

## IMPORTANCE OF KURUKSHETRA IN TERMS OF TIRTHAS AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL INTEREST

Sumit Hooda

Research Scholar, Department of History, Himachal Pradesh University Shimla

### Abstract

Mythologically, the name “Kurukshetra” applies to a circuit of about 100 miles (160 kilometres) which includes a large number of holy places, temples and tanks connected with the ancient Indian traditions and the Mahabharata War. “According to popular belief the number of places of pilgrimage in it is 360, but no complete list of them is given. Its circuit is variously said to be 20, 40 and 48 kos, and these accounts would make it include the town of Jind, which is 65 miles (104.6 kilometres) distant from Thanesar.

Kurukshetra, no doubt, has its distinct position amongst the tirthas of ancient India. The Mahabharata states that Naimisa is the foremost tirtha with regard to merit on earth, Puskara with regard to merit in the firmament and Kurukshetra with regard to merit in the three worlds. We are lucky to have abundant source material both archaeological as well as literary, for the study of Kurukshetra. Kurukshetra region is one of the most explored area so far as the archaeology is concerned. We all know that Kurukshetra had been the most renowned seat of Indian culture and it is one of the most ancient places of pilgrimage. It was the cradle of Vedic Culture; the battlefield of Mahabharata war, the birth-place of Srimadbhagavadagita and the dharma par excellence.

**Keywords :** Mythologically, Kurukshetra, Mahabharata, Tirthas. Archaeology.

### 1. Introduction

The Kurukshetra District has its due share of places of interest among which Thanesar and Pehowa form places of all India importance. Kurukshetra, as indicated elsewhere, has an extensive area of about 100 miles (48 Kos) in length and the same in breadth.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> B.K. Muztar, Kurukshetra, Political and Cultural History, 1978, p.127.

It is said in the Puranas that those who visit this area or reside here even for a while, go straight to heaven after death. But the most sacred act is taking a dip in its many holy tanks, which are as follows:-

### **1.1 Kurukshetra**

The big locality is the starting of a pilgrimage for millions of Hindus from all over the country who visited the land of Kurukshetra, the venue of the Mahabharata and the birth place of Bhagwad Gita for its holy places. There are no big hotels to accommodate the large influx of people, but accommodation is available in local Dharamshala, viz., Birla Dharamshala, Aggarwal Dharamshala, Jat Dharamshala, Bishnoi Dharamshala, Dharamshala Baba Kali Kamli Wala and Bharat Sewa Ashram etc. Accommodation is also available with special permission from the concerned Departments in the P.W.D. Rest House at Pipli, Modern Tourist Complex (also at Pipli) and the Canal Rest House at Jyotisar. The Haryana Government's Tourist Bureau at Kurukshetra caters to the convenience of tourists and pilgrims.

In the very first verse of the Bhagvadgita, Kurukshetra is described as Dharmkshetra, the field of righteousness. It is also known as Brahmakshetra, the field of Brahma-the creator. Nardak is another name for Kurukshetra, probably derived from nirdukh i.e. without sorrow.

The very name "Kurukshetra" conjures up the imagination of every Hindu and reminds him of the ancient Indian past when the Aryans inhabited the land at the dawn of civilization. Upanishads and Puranas were also originated in this land.

Saraswati is the river par excellence and appears most frequently in the Rigveda. Kurukshetra was the abode of Sage Vyasa, the legendary compiler of the Vedas and Puranas. It was an important centre of learning and civilization. In fact, it is the cradle of Indian civilization and culture. Around this, country took shape a civilization which is one of the legends in the course of world history and surpasses in its continuity the ancient civilization of Egypt, Summer, Babylon, Akkad and Assyria which have ceased to exist since long.

Kurukshetra remained neglected for development purposes till 1968 except making adequate arrangements at the time of the solar eclipse fair. The Haryana Government then decided to revive the ancient glory of Kurukshetra and constituted the Kurukshetra Development Board to undertake an integrated and planned development of the region.

## **1.2 Origin of the Name**

How the name of Kurukshetra came into being is not definitely known, but the popular belief, referred to in the Mahabharata and the Puranas, is that Kurukshetra, i.e. land of Kuru, has been named after the king Kuril, the grandson of Riksha and son of Samvarna<sup>2</sup>, a fore-runner of the Kauravas and Pandavas. A story given in the Mahabharata and the Vamana Purana speaks that in the beginning of the Satya-yuga, Kuru, with a desire to establishing a permanent monument of glory, travelled all over the world and at last reached Samantapancaka<sup>3</sup>. He started ploughing there<sup>4</sup>, yoking himself with Nandi and wanted the 'eight-fold'<sup>5</sup> i.e. tapas (austerity), satya, daya (kindness), ksama (forgiveness), sauca (purity), dāna (charity), yoga and brahmacharya (continence) ethical conduct of life cultivated.

The lord Visnu wished to test the sincerity of Kuru. The latter stood to the test by offering every part of his body and to seed the land. Visnu got pleased and offered Kuru a boon by virtue of which the land came to be known as Kurukshetra after his name. Al-Biruni<sup>6</sup> has also referred to similar story about the origin of the name Kuru. Cunningham identifies this place of cultivation with 'Kuru-tirtha' or 'Kuru-dhvaja-tirtha'<sup>7</sup> close to the south side of the old fort of Thanesar.

Williams<sup>8</sup> and Apte<sup>9</sup> are of the view that the name of Kurukshetra was named after Kurus, an Aryan tribe who were initially a priestly class connected with the composition and recitation of the Vedas and the performance of yajnas.

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<sup>2</sup> Visnu P.(tran.by Wilson), Vol., IV, p.148

<sup>3</sup>Mbh., III. 81.178.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, IX. 53.2

<sup>5</sup>Vam. P., 23.24-25.

<sup>6</sup>Sachau, E.C., Alberuni's India, Vol. II, (Reprint) Delhi, 1964, p.147.

<sup>7</sup>Cunningham, A., ASI, Vol. XIV, p.105.

<sup>8</sup>Williams, M., A Sanskrit-English Dictionary, pp.294,747.

<sup>9</sup>Apte, V.S., Sanskrit-Hindi Kosa, p.286.

Though the word 'Kuru' occurs in the Rgveda as component of the names of some persons like Kaurayana and Kurusravana, the Kuru tribe is not expressly mentioned in it.<sup>10</sup> But, in the Atharvaveda<sup>11</sup> and the Brahmanas<sup>12</sup> the Kurus figure as a very prominent people. The above references shows that the land was named either after the king Kuru or the Kurus, a Vedic tribes.

### **1.3 Different Names**

The holy region of 'Kurukshetra' is differently known in literature by various names. It was called Brahmavedi<sup>13</sup>, Samantapancaka<sup>14</sup>, Uttaravedi<sup>15</sup>, Sarvapancaka<sup>16</sup>, Avimuktaksetra, Brahmasadana<sup>17</sup>, Devayajnbhumi<sup>18</sup>, Dharmaksetra<sup>19</sup>, Tapahksetra<sup>20</sup>, Brahmaksetra<sup>21</sup>, Brahmavarta<sup>22</sup> and Srikantha<sup>23</sup>.

### **1.4 Places of Archaeological Interest in Kurukshetra**

A few more sites of archaeological interest which have not been mentioned in the foregoing pages but have yielded various objects of antiquarian interest and a distinctive class of pottery known as the Painted Gray Ware generally associated with the Aryans (C-1100-500 B.C.) are described below:-

#### **Raja Karan Ka Qila**

It is a small mound about 3 miles (5 kilometres) to the west and southwest of Thanesar. It is about 500 square feet (46.5 square metres) at the top, 800 square feet (74 square metres) at the base with the height of 30 to 40 feet (9 to 12 metres). Sherds of Painted Gray Ware

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<sup>10</sup>Rg., X.53.4; Kane, P.V. takes the meaning of Kurusravana as 'heart or famous in the land of Kuru'. Op.cit., Vol.IV.p.680.

<sup>11</sup>Haryana Shodh Patrika (Hindi), p.4

<sup>12</sup>Jai.Br., III.126.

<sup>13</sup>Mbh., IX.53.1-2

<sup>14</sup>Nar., p., II.64.20

<sup>15</sup>Mbh., IX. 53.1-2

<sup>16</sup>Vmn., Sm. 23.17.

<sup>17</sup>Schrader, F. Otto, The Minor Upanisads, Madras, 1912, pp.59-60.

<sup>18</sup>Mbh., III.83.6.

<sup>19</sup>Schrader, F.Otto, Op.cit., pp.59-60.

<sup>20</sup>Mbh., Santiparva, 53.23

<sup>21</sup>Mbh., Bhlsmaparva, 1.2

<sup>22</sup>Vayu P., II. 97.4-5

<sup>23</sup>Manu Smrti, II. 17

and some other objects such as a flesh rubber, a terracotta reel, a mould for printing cloth, a human head, a double inkpot, a hollow terracotta rattle, a flattened bronze object appearing to be a late derivative of a celt with crescentric circle, an earthen chati (pot) having a line of trisula and wheel carved on it, one earthen pitcher ornamented round the shoulder and some pieces of glazed pottery of the Muslim period have been found here. There is also a large step well of the Muslim period.

Excavations show the size of bricks as 14 to 14½" x9" to 9½"x 2½" to 3". Spooner mentions about the discovery of two wedgeshaped bricks about 2 or 3 feet above the virgin soil in one of the trenches excavated here. He also informs that such bricks had been used in the most ancient times.

### **Raja Harsha Ka Tila**

Situated in Thanesar Town adjacent to the Sheikh Chilli's tomb, the Raja Harsh Ka Tila dated back to Circa 1st century AD. Found in a circumference of 1 Km. X 750m., its excavation indicates the existence of a settlement before starting a continuous habitation at the site since Christian era. The study of excavated material divides it into six cultural periods from Circa 1st century AD to 19th century AD i.e. Kushana period, Gupta period, post Gupta and Vardhamana period, Rajput period, Sultanate period and Mughal period (upto 1806 AD) etc.

### **Jogna Khera**

This village lies near the Shekh Chilli's tomb towards north-western bank of the river Saraswati and relates to the period c. 1500-800 BC. Recently the villagers have rendered the mound extensively stabbed, and poked in all over for its soil both for building and agriculture use. The pottery found on its excavation is essentially the red ware. It is as a rule made of well-levigatged clay, backed red, treated in most cases with fine red slip, decorated quite richly with geometric, vegetal and animal motifs executed in black and purple pigments. As is obvious, the importance of the site should lie in properly understanding the nature and use of the kilns which surely formed part of large-scale industrial production during the Bara period.

## **Nabha House**

Situated opposite to the Sannihit Sarovar at Kurukshetra, this palatial building was constructed by the royal family of Nabha principality during 19th century and was being used by its member for stay during religious performances at Kurukshetra. The building stands on a raised platform, the entrance gate of which is on the eastern side, either sides are decorated with four arched niches.

There are two beautiful pillar windows on the 2nd floor of the building. A temple dedicated to God Brahma is constructed on the top of this magnificent building. It represents the Hindu style of architecture in early British era.

## **Asthipura**

It lies to the west of Thanesar and to the south of the Aujas ghat and marks the place where the bodies of the persons slain in the Mahabharata War were cremated. Yuan Chwang visit to this place in the 7th century A.D. also bears testimony to this fact.

Cunningham excavated the mound which measures about 700 feet by 500 feet (213 metres by 152 metres) and found "an extensive platform of unbaked bricks still 364 feet (111 metres) in length", besides many remains of walls and fragments of terracotta sculptures.

## **Bhor (Sarsa)**

About 8 miles (13 kilometres) to the west of Thanesar towards Pehowa lies the Bhurisrava Tank. Tradition ascribes the place to be connected with the treacherous murder of Bhurisrava by Arjuna during the Mahabharata war. Bhurisrava was son of Somadatta, Raja of Varanasi. The village is named Bhor after him. This small village is situated on an ancient mound. The houses are built of old large size bricks of  $12\frac{3}{4} \times 2\frac{1}{2} \times 2$ ".

Besides, Painted Grey Ware have also been found from Bahola, Daulatpur, Jaurasi Khurd, Khera, Morthali, Teora and Urnai and Red Polished Ware from Kohand.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Painted Grey Ware are assigned to the beginning of the first millennium B.C.

## **Mirzapur**

This small mound located about 200 metres from the east of Raja Karan Ka Qilla contains the remains of late-Harappan settlement is known by a structural complex of mud brick walls consisting of two rooms and the sturdy Red Ware painted in light black colour with geometrical and linear plant, fish and bird designs. The finds of this period are a complete spearhead without mid-rib, a fragmentary parasu in copper: figurines of humped bull and the painted figurines of snakes etc. The mound also shows evidence of early settlements of the Christian era- two moulds of punch-marked coins, the Kushana terracottas, and glazed animal figurines. Another feature of this period, the typical Red Polished Ware, is in abundance here. This site remained uninhabited for a long time. There are also the remains of early medieval habitation at the top of the mound.

## **Daulatpur**

This site is situated beside a stream branching off Chitang (ancient Drisadvati) at about 15 kms. to the east of Thanesar. Its early period is marked by typical sturdy red coloured pottery, painted in black with geometrical and linear designs the special features of the Late phase of the Indus Civilization (c. 2000-1500 B.C.). The next period is distinguished by the Painted Grey Ware generally associated with the Aryans (c. 1100-500B.C.). There is then the early historical period covering c. 500 B.C. to A.D. 500 marked by the Plain Grey (belonging to the centuries succeeding the Christian era) and Red Polished Ware (Saka -Kushan period). Among other important finds are the clay seals and sealings bearing legends in the early Brahmi script (4th -5th century). One of the sealing has the legend Sthanesvarasya i.e. of Lord Sthanesvara.

## **Bhagwanpura**

This site, situated on the bank of the river Saraswati (in Kurukshetra district), was excavated in 1976. It denotes the evidence of overlap between the late-Harappans and Painted Grey Ware cultures as reflected in the continuity of pottery types in painted designs and in the terracotta figurines and burials. The major ceramic industry of this period is the sturdy Red Ware Pottery (associated with late- Harappans) similar to that found at Daulatpur and Raja Karna Ka Qila. The late-Harappans, who first settled, on the

alluvial deposit of the Saraswati, had used solid mud platforms as protective measures against floods. Further, the excavation throws light on three phases of structural activity of the Painted Grey Ware people: firstly, semicircular thatched huts and oval shaped structures of highly burnt mud walls; secondly, the mud wall houses (a complete house complex of thirteen rooms, a corridor and a courtyard); and thirdly, houses built of baked bricks. The excavation has also yielded two skeletons of an adult and a child.

## **1.5 Tirtha**

“The Gods always play where lakes are, where the sun’s rays are warded by umbrellas of lotus clusters, and where clear water paths are made by swans, whose breasts toss the white lotuses hither and thither; where swans, ducks, curlews and paddy birds are heard and animals rest nearby in the shade of Nicula trees on the river banks”<sup>25</sup>

The term 'tirtha', which implies a blessed or consecrated spot, has far off artifact. It happens often in the most punctual writing of India for example Rgveda and other Vedic Samhitas and is utilized for various implications at better places. One of the most punctual utilization of the word 'tirtha' is as a blessed spot or the lake or a stream<sup>26</sup>. In a few entries of the Rgveda, 'tirtha' seems to mean a street; a way; or a portage in a river<sup>27</sup>. In the Apastamba Grhya Sutra, 'tirtha' is viewed as a consecrated stream and a water supply, where an understudy scrubs down toward the finish of his investigation.<sup>28</sup>

In Uttararamacharita, tirtha is viewed as a position of journey and an altar devoted to some heavenly object particularly on or close to the bank of a consecrated river<sup>29</sup>.

With regards to forfeit the tirtha is the spot between the pranita waters and utkara i.e., pit for squander. Tirtha likewise implies the route between the 'Catvala' and the 'Utkara' Vedi for going to or originating from the conciliatory ground (the Vihara)<sup>30</sup>.

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<sup>25</sup> Original quotation from Brihat Samhita as in Subhadra Sengupta's, "Puri— Lord Jagannatha Dhaam", Rupa and Co, New Delhi, 2002, Chapter 1.

<sup>26</sup> Dvivedi, Kailash Nath. Rgvedic Geography, (Hindi), Kanpur, 1985, p. 324.

<sup>27</sup> Dvivedi, K.N., op. cit., pp. 324-25; Bhagavata Purana (Bhag. P. hereafter), IX- 19.4.

<sup>28</sup> Apastamba Grhya Sutra (Sp. Gr. Su. hereafter), V. 26; XIII. 1; Cf. Sen, Chitrabhanu, A Dictionary of Vedic Rituals, (Reprint) Delhi, 1982, p- 145

<sup>29</sup> Kane, P.V., (Ed.) Uttararamacharita, (Bombay, 1915) 1.13; Bhartrihari's Nitisataka, 2.55; Raghuvamsa, (Ed. by Joglekar, K.M.V Bombay, 1975) 1.85.

<sup>30</sup> Sen. Br., 18.9-Apastamba Sruta Sutra (Ap. Sr. Su. Hereafter) XII. 5.4



Respect of a 'tirtha', as indicated by Samkhayana Brahmana<sup>31</sup>, is supposed to be the Day and Night as the ocean which retains everything and the nightfalls are the unimaginable tirthas (of the ocean). In the Dharmasutras<sup>32</sup>, various pieces of the front hand, the foundations of the littlest finger, the forefinger and the thumb and the tips of the fingers of the hand are separately called Prajapatya, Pitr. Brahma and Daiva-tirthas.

In Hinduism, a place of pilgrimage is a tirtha or tirthastana, a pilgrimage is also a tirtha or tirthayatra and a pilgrim is a tirthayatri For a Hindu a tirthastana is a sacred space and they believe that the place is charged with divine power and purity. A tirtha is resonant with three elements that makes it so sacred----it is stichi (pure); it brings punya (merit) and goodness and it is subha (auspicious).

The act of pilgrimage is praised in many ancient texts, like the Aitareya Brahmana,

“Flower like are the heels of the wanderer

Thus his body grows and it is fruitful

All his sins disappear

Slain by the toil of his journeying”<sup>33</sup>

Hindu tradition states that a tirtha is a place where you can gain nirvana, (true enlightenment), and also achieve moksha, (liberation from the endless cycle of life and death). However for a Hindu, who worships every aspect of what is good and sacred in life and nature, a tirtha does not have to be a specific place or a temple. It can be anywhere -by the banks of a holy river, at the foot of a mountain, under a sacred tree and even at the feet of a great saint or guru. In the tolerant and the life enhancing beliefs of Hinduism, a tirthastana and a tirthayatra, are finally a state of mind and one finds it where he/she might

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<sup>31</sup>San.Br., II.9; also Kane P.V., op. cit., IV. p. 554.

<sup>32</sup>Visnu Dharma Sutra (Vi. Dh. Su. hereafter), 62. 1-4; Baudhyana Pharma Sutra (Bau. Dh. Su. hereafter), I.5.14-18; Yajnavalkya Dharma Sutra (Yaj. Dh. Su.) 1.19; Cf. Kane, P. V., Op. cit., II, p. 316 fn. 750.

<sup>33</sup> Original quotation from Brihat Samhita ,Ibid, pi.

seek it. A tirtha is a spiritual goal, as the Skanda Puarana<sup>34</sup> states, "Truth, forgiveness, control of senses, kindness to all living beings and simplicity are also tirthas".

### **1.6 Significance of Kurukshetra in Relation to other Tirthas**

Kurukshetra, no doubt, has its distinct position amongst the tirthas of ancient India. The Mahabharata states that Naimisa is the foremost tirtha with regard to merit on earth, Puskara with regard to merit in the firmament and Kurukshetra with regard to merit in the three worlds<sup>35</sup>. The Matsya Purana makes a reference that Kurukshetra is very holy (mahapunya) and all other tirthas get assembled here.<sup>36</sup>

Sankha Smrti makes a reference that one who give donation to others in Kurukshetra and Varanasi secures the highest place in the world.<sup>37</sup> It is also testified through epigraphic evidences. An iscription of the reign of Vikramaditya VI referred that Kurukshetra, Benaras, Prayaga and Gaya are the great tirthas to making the great gifts.<sup>38</sup> Kurukshetra and Ganga are placed on the same level of sacredness.<sup>39</sup>

The Matsya Purana goes a step further by describing that Kurukshetra is the best tirtha among the tirthas and even, the Praygga - tirtha also get assembled at 'Kurukshetra-tirtha'<sup>40</sup>.

### **1.7 Kurukshetra and Solar Eclipse:**

Pilgrimage to Kurukshetra, especially on the occasion of the Solar eclipse, receives much attention even now today. It is considered a harbinger or messenger of bliss and religious merit. People had been taking since long a dip into holy water of the sacred pools and lakes at Kurukshetra.

According to the Mahabharata, all the tirthas of 'earth' and 'sky' get assembled at Kurukshetra on the dark day of the month (amavasya).<sup>41</sup> One attains the benefit of an

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<sup>34</sup> Skanda Purana, in Mani, Vettam's, "Puranic Encyclopedia". 1st English ed. New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1975.p 23.

<sup>35</sup> Mbh.,III.83, 202-203

<sup>36</sup>Mat.P., 22.18.

<sup>37</sup> Sanlkha Smrti, 14.29

<sup>38</sup> Epigraphia Indica, Vol.XVIII,pp.179 & 181

<sup>39</sup>Mbh., III. 85.89

<sup>40</sup> Mat.P. , 22.18

Asvamedha-yajna by bathing at Sannihita-tirtha on the day of Solar eclipse<sup>42</sup>. All the tirthas and devatas meet in Sannihita tank on the day of Solar eclipse.<sup>43</sup>

The Markandeya Purana<sup>44</sup> records that while Brahma created the Universe it was here the Sun emerged first of all. The Srimadbhagavata Purana<sup>45</sup> makes a reference that on the day of solar eclipse, Krsna alongwith Yadus visited Kurukshetra and took a holy bath and people from all over the country assembled there. To attain punya, they observed fast, had their bath at Kurukshetra and distributed garlands and cows among the brahmanas.<sup>46</sup>

Visiting Kurukshetra on the solar eclipse has been regarded as blissful and meritorious act<sup>47</sup>. Al-Biruni on the basis of Varahamihira records that during the eclipse of the Sun, the waters of all the other tanks visit the tank of Thanesar<sup>48</sup>, and therefore, a man who bathes in it, it is as if he had bathed in every single one of all of them<sup>49</sup>. Alberuni goes a step ahead by saying that Kurukshetra was visited because of being “the theatre of the exploits of Vasudeva in the war of Bharata and the destruction of evil-doers”.<sup>50</sup>

The Rajatarangini of Kalhana too informs us that the place was visited by the prince on the occasion of solar eclipse which was visible at Kurukshetra<sup>51</sup>. It seems that a visit to Kurukshetra during eclipse may be significant because of its central position for astronomical calculations<sup>52</sup>, yet the traditions continues even today to have a religious bath at Kurukshetra on Somavati Amavasya and especially when solar eclipse takes place on that day.

## **1.8 Over Seas Fame of Kurukshetra**

The fame of Kurukshetra was not only confined to India but had gone to other countries as well. Kurukshetra enjoyed great reputation as a seat of religion and spiritual benefit. A

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<sup>41</sup>Mbh., III.83.196.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., III.81.167

<sup>43</sup>Gita,10.21

<sup>44</sup>Markandeya Purana, 57.80.

<sup>45</sup>Srimad BhagavataPurana, 82. 1-2.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 82.9

<sup>47</sup>Mat.P., 199.12

<sup>48</sup>Cunninghaam, A., Op.cit., pp.380, 383.

<sup>49</sup>Agrawala, R.C.,IHQ, Vol. XXXI, p.30.

<sup>50</sup>Sachau, E.C., Op.cit., II. p.147.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid

<sup>52</sup>Sachau, E.C., Op.cit., I, p.308

stone inscription<sup>53</sup> found in Laos shows how the king Maharajadhiraja Sri Devanika (second half of the fifth century A.D.), who was compared to Indra, Yudhisthira a Dhananjaya, Indradyumna and Sibi, determined to set up a mahatirtha (great place of pilgrimage) to be known as a new Kurukshetra.<sup>54</sup>

The inscription begins with an invocation to Brahma, Visnu and Siva. This Kurukshetra mahatmya in Laos would show how the sanctity of Kurukshetra was held by great reverence.<sup>55</sup>

The three identical verses (XI, XII, XIII) both in the inscription and in the Mahabharata<sup>56</sup>, one of which is also found in the Matsya Purana, shows that the eulogy of Kurukshetra in Devanika's record must have its foundation in some Indian authority.

“The existence of such a Kurukshetra mahatmya is indicated by the common verses both in the Mahabharata and the inscription specially the one which puts Kurukshetra above all other holy places of pilgrimages.”<sup>57</sup>

Another inscription found at Prah Vihara<sup>58</sup> (in Cambodia) dated 1037-38 A.D., states that the keeper of Royal Archives Sukarman, a native of Kurukshetra<sup>59</sup>, was recommended by king Suryavarman for the grant of the territory of Vibheda. He change its name and named after Kurukshetra. It proves his love for his native place. The tradition of the cultural sanctity of the region thus stands immortalized to this day on a stone slab in Cambodia.

## **1.9 Kurukshetra in Indian Inscriptions**

Not only the literary records speak of the heart beat of Kurukshetra in Indian lore, but the epigraphical records also hold high its sacredness. Talangere inscription of Jayasimha<sup>60</sup> records that the king makes a land grant to Mochabbarasi and said that the violator of the terms of the grant would incur the sin of ‘destroying cow and brahmanas’ in Kurukshetra.

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<sup>53</sup> Majumdar, R.C. Holy Kuruksetra in Laos, Journal of Asiatic Society of Bombay, Vols.34-35, 1959-60, pp.22-26.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p.6.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p.9 ff.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., pp.9-10

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p.9.

<sup>58</sup> Sarkar, Kalyan Kumar, 'Early Indo-Cambodian Contacts', Vishva Bharti Annals, Vol.XI, 1968, pp.16-17

<sup>59</sup> Ibid

<sup>60</sup> Epigraphia Indica, Vol.XXIX, pp.208-209.

The Mlraj inscription of Saka 1065 and 1066 referred to Kurukshetra as the best and holy place for pilgrimage<sup>61</sup>. It is said in the Huli inscription, of the reign of Vikramaditya VI, dated 1082 A.D., that the protector of the temple of Virabhadra, Visnu and others and of the holy pool would achieve the merit of making gifts at the holy places, viz., Varanasi, Kurukshetra, Arghyatirtha, Prayaga and Gaya.<sup>62</sup>

Ablur inscription of Tribhuvanamalla Somesvaradeva IV<sup>63</sup> referred that those preserved the acts of religion, attained the reward of donation of cows to the brahmanas at the sacred tirthas at Varanasi, Kurukshetra, Sriparyvata, etc. Violate or demolish the religion is equal to incur the sin of slaying of cows and brahmanas at the Ganga or Varanasi or Kurukshetra or at any other sacred places. In the Ramtek stone inscription, of the reign of Ramachandra (13th Cen. A.D.), Kurukshetra is also mentioned in the list of the holy places<sup>64</sup>.

### **1.10 Conclusion**

Though Kurukshetra is the par-excellence tirtha in the heart of the Indian society of Hindu fold, yet the reverence seem to have faded during the early medieval times and with the rise of other later developed tirthas.

Surwaya inscription, dated V.S. 1350, described that Chachlga who belonged to the Mathura Kayastha family visited the pilgrim spots of the gods Kedara, Somesa (Somanatha), Prayaga and Gaya-sirsa (Gaya) and offered oblations to his deceased ancestors at the mentioned place.

While discussing the philosophy of materialism and knowledge, Krsna Misra, the great poet of early medieval times, induces a love to Charavaka philosophy against knowledge and remarks that the latter has even faded away from Kurukshetra.

It shows that Kurukshetra, a place of venerated souls, the birth-place of Gita, lost its sanctity at that time (during the early medieval times).

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<sup>61</sup>Ibid., Vol. XIX, p.39.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., Vol.XVIII, pp. 179-181.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., Vol.V, verses 91-92, pp.251-259.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., Vol.X p. 16.

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