

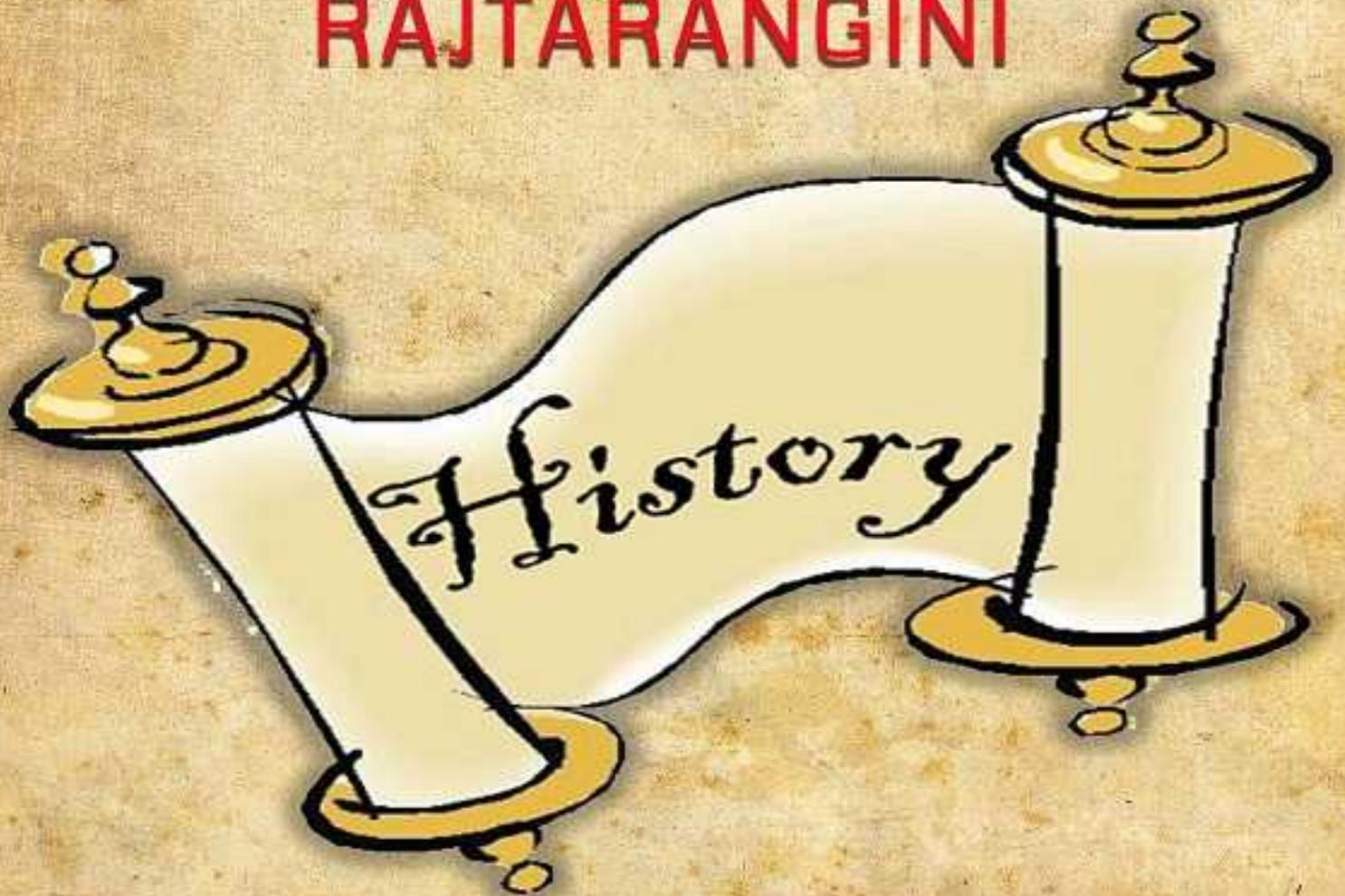


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Soparaka

The town Nalasopara in the Thane district inland along the Maharashtra coast, 75km north of the Mumbai this ancient port was the capital of *aparanta* and was known as Sopara, Soparaka, Sanskrit Suraraka. Nalasopara was a major port town whose trade had linked ancient India to Mesopotamia, Arabia, Greece, Rome, Africa among others. The cluster of archaeological sites is located between two creeks in this region viz., Vasai Creek and Vaitarana Creek. This is a preliminary report and documentation of the archaeological findings. this need more scrutiny and intensive explorations. One can find potsherds of red ware, porcelain and Ming potteries.

The Archaeological remains are found in the following Villages: Gass, Umraale, Sopara, Vasai, Sonarbaht, Taki Pada, Bramhatekadi (locally also known as Dongari) (Gass), Upavana Nivara, Bolinj, Agashi, Ran Pada, etc.

In 1882 by Pandit Indrajit discovered Ashokan Edict near Lake Bhatela here Another inscription - the ninth - was discovered by a historian N.A. Gore in 1956 from Bhuigaon. the edicts can be found at the prince of wales museum in the ancient history section. he fragments of the ninth rock edict is a massive octagonal block of stone covered with Mauryan Brahmi writing. Ashokan inscriptions have been recovered from Sopara, Buddhist text gives details that it was a prominent Buddhist area. During excavation ruins of a Buddhist Stupa were found. From the center of the stupa (inside a brick built chamber) a large stone coffer was excavated which contained eight bronze images of Maitreya Buddha which belong to the 8th-9th century A.D. The coffer contained a relic caskets, numerous gold flowers and fragments of a begging bowl. A silver coin of Gautamiputra Satakarni was also found from the mound. Nalasopara was an important center of Buddhist activity. Emperor Ashoka ensured that rock hoardings propagating his dhamma were installed at strategic points in his empire as Nalasopara was an important trading Centre. It was around sopara that a major center of Buddhist activity, in all probability a university center, flourished at Kanheri almost until the advent of the Portuguese in the 15th century

The legend of Purna has close connection with Sopara. Purna a rich merchant from the town, had journeyed to Shravasti in Uttar Pradesh, where he met. Gautama Buddha. He became a disciple of Buddha and renounced his wealth. He became Buddhist monk and returned to Sopara, where he built a Buddha Vihara, which had eight sandalwood gates. He started propagating Buddhism.

He invited Buddha to inaugurate the Buddh Vihar, which the founder of Buddhism honored and travelled to Nallasopara with 500 disciples and stayed here for a week. Buddha gifted his begging bowl to Purna, which was discovered in April 1882 by Pandit Bhagwanlal Indrajit.

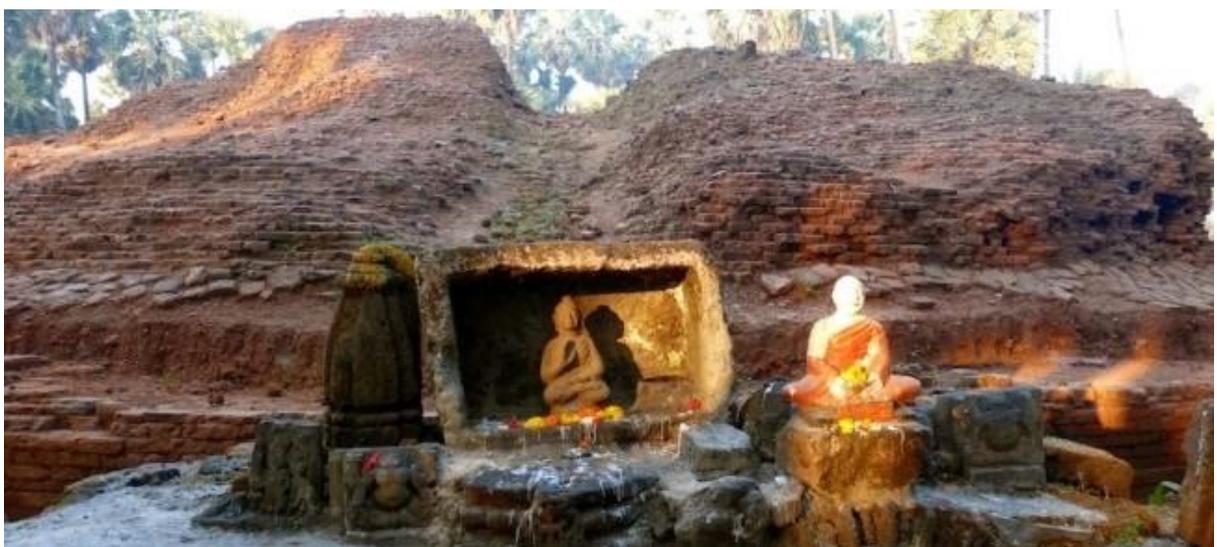
In spite of having rich historical sources both literary and archeological, Nalasopara is one of the neglected heritage site. The remains of this stupa are lying in neglected condition. The stupa is constantly eroding day by day. Proper preservation and restoration work has not been done as early as possible. Security measures are not effective at the site. Awareness has to be created among the local people.



Remains of Ancient Stupa at Nalasopara



Votive Stupa at Nalasopara



Remains of sculptures at Nalasopara



Rock Edict of Ashoka found at Nalasopra, now kept in CSMVS Museum