

Vol 4 Issue 8 Feb 2015

ISSN No :2231-5063

International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

Golden Research Thoughts

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RNI MAHMUL/2011/38595

ISSN No.2231-5063

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SIGNIFICANCE OF KOS MINAR (MILESTONE) IN MEDIEVAL PERIOD

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Abstract:-This paper is based on the Kos-Minar are medieval milestones that were made by the Mughal emperors between 1556 to 1707AD. “Kos” literally means a medieval measurement of distance and “Minar” is a word for tower. Such structure come draw attention to glory of Mughal empire administration. The Kos Minars present a great travel story and it would indeed be a worthwhile exercise to check their present status. Kos minar were used to mark the royal route. It interesting to note is that the modern highway is running almost on the same route as that of the Mughals empire.

Keywords: Medieval Period , KOS Minar (Milestone) , medieval measurement .

INTRODUCTION

Kos-Minar is a tower marking the distance at a kos. Kos is a medieval measurement unit of distance denoting approximately 3.2 km (Rogers 1968) and "Minar" is a Persian word for tower. Such structures served as beacons for caravans who also could compute the distance they traversed using these markers. The Kos Minars were constructed by the Afghan ruler Sher Shah Suri and subsequently by the Mughal emperors. These Minars were erected on the main highways across the Mughal Empire between 1556 to 1707 AD to mark the distance. Kos Minars were also raised by Akbar, a reference to such monuments is also found in Abul Fazl's Akbarnama (Lowe 1973). Such structures (about 30 feet high) were constructed at a distance of every one kos on the ancient Grand Trunk road. These were initially constructed between Agra and Ajmer via Jaipur in the West, and between Agra and Lahore via Delhi in the North and finally between Agra and Mandu via Shivpuri in the South (Forbes 1813). After Akbar, his descendants continued the policy of ornamenting the Grand Trunk road with such constructions, which were raised all the way from Peshawar to Bengal. The Grand Trunk road has played a significant role in the history of South-Asia. It could be called the 'Great Wall' of South-Asia. In fact we can proudly say that it was more effective than the Great Wall ever was. It played a crucial role in facilitating trade in India. In fact there was a very popular trade route in ancient India leading from the Ganga Valley to Takshashila to Bactria. At that time the Indians were trading with the Greeks and subsequently the formation of GT Road leading all the way to eastern India was a huge leap forward in terms of progress.

However, the real credit of such ingenious civic creation goes to the Afghan Sher Shah Suri. He not only made a proper road out of the mud track that existed at that time but also straightened it, where the bends were much cursive.

Akbar the successor of Sher Shah Suri understood the vital role that this road played in the economics of India strived to make it safer for the travelers by erecting kos minars and caravanserai (rest houses). His successors, primarily Jahangir and Shah Jahan, played a vital role in further establishing the GT road. Besides the economic factor, another very important aspect of the Grand Trunk road was administration.

STRUCTURE FEATURE

The Kos Minar is a round pillar made of bricks that stands on a stone platform plastered over with lime. In

Significance Of Kos Minar (milestone) In Medieval Period

most of the cases the lower part of the pillar is octagonal whereas the upper part is round. All the minarets, with or without minor variation in plan or design, broadly follow the same architecture. With their increasing height the pillar was made tapering. Its top looks like hemispherical (Cunningham 1872). The whole network of minarets was an impressive initiative, but individually the minarets were bare structures, possessing none or very little ornamentation or inscriptions along their circumference – red bands & moulding with geometrical patterns demarcated the octagonal base from the conic portion, a similar pattern existed just below the top knob. They were meant to serve practical purpose & were certainly not the architectural beauty or visual delights that the other Mughal structures exemplified.

IMPLICATION

Besides, there are step-wells containing drinking water built beside some of the Kos Minars for the benefit of travelers. The Kos Minars proved critical in the governance, as there was a horse, a rider, a drummer posted at every Kos Minar, where usually the horse or the rider or both would get changed and royal messages were relayed back and forth with great speed. Such a method guaranteed a faster postal service (Foster 1968). In this way, the kos minars also acted as check points. Some historians believe that the Kos Minars were principally made to facilitate transportation and not communications. The government needed an effective transport system to govern better. Official message carriers were sent from one end of the country to another with urgent messages.

Fortified caravan-serais furnished with fresh water reservoirs were built at every eighth Kos Minar. In 1619, Akbar's son & successor, Jahangir (ruled AD 1605-27) ordered Baqir Khan, the Faujdar of Multan, to establish Kos Minars in his city. Jahangir also had wells dug up at every 3 kos on the highways & bridges constructed across rivers.

Historical Perspective

Since ancient times, India's overland contact with the outer world has been through the passes or corridors in the northern and northwestern ranges of the Himalayas. Through these corridors transhumance took place between India and China or Central Asia. Besides, many travelers, traders, and invaders entered India via Kandahar, Ghazni and Kabul. All the capital townships e.g., Pataliputra, Delhi or Agra needed a strategic and efficient road system connecting it to the northwest. During the time of invasion or uprising in a far-off region, this system facilitated easy mobilization of forces whereas during peace travellers and traders utilized such roads. Rulers who contributed to the development of such communication networks increased their personal glory and filled their coffers with tax revenues. Of the stages from Kannauj to Kabul and Ghazni, mentioned by Alberuni (970-1039), Panipat, Sunam, and Lahore are clearly identifiable. Later, when Lahore was destroyed by Mongols in 1241, the route connecting Delhi to Kandahar and Ghazni passed through Multan. Of the two main routes leading from Delhi to Multan, the direct road ran through Kharkhauda, Rohtak, Hansi, Sirsa, Bhatner, and Marot. The second route proceeded by way of Abohar and Ajudhan (Pakpattan) Rogers 1986). In the early 15th century Taimur devastated the territories between Delhi and Multan, the route to the northwest turned eastwards and northwards, again through Lahore. Gradual northward encroachments of the Thar desert, as suggested by Alexander Cunningham might have also forced the Mughals to abandon the old routes of communication and develop a permanent road further north, via Ambala and Sirhind. This then became the new Mughal highway. The route remained operative while the Mughals held Punjab.

“Be it quelling the rebellion or expanding the Trade, Kos Minars are important milestones in the surface transport history of the subcontinent” R.V.SMITH.

CONCLUSION

The Kos Minars present a great travel story and it would indeed be a worthwhile exercise to check their present status. Lining the highway on either side, the most visible presence of the Kos Minars is between Agra and Delhi. They played a significant role in the system of governance during the Mughal period. What is interesting to note that the modern highway is running almost on the same route as that of the Mughals. Nowadays these monuments are protected by the Government of India, coming under the purview of the ASI. In February, 2005, a first day cover was issued depicting, a renovated, Kos Minar as a symbol for Heritage Conservation.

At the height of the Mughal empire, the highways spanned almost 3000-kilometers in total & boasted of hundreds of Kos Minars, however very few of these survive now, According to a report of the Archaeology Survey of India, there are 49 Kos Minars in Haryana, 10 in Punjab, 5 in Uttar Pradesh and only 2-3 in Delhi, a few have also been maintained beyond the border in Pakistan. Most of the minarets were lost over time to natural force, disrepair, encroachments, wanton destruction and industrial and public space requirements.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I thank to Dr. Jeewan Singh Kharakwal, Department of Archaeology, JRNRV, Udaipur, for his kind support

and suggestion. I would also like to express my deep gratitude to Dr. K.P. Singh, Department of History , MLSU Udaipur, for his valuable constructive suggestion to improve this research paper.

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