Tripura in Thai and Cambodian Epigraphy: Evidence from Indian Literature

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Abstract—This article centers around the expression tripura mentioned in the Sukhothai Inscription I of Ram Khamhaeng dated 1292 CE, in the Wat Chiang Man inscription dated 1581 CE, and in the poem Kamsuan Samut attributed to the Ayutthayan poet Si Prat. The term tripura is examined in Sanskrit and Khmer language Cambodian inscriptions before Sukhothai, and in the Indian Sanskrit literature, spanning over three millennia (1500 BCE to 1400 CE). The ancient Cambodians worshipped a Tripurāntaka image of Śiva in their temples. The Siamese built commemorative tripura-cities like their Indian counterparts.

Introduction

The term *tripura* appears in the Ram Khamhaeng inscription dated 1292 CE from the World Heritage Site of Sukhothai, in the inscription of Wat Chiang Man at Chiang Mai, dated to 1581, and in an Ayutthaya poem probably from the late 17th century. Scholars of Thailand have interpreted *tripura* to mean a triple wall or rampart, pointed out that none of these three locations have archaeological evidence of a triple wall, and argued over what this implies about the sources (Vickery 1995: 109). This controversy remains unresolved.

The present article offers new insight on *tripura* from Cambodian epigraphic sources, and from a wide range of Indian literary and artistic material. It concludes that *Tripura* does not indicate a triple wall but a city built to glorify Śiva.

Tripura related source material from Thailand

Tripura at Sukhothai

In the second half of the 19th century, Schmitt (1885) and Pavie (1898: 176-201) deciphered an expression in Sukhothai Inscription I of Ram Khamhaeng as "trīpūra dai" and translated it as "the three suburbs included" (*les trois faubourgs compris*).

Next, Bradley (1909: 51) noted: "The real trouble is to discover anything that will make intelligible [the word] *trī* since at the end of [line] 42 … the word is the Indian numeral 'three', likely to be used only in some compound name or title. The general sense, which fortunately is unmistakable, calls for something equivalent to circuit or

Journal of the Siam Society, Vol. 108, Pt. 2, 2020, pp. 149–166

distance or perhaps wall." The next words Bradley read as 'pūra' and 'dai'. Continuing his speculation, Bradley further observed "the idea of faubourgs as constituent parts of a municipality," proposed by Schmitt and Pavie, "seems wholly foreign to Siamese thought, nor would the Siamese apply to faubourgs separately the term 'pura (buri)' fenced city, which includes all its parts."

Cœdès (1923: 115) observed: "I have found this word with the indubitable meaning of enclosure wall in the inscription of Wat Xieng Man …. the stone clearly bears the expression *kå trībūn thāṅ sī khāṅ,* meaning to construct an enclosure wall on four sides. This refers to the same word that figures in the inscription of Ram Khamhaeng." Interestingly, the expression *tripura* is not translated here as triple wall or triple rampart.

In his translation of Inscription I, Cœdès (1924: 40, 45) rendered tripura as "triple rampart": "Around this Mo'aṅ Sukhodai, there is a triple rampart, measuring 3.400 arm-length (vā)." The accepted transcription of the line today is: รอบเมืองสุโขทัยนี้ ตรีบูร ได้ สามพันสี่ร้อยวา (rop mueang sukhothai ni tripura dais am phan si roi wa). One argument deployed by scholars who challenged the authenticity of Sukhothai Inscription I was that there was no archaeological evidence that Sukhothai ever had a triple wall (Chamberlain 1991).

Jayabhūmi for Tripura at Chiang Mai

The *Jinakālamālī* notes that in 1296 CE King Măṅ Rai (Mangrai, r. 1296–1317) founded his new capital at Chiang Mai. The *Chiang Mai Chronicle* adds that in 1291 the king began a search for an auspicious place for his new capital. The following year a series of favorable omens indicated the location of the Jayabhūmi (land of victory) he was seeking. Griswold rightly suggests that Jayabhūmi is a technical term meaning a site adjudged favorable by geomancy or omen. The king went to live in a camp in the northeastern part of the Jayabhūmi at 4.30 a.m. on Thursday, 27 March 1292 CE.

With his two friends Brañā Ṅām Möaṅ (King Ngam Mueang of Phayao) and Brañā Rvaṅ (King Ram Khamhaeng, r. circa 1279-1298), the king settled in a newly built pavilion near the Jayabhūmi, and reviewed the plan and geomantic advantages of the site. They paced the four sides of the future city, deciding locations of the moats, walls and gates. First, ritual offerings were made to the titular divinities of the Jayabhūmi and its future five gates. The artisans and labourers were recruited to build Măṅ Rai's palace, to dig the city moats and to build the city walls. Finally, on Thursday, 19 April 1296 CE just before the dawn, all the building works began simultaneously, and in four months the capital city arose.

These chronicles relate the founding of Chiang Mai centered on the Jayabhūmi, but they do not mention a *tripura*. The Wat Chiang Man inscription states that the Jayabhūmi is the center of a *tripura*.

The Wat Chiang Man inscription

The inscription of Wat Chiang Man (Chiang Mai), dated 1581 CE, recalls (l/1-6) how Brañā Măṅ Rai and his two royal friends founded the city of Chiang Mai, residing in a temporary pavilion on the Jayabhūmi. On Thursday, 12 April 1296 at about 4 a.m., they began building the moat and the *tripura*, a *cetiya* marking its center. This date is

exactly one week earlier than the *Chiang Mai Chronicle* (Griswold and Prasert 1977a: 147; 1977b: 112). The transcription of the passage by Griswold and Prasert (1977b: 121) reads: ในที่ไชยภูมราชมนทยรขุดคือก่อตรีบูณทังสีด้าน (*nai thi chayaphum ratchamonthian khut khue ko tripun thang si dan*).

The expression *tripura* is explained as a triple enclosure wall, though the city walls of Chiang Mai were not triple. Griswold and Prasert (1977b) resolved this contradiction as follows: the inscription dated 1581 does not refer to the visible single wall of Chiang Mai built in the 18th century, but to a triple wall built in 1296 around an early city area with Wat Chiang Man at its center, and of which no trace exists.

Tripura at Ayutthaya

According to legend, a court-poet named Si Prat was banished by King Narai (r. 1658-1688) from Ayutthaya for his serious indiscretions. In those dark days of his life, the poet composed the *Kamsuan Samut*, a 131-stanza poem of *nirat* genre. Derived from the Sanskrit word *nirāśa*, the term literally means without (*nir*) hope (āś*a*). In brief, *nirat* is a poem of lament. The poet laments for his beloved ones and for his beloved city of Ayutthaya.

Though some Thai scholarship disputes the authorship, *Kamsuan Samut* is considered "the ultimate of the lament genre" (Winai 2002). This masterpiece of Thai literature celebrates Ayutthaya (Baker and Pasuk 2017: 233). In such a text, one cannot expect an architectural description, but the seventh stanza describes Ayutthaya as a *tripura*: อยุทธยาไพโรชได้ตรีบูร (*ayutthaya phairot dai tripun*).

Tripura in Cambodian epigraphic sources

So far scholars of Thailand have focused on the meaning of *tripura* as three cities. But the term has wider meaning bound up with the worship of Śiva.

When Cœdès published his translation of the Ram Khamhaeng Inscription I in 1924, he did not have at his disposal the Khmer inscriptions which present *tripura* as three cities of demons destroyed by Śiva. Much later in 1952-54, Cœdès published these inscriptions from the Angkor region. Since then no scholar has returned to these published Khmer epigraphic texts in order to unfold the nuances of *tripura* in mainland Southeast Asia. This article will now examine the pre-Angkor and Angkor inscriptions to understand the relevance of *tripura* for the ancient Khmer polity.

The pre-Angkor temple

A bilingual Sanskrit and Khmer inscription (K. 904) informs us that in 713 CE, Śiva, the destroyer of the triple city (Tripurāntaka), had a temple near the West Baray Lake to the west of the walled city of Angkor Thom (Siem Reap city, Cambodia). The inscription hails "Īśvara (Śiva) who burnt Tripura by a single arrow". This cryptic phrase offers a hint for our narrative. The cities were not simply destroyed, they were burnt down. By a single arrow Śiva alone could accomplish this impossible task.

A Śaiva Brahman named Śakrasvāmin, native of Madhyadeśa (Central India), and his wife, the Khmer Princess Śobhājayā, were founders of a temple in which they

installed an image of Tripurāntakeśvara—the lord (īśvara) who destroyed (*antaka*) Tripura. The ruling queen Jayadevī also made donations to the temple founded by her daughter and son-in-law (Cœdès 1952: 61, fn.1).

The temple of Tripurāntakeśvara was established in an era "afflicted by the age of Kali". The pre-Angkor kingdom had undergone all-pervasive decadence. The Tripurāntaka-Śiva was invoked apparently for his divine help to overcome the prevailing dismal conditions.

By the 7th century, Tripurāntakeśvara was a Khmerized Hindu divinity, bearing a Khmer title of *vraḥ kamrateṅ* añ, owning landed property and workers in the neighboring Khmer villages. No trace of the temple or its sculpture survives as the region was turned into a huge lake by the 11th century.

The Angkor-period temple

The Prasat Ampil Rolum, an Angkor period temple, was also dedicated to the god Śrī Tripurāntakeśvara. An inscription of its central shrine (K. 162) records royal donations by Yaśovarman (889-900 CE) and Jayavarman IV (921-41 CE). Finally this temple of Tripurāntakeśvara acquired the status of a *rājapuṇya* or royal foundation (Cœdès 1954: 105-6, fn.5).

A post-1037 CE Khmer language inscription (K. 276) at Ta Keo (Angkor) records that the guru of King Sūryavarman I donated a palanquin of gold for a gold image of the god *vraḥ kamrateṅ añ śrī* Tripuradahaneśvara. The donation was made to enable the god to travel together with his wife Bhagavatī for the procession of five festivals. The relevant Khmer passage runs as follows: "*ta kanloṅ kamrateṅ* añ *aṅve danle ti pratiṣṭhā vraḥ kamrateṅ añ* śrī *tripuradahaneśvra kanakāṅga stāc pañcotsva amval bhagavatī jvan hemadolā mvāy*" (Cœdès 1952: 153, 155).

Another inscription (K. 277) refers to the images of *vraḥ kamrateṅ añ* śrī Tripuradahaneśvara and the goddess Bhagavatī (of a place called) *kanloṅ kamrateṅ a*ñ *aṅve danle,* to whom Yogīśvarapaṇḍita gave a golden palanquin. In the old and middle Khmer language, *kanloṅ* denoted the sacred status of mother. It also signified a hole, a cave or a room in a palace or temple to store sacred objects and important papers. Since the gold image of Tripuradahaneśvara was a movable image, its safe custody was possible in a place like *kanloṅ*. The old Khmer language verb *stāc* (to go) suggests that these gold images moved from one temple to the other like the images *(mūrti)* for festive occasions (*utsava*) in India.

Besides signifying the sacred mother (Pou 1992: 78-79), the term *kanloṅ* also appears to denote the consort of Śiva, known variously as Durgā, Pārvatī or Tripura Sundarī. It is quite possible that the moving image of Tripurāntaka was placed in safe custody at his consort's temple (Cœdès 1952: 54 ff.).

A Syāṃ at the Tripurāntakeśvara temple

One of the servants deployed at the West Baray temple of Tripurāntakeśvara was a child (*kon*) of a female Syāṃ servant (Cœdès 1952: 54 ff., K. 904). Other Cambodian inscriptions also mention ethnic Syāṃ as servants assigned to temples of different Hindu gods.

In the 12th century bas-reliefs of Angkor Wat, the Syāṃ Kuk soldiers are generally supposed to represent the Siamese ethnic community in the Khmer military contingent (Groslier 1981: 107-126). In modern Khmer, the Siem (Syāṃ) denotes the Thai of ancient Siam (Pou 1992: 514). As early as the pre-Angkor period, the Siamese (Syāṃ) appear to be familiar with the Tripurāntaka Śiva, the destroyer of three demon cities (K. 904).

Tripura: the Indic background

In mainland Southeast Asia before the Sukhothai era, Tripurāntakeśvara was known as a powerful representation of Śiva. What is the longer background of this concept in Indian history and culture?

Tripura in Indic texts

The *tripura* mythology was transmitted through oral and textual channels. A 7th-century inscription (K. 359) records the gift of the written texts (*pustakam*) of the Rāmāyaṇa, the Purāṇa and the complete Mahābhārata to a Śiva temple for uninterrupted daily recitation. Any attempt to lift even a single donated volume led to punishment (Pal 1987: I, 49). The above Cambodian inscription confirms that all the major post-Vedic texts were available as written texts in mainland Southeast Asia for ritual recitation.

A closer look at the vast corpus of inscriptions suggests that Brahmans who were expert on early and later Vedic texts frequently migrated to mainland Southeast Asia at least from the beginning of the 7th century CE. One such Brahman was Durgasvāmī, born in Dakṣiṇāpatha. He was well-versed in the mantra, the Brāhmaṇa and the Sūtra of the Taittarīya school (Cœdès 1952: 27). By the 10th century, the four Vedas, the six Vedāṅgas, and the Purāṇa were studied at Angkor (Cœdès 1937: 103 ff.)

Pura and Tripura: lexical meanings

Sāyaṇa, a 14th-century Indian commentator on the Rig Veda, interprets *pura* as a town (Majumdar 2013: 48-53). Monier-Williams (1899) defines the root word *pur* as rampart, wall, stronghold, fortress, castle, city, town (also of demons). He explains *tripura* as three cities, built of gold, silver, and iron, and located in the sky, air, and on the earth. Macdonnell and Keith (1912) observed: "Tripura, a threefold stronghold, is alluded to in the Brāhmaṇa texts as a secure protection. But as the passages are mythical, no stress can be laid on them as evidence for the existence of forts with three concentric walls."

The ancient Indian Sanskrit manuals describe different types of fortifications, but a *tripura*-type fort with three concentric walls is not in their list. Moreover, *pura* as wall or rampart does not convey the broad meaning of the term. Contextually a *pura* is not simply a wall. The term signifies a well-secured walled-space, constituted by three components—a defined space, its temporary or permanent enclosure, and its inhabitants. In fact, the Vedic texts offer ritual configurations of three enclosures around the god Agni, not an actual architectural description of a fort with triple ramparts.

The Rig Vedic hymns (I.51.1; IV.30.1-20) introduce the god Indra as the destroyer

of enemy fortresses, *purabhid* and *purandara*, and refer to stone fortresses (*aśmamaīym purām*) and invisible, invincible metal (*ayasa*) fortresses (Shendge 2003: 53-54, 118, 121).

Tripura—a later Vedic addition

The word *tripura* is not found in the early portions of the Rig Veda (1500 BCE). It occurs in the later Vedic literature, represented by the Brāhmaṇa and the Āraṇyaka (1000 BCE-500 BCE). The Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (VI. 3.3: 23-26), the *Vājasaneyī Saṃhitā* (XI, 26) and the later part of *Rik Saṃhitā* (X.87, 22) say that the priest draws lines around Agni since the gods were afraid that the demons (*rākṣasa*) would destroy him. By reciting three verses, the priest makes a threefold stronghold for Agni. The threefold stronghold is, therefore, the highest form of stronghold. Each successive line of verse has a wider arc with a larger meter, resulting in a triple rampart of verse (Eggeling 1894: 212-13).

The Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa adds that the demons built for themselves three castles which made the gods jealous. Indra is said to have prepared his thunderbolt with Agni as the shaft, Soma as the iron and Viṣṇu as the point in order to destroy these castles (Erdosy 2012: 370).

The *Taittarīya Saṃhitā* of Yajurveda (6. 2.3) says: the demons had three citadels; the lowest one was of iron, the middle one of silver, and the highest one of gold. The gods could not conquer them by siege. Finally Rudra destroyed the castles and drove the demons out of these regions. For this purpose, the gods offered themselves as different constituent parts of the arrow: Agni as the point of the arrow, Soma its socket and Viṣṇu its shaft. Rudra finally shot the arrow; it cleft the three citadels and drove the demons away from these worlds.

In the later Vedic Brāhmaṇa texts, the demons conquered the three worlds, and transformed them into their forts. Rudra shot his fire arrow, and the three forts were filled with fire. "It was a universal conflagration that wiped out the demons from the earth, air and the sky, and left them untouched in their domicile, the netherworld" (Kramrisch 2007: 4).

The classical Sanskrit sources

The classical Sanskrit works (500 BCE-1500 CE) are represented by the ancient Indian epic *Mahābhārata*, the eighteen *Mahāpurāṇa* and a large number of literary compositions. These texts replace the Vedic cult of nature by the formal trinity of Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva (Sastri 1960: 15-17). In these sources, *tripura* designates the legendry three cities built by Maya, the architect of the demons. In his *Cloud Messenger (Meghadūta)*, the 4th-century Sanskrit poet Kālidāsa advises the cloud to pass over the Himālaya and listen to the Kinnara ladies singing melodiously the lore of Śiva's victory over Tripura—*saṃraktābhis tripuravijayo gīyate kinnarībhih* (Karmarkar 2001: 36, stanza 58).

In chapter three of *Harṣacarita*, the 7th-century Sanskrit prose writer Bāṇabhaṭṭa describes Sthāniśvara, the capital city of Harṣa empire, as a city noisy like hundreds of roaring rivers with tumult surpassing Tripura. All its people were unaware of the

devastating might of Śiva's arrow (Cowell and Thomas 1897: 70-99).

Around the early 4th century CE, the Indian epic *Mahābhārata* (*Karṇa Parva*) refers to three demons: Tārākṣa (Star-Eyes), Kamalākṣa (Lotus-Eyes) and Vidyunmāli (One Garlanded with Lightning). They had devoted themselves to the practice of mortification to gain immortality.

Advised by Brahmā, the demons left their quest for immortality, and preferred to dwell in the three cities built by their architect Maya—a gold castle in the sky, a silver citadel in the air, and an iron one on the earth. Only once in 1,000 years, when the three moving castles would be on the same axis, they could be destroyed by "one-arrow-one-shot" by none other than Śiva.

Tripura in the Purāṇa

In the Sanskrit *Purāṇa* texts, *tripura* is a prominent theme (Hazra 1987: 49, 116, 364). The *Matsya Purāṇa* (200-500 CE) refers to the triple-city built by the demon architect Maya at the astronomical conjunction of the moon with the most powerful asterism Puṣya (Anada 1996: 35ff.). The epic motifs of the myth are repeated. Finally, Rudra pierced the three cities, and they fell burning into the Western Ocean. Each of the cities occupied a square of 100 *yojana*; that is, eight or nine hundred miles (chapters 129-131, 139).

The square plan is basic in Indian architecture, but the size of three cities is mythical. Whereas the *Mahābhārata* describes the cities rotating, in the *Matsya Pur*āṇa the cities would go anywhere the demons wished.

Towards the 8th century, the *Skanda Purāṇa* notes: possessed by the goddess Tripurā, Śiva reduced the three cities (*tripura*) to ashes. Tripurāntaka is one of the sixty-eight prominent holy places of India. Each one of the three demons [of Tripura] had established a *linga*. A pilgrimage to these three *linga* washed out all sins (Tagare 1991: 39, 80, 88,197, 446, 2708).

Around the 12th century the *Padma Pur*āṇa refers to the *Kārtika* festival on the bank of the Narmadā River in the Mahiṣmatī city in honor of [Śiva] the Enemy of Tripura (Deshpande 1991: 2708). A century later, the *Brahma Purāṇa* (2004: 761) refers to the demon's holy centers like Gayā and Tripura in India.

The Ś*iva Pur*āṇa (trans. 2008) develops a *tripura* narrative between the 10th and 14th centuries. Śiva had his temples in Tripura built by his demon-devotees. It was therefore not possible to persuade him to destroy the strongholds of his own devotees.

Playing a trick, Viṣṇu created a shaven-head ascetic who initiated the demons in the Buddhist doctrine. As the demons abandoned his worship, Śiva agreed to destroy the three cities, provided he was offered a chariot and "the paraphernalia of an emperor" (Singh 1997: 39-52).

The Earth (Prithvī) became the chariot, the Sun and the Moon its wheels. Brahmā was the charioteer. The cosmic mountain served as the bow, the serpent Vāsukī as the bow-string, Viṣṇu as the arrow, and Agni as its tip. The wind-god (Vāyu) was at the rear of the arrow to impart it divine speed (Ś*iva Purāṇa* 2008*:* 802-858).

As Śiva was about to loose the arrow, the gods became obsessed with pride for collectively deploying their strength. Śiva, therefore, did not loose the arrow; he just

smiled. And the three cities were burnt instantly. As the gods recognized his supreme power, Śiva fired the arrow to the already burning cities. In Tamil, Śiva is addressed as the god "who burnt the cities with a mere smile".

One version of the story refers to only one demon named Tripura whom Śiva killed, splitting him into three (O'Flaherty 1980: 182-83, 191).

In due course, the *tripura* legend became integral part of folk literature. Monumental anthologies of popular tales were included in the Sanskrit language, including *Kathāsaritsāgara* (the Ocean of Story-Streams) written by Somadeva, a Śaiva Brahman from Kashmir (Penzer 1924-28: IV, 19; VII, 131; VIII, 151).

The *Mayamatam is* supposed to record the views of the demon architect Maya who planned and built the three demon-cities (*tripura*). The text recommends the worship of the image of Śiva as the destructor of *tripura* (Tripurasundara) in order to bring about the death of an enemy (Dagens 1994: xl, 834-35). It is obvious that this aspect of Śiva was worshipped as part of black magic.

The Triadic discourse

The *tripura* is essentially one of the earliest Indian triadic discourses. The demons are three. Their cities are three, built with three different metals—iron, silver and gold. They are established in three different locations— the earth, the heaven, and the intermediary space. The arrow by which Śiva destroys the three cities has three constitutive parts—the point of the arrow, its socket and its shaft. Three different gods constitute these three different parts. Agni is the point of the arrow, Soma its socket, and Viṣṇu its shaft.

It is believed that Śiva destroyed Tripura at Atikai in Tamilnadu (South India), suggesting localization of the story in the real world. In the 7th-century poem *Tiru Mandiram* (verse 343), the three cities are three mental impurities. Their destruction is a mystical rite of purification. The 8th-century saint Ādi Śaṅkarācārya describes Śiva "beyond the three Vedas", and praises the god with three eyes as "the destroyer of three cities" in verse three of his Ś*ivānanda Laharī* (Ananda, 1996: 115; Martin n.d.: 259).

The wife of Śiva is the Beautiful Lady of the Triple City (*Tripura Sundarī*). A non-dualistic text of metaphysics, the *Tripura Rahasya* (Mystery of Three Cities) explains that the three cities denote the three stages of consciousness—awake (*jāgrata*), dream (*svapna*), and deep sleep (*susupti*). The Holy Mother Devī Tripura is the core of consciousness. Her temple in Tripurā is one of the fifty-one places of spiritual power, a śaktipīṭ*ha* in India.

Tripurāntaka sculptures

The Indian sculptors portray the Vedic fierce god Rudra (Śiva of later Hinduism) as a huntsman, armed with a bow and arrows to destroy the triple-city (Figure 1). The *Aṃ*śubhedāgama lists eight subtypes of the image of Rudra/Śiva, the annihilator of Tripura (Rao 1997: 2/1, 164-171). The first five subtypes are four-armed images. The sixth and seventh represent respectively an eight- and a ten-armed image. With several bends in the body the image represents an archer in action. The eighth type portrays Rudra riding a chariot in the air. These images are distinguished by their red complexion, one face, three eyes and the goddess (*devī*) on the left side.

The Kailāśa Temple at Ellora presents a dynamic image of the divine archer in an aerial chariot drawn by prancing steeds (Rao 1997: 2/1, plate, XXXVIII). It looks as if the god has "just released the powerful missile …. The magic demon-castle falls, and its folks pass again into oblivion… " (Zimmer 1990: 18).

Equally noteworthy are the early 11th-century life-size free-standing thirty images of Tripurāntakeśvara at the Rājarājeśvara temple (Tanjore, Tamil Nadu). A fresco from the same temple portrays Tripurāntaka standing in his chariot with Brahmā as his charioteer on a battlefield (Schwindler 1987: 163-78). Tripurāntaka imagery was used as a statement of political power in the royal South Indian temples (Gerd 216: 169-188).

Figure 1. Tripurantaka sculptures at the Vidyashankar temple (built 1338 CE), Sringeri, Karnataka (photo Panchapakesan Iyer, Creative Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0)

Tripurāntaka dance and drama

The ruling Indian kings used the *tripura* myth for legitimization of their conquests. The Tamil epic *Silppadikaram* says that the dance of Kotukotti commemorates the burning of three demon cities by Śiva. This dance was performed on a chariot before the Chera King Censkuttuvan to celebrate his victorious return from a northern expedition (Martin n.d.: 233, 237, 270).

The burning of the demon cities was scripted by Brahmā himself and enacted as a *dim*-type drama in Śiva's home at Mount Kailāśa (*Nāṭyaśāstra* 4.5-10). King Vatsarāja (780-800 CE), a ruler of Gurjara Pratihāra dynasty, is credited with yet another *dim* type dramatic version of Tripuradahana. The king is credited with extensive conquests and establishment of a vast empire. As a conqueror, his interest in the *tripura* theme was not surprising (*Sāhitya-darpaṇa* 2007).

The *tripura* theatrical performance developed as the *dim* type drama most probably from the *Mahābhārata* version of the legend (Lidova 1994: 79-84). This type of drama revolved around a well-known anecdote full of movements, magic, and battles (Leena 2017: 23-25).

Tripura as commemorative cities

To commemorate this mythical event the ruling Indian kings named their capital as Tripura. The Chedi capital was Tripurī on the bank of the Narmada (Tewar, Jabalpur,

Central India). The site of Tripurī was excavated for four consecutive years between 1965-71. Explorations in the Narmada and Betwa valley have yielded inscribed copper coins of the city state (*janapada*) of Tripurī. The rulers issued coins with the legend "Tripurī" in late 3rd century BCE. The area has yielded lead coins of Bhavadatta, Ajadatta and Abhayadatta dateable to late 2nd and early 1st century BCE. Circular sealings of baked clay bearing the names Śiva Bodhi and Vasu Bodhi have also been found. The discovery of an Indo-Sassanian coin suggests that the site was under occupation during the 5th-6th century CE. The Kalchuri kings ruled from Tripurī during the 9th-13th centuries and left their epigraphic records describing Tripurī as a vibrant capital of an important kingdom (Chaubey 2003: 19, 161, 168). The *Mahābhārata* (Sabhāparva, chapter 31, stanza 60) also mentions an ancient kingdom of South India called Tripurī, conquered by Sahadeva during his victory march.

Tripurā is one of the smallest states of the present-day Republic of India. Tripurī is its largest tribal community. The state is famous for its spectacular Śaiva site of Unnākoṭi (meaning one less than ten hundred thousand, i.e. 99,999,999). At this site Śiva is believed to have spent a night with his followers on his way to Mount Kailāśa. Some 130 surviving gigantic bas-reliefs of Śiva, 30-40 feet in height, date back to the 8th-9th centuries (Chakrabarti 2019).

Śiva in the Siamese universe

The concept of *tripura* thus has a long history in the Saivite traditions of India. Its appearance in Siam is thus part of Siam's borrowing from Saivite traditions over many centuries.

The pre-Siamese links

Thailand has a rich legacy of Śaiva cult from the pre-Siam era (7th-12th centuries). A Sanskrit language inscription from Si Thep (K 978) takes back the antiquity of Śiva-worship to the second half of the 6th century when the Khmer King Bhavavarman I (550-600 CE) installed (*sthāpayet*) images of Śiva to mark his accession to the throne.

A four-armed Śiva (11th-12th century CE) is remarkable at Prang Si Thep. The Śiva-related imagery on the lintel and the excavated fragments of *linga*, *yoni*, and Nandi from the Prang Song Phi Nong temple testify to the cult of Śiva in the pre-Sukhothai era (Sampaongern 2015: 12, 48, 169).

A bilingual Sanskrit and Khmer inscription (K. 949) dated 937 CE was found buried near Saphan Chikun under a mound near the Bot Phram or Thewasthana in Ayutthaya. The inscription opens with two Sanskrit stanzas of invocation to Śaṅkara (=Śiva) and to Pārvatī united with Śiva (Ardhanārīśvara), and offers the genealogy of the ruling dynasty of Cānāśapura. In 937 A.D. Maṅglavarman, the younger brother of the ruling king, set up the inscription to commemorate the installation of an image of his mother as Devī, the wife of Śiva. Cœdès (1944: 73) believes that the inscription was lying in situ and relates to the pre-Ayutthaya era.

Śiva at Sukhothai and Kamphaeng Phet

Sukhothai emerged as a center of Theravada Buddhism under King Ram Khamhaeng, but the relics of earlier temples (*prāsāda*) survive to the north of Sukhothai and the worship of the mountain-spirit flourished in its outskirts.

Ram Khamhaeng had planted the Mango Grove to the west of Sukhothai. This suburb developed as a spiritual zone of temples (*devālaya mahākṣetra*). A large number of Śiva-*kṣetra* in India are defined as territories, permeated by the power and presence of Śiva. King Dharmarāja I, the grandson of Ram Khamhaeng, restored the dilapidated temple area of Brahman divinities. The king installed an image of Maheśvara (Śiva) and another of Viṣṇu (*brah maheśvara rupa viṣṇu rupa*) to enable the ascetics (*tapasvī*) and Brahmans to perform regular worship (*pujā nitya*). In the narrative of installation of divine images, Maheśvara (Śiva) is mentioned first, Viṣṇu comes next. Obviously, Śiva was the dominant divine figure in the Sukhothai polity (Cœdès 1924: 46, 91-94, 98, 121).

Two statues of Śiva and Viṣṇu, preserved in the National Museum, Bangkok, are supposed to be the original statues from the Devālayamahākṣetra of Sukhothai (Gosling 1991: 67). Since they were restored by his grandson Dharmarāja I, the Brahman temples must have flourished in the reign of Ram Khamhaeng.

An inscribed statue of Śiva was found from an ancient temple site (*Sāl Phra Īśvara*) in Kamphaeng Phet. In 1510 CE, Śrī Dharmāśokarāja had installed this Śiva image to secure divine protection "for the four-footed and two-footed beings and for the development of different denominations—Buddhism, Brahmanism and the cult of divinities". It was expected that each cult will flourish without any confusion, and the role of each divinity will be understood and appreciated (Cœdès 1924: 159).

Śiva at Ayutthaya

Like Sukhothai Ayutthaya was a Theravada Buddhist kingdom which promoted and preserved Brahman rituals, mythology and artistic expressions. In the city of Ayutthaya, there were two locations with Brahman shrines (devasthāna), close to each other. The western location had three shrines with two ponds on their west side, dedicated to Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva, likely built by King Prasat Thong in 1636. Yet another mound in Ayutthaya was the site of the second Brahman temple (Vandenberg 2009).

The future King Narai consulted the royal Brahman astrologers at the Ayutthaya court and made offerings to Śiva and Viṣṇu, announcing his intentions to the gods to dethrone his uncle King Suthammaracha (Baker and Pasuk 2017: 10, 54, 124-26).

Śiva and the Chakri dynasty

In 1784 King Rāma I of the Chakri dynasty founded a Brahman temple in Bangkok known as the Devasthāna, The complex consists of three large rectangular shrines, dedicated to Phra Isuvan (Īśvara/Śiva), Phra Phikkhanesuan (Vighneśvara/Gaṇeśa), and Phra Narai (Viṣṇu). A small outdoor shrine is dedicated to Phra Phrom/Brahmā (Wales 1931: 54-68). The arrangements at this temple site assign to Śiva the highest position in the Siamese hierarchy of Brahman gods.

The Kailāśa Paramparā in Siam

Mount Kailāśa was well-known in mainland Southeast Asia in the Angkorean epoch. The Banteay Srei pediment at Angkor presents the most dynamic representation of Rāvaṇa shaking Mount Kailāśa. The Preah Vihear complex is yet another representation of Kailāśa, portraying the Dangrek Range as the Himalaya of mainland Southeast Asia (Sahai 2009: 7-8; Finot et al. 2000). The Phanom Rung temple on a hilltop in northeast Thailand is yet another symbolical representation of Mount Kailāśa, the abode of Lord Śiva in the Himālaya.

The Siamese Brahman priests conducted rituals, using Sanskrit manuscripts, written in a script derived from the Tamil Grantha script from South Indian state of Tamilnadu. Later these manuscripts were transferred to modern Thai script. The rituals of Śaivāgama form the nucleus of these manuscripts.

The Khmer and Siamese Brahman priests, like their Indian Tamil counterparts, claim that their ancestors came from Mount Kailāśa in the Himalaya; and that they transmit the teachings of the Śaivasiddhānta, preached by Śiva himself to Nandin. Theravāda Buddhism does not have rituals for the state and kingship. Even after converting to Buddhism, the Siamese Brahmans continued their functions relating to the Kailāśa lineage (Filliozat 1965: 241-47).

In 1821 Crawford recorded the statement of a fifth-generation Brahmana in Thailand, from the sacred land of Ramiseram (Thakur 1986: 46-48). It is believed that Rama, the incarnation of Viṣṇu, established the Śiva linga of Rāmeśvarama on the southern seashore of India and worshipped the god before proceeding to Lanka. The present line of Rama kings (I-X) of the Chakri dynasty has continued the spirit of Rāmeśvarama or Īśvara (Śiva) of Rama. In course of the royal coronation ceremony under the present dynasty, the chief Court Brahman pronounces a Tamil mantra for opening the portals of Śivālaya (Thakur 1986: 23-48).

According to an inscription dated 1347 CE, King Lu'daiyarāja, the grandson of Ram Khamhaeng, had studied, besides the Vinaya and the Abhihamma, the Veda, the Brahman scriptures (śāstra), traditions (āgama), dharma (law), logic (*nyāya*) and astronomy (*jyotiṣaśāstra*), following the rigorous methods of traditional masters such as the Brahmans and the ascetics (Cœdès 1924: 94, 98).

In the second half of the 19th century, Henry Alabaster remarked that in the Siamese ritual milieu there were frequent references to, and (supposed) quotations from the three Vedas (Veda Traya or Trayi Veda) and the Śāstra. The Siamese pandits rejected the Atharvaveda as a later interpolation as did Manu and other orthodox Hindu thinkers (Wales 1931: 55).

The Siamese adopted Theravada Buddhism during the 13th century. Rama I (1737-1809 CE) restored the traditional pattern, emphasizing the preeminence of Buddhism while legitimating Brahman and animist elements. But the court Brahmans were freely used to enhance the prestige of Siamese kingship and the folk Brahmans to solve the worldly problems of the Siamese people (Kirsch 1977: 26).

Śiva's annual visit to Siam

It is believed that Śiva along with Brahma visits the earth annually for ten days.

He lands on the earth the 7th day of the waxing moon and stays until the first day of the first waning moon. Viṣṇu follows Śiva, traveling in the waning moon period. The people consider unlucky the days Viṣṇu arrives and returns. Ritual food is distributed to the public participating in the reception of Śiva. No such ceremony is held for Viṣṇu, since the days of his arrival and departure are not considered auspicious (Kuanpoonpol 1990: 21 ff.).

Until 1935 a number of Thai cities hosted an annual swing ceremony to welcome Śiva on his annual visit to the earth, popularly known as *lo-ching-cha* («pulling the swing») in Thai. During the reign of Ramathibodi II (1491-1529) two Brahman priests had brought the first swing to Ayutthaya (Baker et al. 2005: 212).

One Indian Tamil devotional song for the swing ceremony is the Thiruvempava, composed by the 9th-century Śaiva saint-poet Manikkavacakar, and addressed to the god Śiva. The Thiruppavai is the other Tamil poem composed by the poetess Andal in praise of Thirumal (Viṣṇu).

It is equally interesting to note that the emblem of the present ruling Chakri dynasty of Thailand has the trident (*triśūla*) of Śiva standing embedded in the discus (*cakra*) of Viṣṇu, perpetuating the symbiosis of Hari-Hara.

Conclusion

At Sukhothai (1292 CE) and Chiang Mai (1296 CE), the term *tripura* has been interpreted to mean three enclosure walls built around the city. The later Siamese capital Ayutthaya was also a *tripura* according to a 17th-century Siamese poet. Unfortunately none of these Siamese cities offers archaeological evidence for three enclosure walls. Sukhothai has only two enclosure walls, considered as later constructions on archaeological grounds. At Chiang Mai there is only one enclosure wall. It may be argued that an original triple-wall was later altered, but this hypothesis has not been archaeologically tested.

A pre-Angkor epigraphic text (K. 904) dated 713 CE presents the mainstream mythology—Īśvara (Śiva) burnt Tripura by a single arrow, and records the building of a Tripurāntakeśvara temple in the region of the West Baray at Angkor. Three other inscriptions mention Angkor period temples of Tripurāntakeśvara under the royal patronage from the last decade of the 9th century to the first half of the 11th century.

These pre-Siam *tripura*-related Cambodian epigraphic texts clearly relate to the classical Sanskrit literature of India (500 BCE-1500 CE). These texts mention three demon-cities (*tripura*) destroyed by Tripurāntaka-Śiva. The Khmer temple-centric image worship of Śiva-Tripurāntaka and the presence of Syāṃ workers at the temple of Tripurāntakeśvara in the region of Angkor suggest that the Siamese were acquainted with Śiva-Tripurāntakeśvara from the early 8th century.

By the 7th century the Śaiva temples in mainland Southeast Asia were repositories of written texts (*pustakam*) of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the *Purāṇa,* and the *Mahābhārata* for daily recitation to the public. These texts constitute the original source of *tripura* mythology. Moreover, the learned Brahmans from India were present in ancient, medieval, and premodern Southeast Asia.

Sāyaṇa, a 14th century Indian commentator, interprets *pura* as a town, Macdonnell and Keith (1912) reject the Brāhmaṇa texts as evidence for forts with three concentric walls. The *Rig Veda* (1500 BCE) mentions *pura*, but not *tripura*. In the later Vedic texts (1000 BCE-500 BCE), *tripura* is a ritual in which a priest makes a threefold stronghold by surrounding Agni with three verses in order to protect him from demons.

The classical Sanskrit sources (500 BCE-1500 CE), the *Mahābhārata* and the *Purāṇa* offer a narrative of *tripura* as three demon-cities destroyed by Śiva. With an overtone of black magic the *Mayamatam* recommends the worship of Śiva, the destroyer of Tripura, to bring about the death of an enemy.

Tripura is an exceptionally elaborate triadic discourse—three demons, three cities built of three different metals on three different locations. Tripura denotes the three stages of consciousness, leading to the development of a non-dualistic philosophy, centered on the cult of Devī tripura, the wife of Śiva.

The destruction of Tripura is an interesting theme for Indian sculptors and painters. A number of temples were decorated with Tripurantaka images and paintings. Dance and drama were improvised from the *tripura* theme.

The Śaiva Indian rulers established Tripurī city in central India. The rulers issued coins with the legend "Tripurī " as early as the 3rd century BCE. Tripura is one of the states of the Republic of India, distinguished by outstanding Śaiva heritage.

In brief, the mythology of Śiva, the annihilator of the three demon-cities (*tripura*) has been enshrined in Sanskrit literature, dance, drama, sculptural art, and philosophical discourses for over 3,000 years. The later Vedic reference to the priest drawing three protective lines around Agni with three verses is no evidence for the existence of a fort with a triple-rampart.

The Khmer practiced temple-based worship of images of Śiva as the destroyer of three demon-cities (Śiva-Tripurāntaka). None of the fortified Khmer cities ever claimed to be a Tripura. On the other hand, like their Indian counterparts, Sukhothai, Chiang Mai and Ayutthaya are fortified cities which glorify Śiva, the annihilator of Tripura.

In the pre-Siamese phase of mainland Southeast Asia (7th–12th century CE), there is epigraphic and sculptural evidence for the cult of Śiva at Dvārāvatī and Khmer sites. The Cānāsapura inscription dated 937 CE suggests that Śiva was known to the area where the city of Ayutthaya flourished some centuries later.

A great spiritual zone of the Brahman gods (Devālayamahākṣetra) was developed to the west of Sukhothai in the Mango Groves. King Dharmarāja I, the grandson of Ram Khamhaeng restored the dilapidated area and reinstalled the images of Maheśvara (Śiva) and Viṣṇu. A statue of Śiva was installed at Kamphaeng Phet in the expectation that "each cult will flourish without any confusion, and the role of each divinity will be understood and appreciated". In Ayutthaya, there were probably two Brahman *devasthāna*. Making offerings to Śiva and Viṣṇu and consulting Brahman astrologers were routine matters at the royal court of Ayutthaya.

After the fall of Ayutthaya, King Rama I of the present Chakri dynasty re-established a Brahman *devasthāna* in Bangkok where the images of Śiva, Viṣṇu, and Gaṇeśa were installed. Mount Kailāśa, the abode of Śiva, was well-known in pre-Siamese mainland Southeast Asia. The Siamese Brahman priests claim their descent from the lineage of

Mount Kailāśa. Śiva's annual descent on the earth and the swing festival in his honor were regular features in cities of Thailand until 1935. Such an exceptional exposure leaves us wondering how the Siamese remained unaware about Śiva destroying the three demon-cities.

Acknowledgements

Banlung ASEAN Chair Professor Sachchidanand Sahai and Assistant Professor Akkharaphong Khamkhun have jointly researched and written this paper under the auspices of Pridi Banomyong International College, Thammasat University. The authors express their indebtedness to Thammasat University for support and assistance.

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