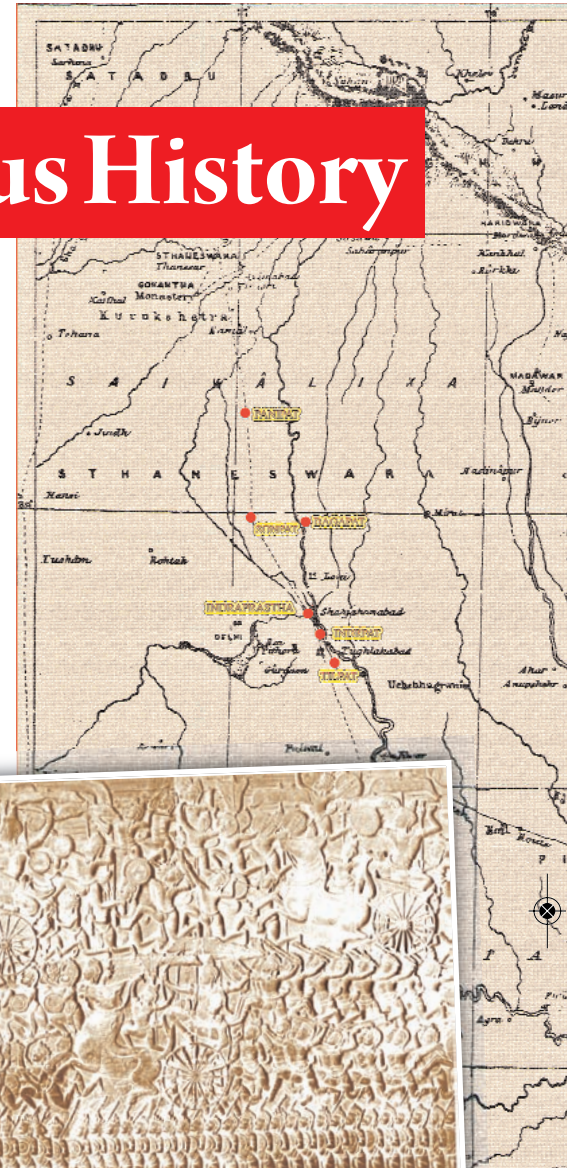
■ **Neera Misra**

Before delving into some historical aspects of Indraprastha, we highlight few ‘givens’. Firstly, it is an absolutely fallacious premise of some western historians, and their followers, that scholars of ancient ‘Bharata’, had no sense of ‘history’ or ‘documentation’ of historical events. Scholars or ‘Rishi’s’ of ancient India had a very strong sense of the ‘Itihas’ and wrote extensively about it. If the methodology of documenting or writing and dissemination of knowledge differed from modern methods, it does not take away authenticity of the basic facts, which have survived thousands of centuries. Our *Vedas, Puranas, Brahmanas, Ramayana, Mahabharata, Rajatarangini* and such revered ancient texts are our ‘Itihas’.

Secondly, it was not an age of printing press and text books, and it is the unparalleled efforts of our seers that have kept our historical roots so strong. Thirdly, when, through centuries of natural and political onslaughts, the birth certificates are trampled upon and mortal remains are buried under loads of new concrete, how correct is it then to ask for proof of existence? Fourthly, when ruler patronised history books became the trend from medieval time, subjectivity crept in and the seeds of politicisation of history were sown. This found fertile ground when new rulers wanted to create own identities. The history of ancient Bharat and some of its glorious cities of Vedic, *Treta* or

‘*Dwapar*’ era, Kashi, Kampilya, Mathura, Dwarka, Indraprastha, etc, has to be understood in this context.

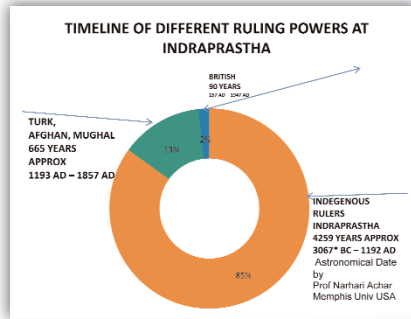
History of (ancient) Indraprastha, says Carr Stephens (*Archaeology and Monumental Remains*, 1876) “will be found in the *Indrapat Mahatam* and in the great epic of *Maha Bharata*”, but unfortunately the former book is so far untraceable. Pandavas and the Kauravas held highest authority in Aryavarta, but their internecine struggle for supremacy in Bharatvarsh, led to division of their country. ‘After the Pandavas became powerful due to their alliance with Panchala king Drupada, by obtaining as wife powerful Drupada’s daughter Draupadi’, a worried Dhritarashtra, the representative King at Hastinapura, summoned them to his Palace. Addressing Yudhishtira, King Dhritarashtra said, ‘Listen, O son of Kunti, with thy brothers, to what I say. Repair ye to Khandavaprastha so that no difference may arise again (between you and my sons). If you take up your quarters there no one will be able to do you any injury. Protected by Partha (Arjuna), reside you at Khandavaprastha, taking half of the kingdom.’ Thus **Pandavas got Sonapat (Sonipat), Panduprastha (Panipat), Vyagprastha (Baghpat), Tilpat and Indraprastha. After choos-**



Pandav Army moving to Battlefield--Angkor Wat. Map of Pandav Kingdom as shown in A Cunningham Report, 1862-63 showing the five areas of Pandav Kingdom

ing a suitable, secure and trade friendly, location on the banks of River Yamuna, Indraprastha was built with help of the Vishwakarma, Maya, and Vasudeva Krishna. As their capital city matched, in beauty and splendor, Amravati city of Indra, it was named “Indraprastha”. In ancient ‘*itihas*’ Indra represents nature God. It appears that Pandav empire acquired its name from the main *patha* Indrapath. Prof Willson opines, ‘Indra Prastha signifies the plain of Indra, the word ‘*prastha*’, means anything “spread out and extended,” and

HISTORICAL EVIDENCES



Draupadi and Pandavas before Krishna. Udyog Parva, Deccan, Saka 1668 (1746)



Draupadi Swayamvara: Arjun shooting the arrow, relief from Hoyshal Temple

hence an open space. The locals too referred to the place as 'Indra-ka-Khera' or the plain of Indra. 'Prastha' would also denote the plateau, in hilly areas.

It is quite obvious that the 'half of Kuru Empire' given to Pandav brothers included a very large area encompassing Sonipat, Panipat Tilpat, Baghpat and of course Indraprastha. But what would have been the spread of the capital city Indraprastha? It may be deduced from the following textual

mentions and findings.

(1) Raj Ghat area—"a place of pilgrimage on Jumna called Nigambod Ghat...This ghat is celebrated as the place where Yudhisthira, after his performance of the Ashwamedha performed a 'yajna' or 'Hom. (*Alexander Cunningham Report 1862-63*)"

(2) Yogmaya Temple – 12th-century Jain scriptures mention Yoginipura after the temple, identifying this name with Mehrauli area. The temple is believed to be built by Pandavas at the end of Mahabharata war. Incidentally, Yogmaya is the only surviving temple belonging to pre-sultanate period which is still in use. (Brahmin king Hemu, reconstructed the temple. He was the last Hindu King who defeated Akbar's forces and crowned himself as King at Indrapat Kila). The temple lies 260 yards from the Iron Pillar in Qutb complex, and within the Lal Kot walls.

(3) Naraina area – where a 13th Century Inscription mentions Indraprastha as becoming a 'pargana' or district by then,

(4) Likewise the Sarban Inscriptions mention this surban village of current Raisina Hill areas, as being part of 'pargana' of Indraprastha.

All this logically suggests that the stretch of ancient Indraprastha capital city areas covered a substantially large area of current NCT Delhi. So, Purana Quila is Indraprastha, but Indraprastha is not just Purana Quila but almost, at least the whole stretch from Mehrauli to Rajghat to Naraina to Raisina. According to Carr Stephen – "Tradition points to the walled village of Indrapat as the inheritor of the name and a portion of the site of Indra Prastha," He further says- 'It is generally believed to have occupied the extensive piece of ground which covers the site of Indrapat, and stretches north ward to the Delhi gate of modern Delhi. General Cunningham would fix its southern boundary at or about Humayun's tomb". Here it must also be noted that Abul Fazal mentions in '*Aine-e-Akbari*' part II that Humayun's Tomb was made at Kelukhari Or Kilokri. "Muizz-ud-din Kai Kubad (1286-9) founded another city on the banks of the Jumma called Kelukhari. Amir Khusrau in his poem '*Qiranu s Sadain*' eulogises the city and its palace. It is now the last resting-place of Humayun where a new and splendid monument has been erected." Now Kilokri is near Maharani Bagh and Okhla. So where exactly is Humayun's Tomb located? This is a matter of investigation, like other aspects of history of Indraprastha.

This also leads us to the actual status of later 'cities of Delhi'. Fact is the later 'so called cities' of Yoginipura, Rai Pithora, Siri, Ferozabad, Tuglakabad, Shergargh, Jahanabad were small fortified secure ruling centre 'cantonment' type areas for each new ruler, rather than cities in the sense that the large Indraprastha City area had been developed. As per RE Frykenberg in *Delhi Through The Ages* (1986), "If we correlate the Buddhist and Brahmanic traditions, we might suggest that there were satellite townships around the chief city Indraprastha. The facts in detail may still lie buried underground."

(The writer is chairperson of Draupadi Dream Trust)