

Social Anthropological Research on 'The People of Angkor: Living with a World Heritage Site'

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Angkor is a national, regional and world heritage site. It is also a contested site with many stakeholders who have produced or reproduced their particular notions and social space of Angkor. By social space, I mean Lefebvrian notion of social space which contains a great diversity of objects, both natural and social, the networks and pathways which facilitate the exchange of material things and information (See Soja, E.W. Postmodern Geographies. The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory. London:Verso.1998:77.). The social space of Angkor has been consumed in a diverse way by the respective stakeholders. The conventional notions of Angkor have been constructed by the rulers and the powerful – both the Khmer and foreigners – while notions and perceptions held by the local inhabitants are little known to us.

Through my Ph. D. research I will attempt to construct Angkor from the viewpoints of local inhabitants and demonstrate their understanding of life around and relationship with the site from spiritual, religious, and socio-economic points of view. In particular, I examine the traditional relationship between the local population and the social space of Angkor, what are the catalysts and processes of change, and how the local people understand and deal with their changing situations and problems. In this attempt I hope to clarify where local people are situated vis-à-vis national and international efforts to 'save' Angkor. At the same time I wish to contribute to Cambodian and international policy analysis and formulation with recommendations for the modification of existing site management modalities, and future directions of policies and practices. In a broader sense I hope my research will serve as material for common human interests to further inter-related notions of colonialism, capitalism, nation-states, social production and consumption of space, heritage, community, and identity, as well as issues of conservation and management of heritage sites.

In this newsletter article I briefly discuss about the traditional relationship between Angkor and its local community, mostly based on semi-structured interviews conducted in the local and religious communities. Here I limit my discussion in the area around Angkor Wat and Angkor Thom where my research has been conducted intensively.

TRADITIONAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ANGKOR AND ITS LOCAL COMMUNITY

For the local community and for Cambodians as a whole Angkor is primarily a spiritual and religious place. Angkor temples not only enshrine Hindu or Buddhist icons but also house guardian spirits called *neak ta* អ្នកតា and *báng bát* បងបត់ or the owner spirits of ancient temples. During the war, large Angkor temples and Angkor Thom became shelters for local people. Angkor Wat, in particular, represents the highest spiritual value as much as it is a national symbol, but many also recognise the universal value of the Angkorean legacy to a wider community beyond its national boundary.

ANGKOR WAT: A PLACE FOR SPIRITS, RELIGIOUS CEREMONIES, NEW YEAR CELEBRATION, SHELTER AND EDUCATION

Angkor Wat អង្គរវត្ត is locally known as Angkor Toch អង្គរតូច or Small City as against Angkor Thom អង្គរធំ or Large/Capital City, while some call it Srei Sruoch ស្រីស្រួច or Sharp Lady. It is widely believed to have been built by Pisnukar (the name was derived from Visnu) – an architect with magical power or incredible knowledge. The most well-known statue of Visnu in the west gallery of Angkor Wat is locally known as Ta Reach តារាជ័- the most powerful *neak ta* of the region – whose power is said to be so mighty that even birds flying over it would drop dead and wishes of those who pray to him will always come true. There are two more statues in the same gallery considered to be his wife and a child (some say, son and daughter). Three other *neak ta* guard the gates in the north, east and south respectively. Even though some of the statues have been lost, the people continue to believe in their power giving them offerings where they used to stand. The *neak ta* in the south gate is called Ta Pech តាពេជ្រ in the form of a huge eerie termite mound which is considered to be the second most powerful one in Angkor Wat, but people fear his rather malicious nature.

Báng bát are honest and never hurt people unlike *neak ta*, but when a roof in Angkor Wat collapsed, some supposed a *báng bát* was angry with people who had done something wrong. Local people believe that the soul of a person with purity, honesty, and integrity may turn into *báng bát*. It stays

in the jungles where temples stand after clearing and also can be created during meditation.

When the French took over Battambang and Siem Reap from Thailand in the early 20th century, approximately twenty families were said to have been living on the ground of Angkor Wat outside its external wall along the moat from the south side of the causeway to the south-west side as far as the south gate with Ta Pech. At that time there were no monasteries in Angkor Wat, and monks were said to have been living on the temple ground in the north and south sides of Kda Baen or the terrace in front of the first gallery and prayed in the gallery of Thousand Buddhas. The French then moved the monks from there to build monasteries in the compound, but further away from the main building mass. The people who were expelled from the compound of Angkor Wat moved to live in the areas around it, most notably South Teaksen village located south of Angkor Wat and some in Trâpeang Seh village ភូមិត្រពាំងសេះ to the west of Angkor Wat. From the colonial era to the Sihanouk period Angkor Wat monasteries also served as schools up to the third grade although some studied there higher than the third grade.

The stupas of the two monasteries housed ashes of the ancestors of local people. Because no new monasteries were constructed inside Angkor Thom until the 1980s, most people whose villages lie around Angkor Thom also went to Angkor Wat monasteries for religious ceremonies, both secular and religious studies, and for the Khmer New Year to enjoy the New Year games and special performances of music, dance and theatre.

During the Lon Nol period when the Angkor area was occupied by the Khmer Rouge, the villagers who used to live around Angkor Wat sought shelter there, so as to avoid shelling from the Lon Nol side. Dagens writes that almost 3,000 people from villages to the north had fled for safety to Angkor Wat, among them many of Angkor's workmen (Dagens, B. Angkor: Heart of an Asian Empire. London: Thames and Hudson. 1995:126). Since the old days many monks and care-takers of religious statues in Angkor Wat have come from the nearby villages. Despite the fact that these villagers were moved to the west of Angkor Wat in 1962 and in 1991 to Dai Thmei village ភូមិដៃថ្មី near Siem Reap, many were unable to make a living there and returned to their old village sites where they had rice fields and fruit trees, and close to the monasteries with their ancestors' ashes and their memories of the past.

ANGKOR THOM WITH MORE COMPLEX SOCIO-ECONOMIC RAMIFICATIONS

Angkor Thom, the city of Jayavarman VII, lies to the north of Angkor Wat. Because of the nature of its social space, the relationship between the local population and the city is more complex. Some villages trace their origins to the royal court of Angkor Thom, whose people have had customary rights to cultivate some of the land inside the city gate and its moat, and collect forest products, including fruits and resin.

In the memory of senior villagers, villages existed inside the ancient city at some point of time. Kôk Ta Tru village ភូមិតែកតាត្រូ was in the east of where Preah Se-ar Metrei monastery វត្តព្រះសីហារ្យមេត្រី is presently located. Srah Srei village ភូមិស្រះស្រី (or some called it Angkor Thom village ភូមិអង្គរធំ) was located in the east of Srah Srei or the Women's Pond within the royal palace compound. Baoeng Ta Trau village ភូមិបឹងតាត្រៅ existed to the west of Bapuon. Some also remember having seen several huts at Baoeng Senthmie and Baoeng Thom where traces of human habitation can be found.

Concerning Kôk Ta Tru, one senior monk of Wat Tep Prânâm វត្តទេពប្រណិម្យ from Angkor Krau village ភូមិអង្គរក្រៅ mentioned that his grandfather – Ta Kriel តាក្រឿល – used to live there during the period of Siamese control and gave special magical protection for the Siamese commander. They say that the commune chief was murdered by a robber in his house. This incident and the French made the villagers leave Angkor Thom to live elsewhere. However, during the Sihanouk period, some villagers returned to build huts there and looked after their old fields. Ta Pruoch តាប្រូច was said to have been the last person to live in Kôk Ta Tru; he had no children, and his wife had died before him. About thirty years ago he died at an age around 90 years old, after moving to Kôk Doung village which lies immediately on the south-east bank of the moat of Angkor Thom. Ta Pruoch used to cultivate rice in Baoeng Ta Tru បឹងតាត្រូ or Lake of Grandfather Tru but since 1970 no one has cultivated it because of war and bad soil conditions.

Those who used to live near Srah Srei are regarded as the descendants of Angkor kings who were, according to the village legend, expelled to Krau Angkor ក្រៅអង្គរ or outside Angkor where a village called Angkor Krau ភូមិអង្គរក្រៅ has been established and still exists. One legend tells of an illicit love affair between a princess and a subordinate of the king, as the result of which the princess was expelled

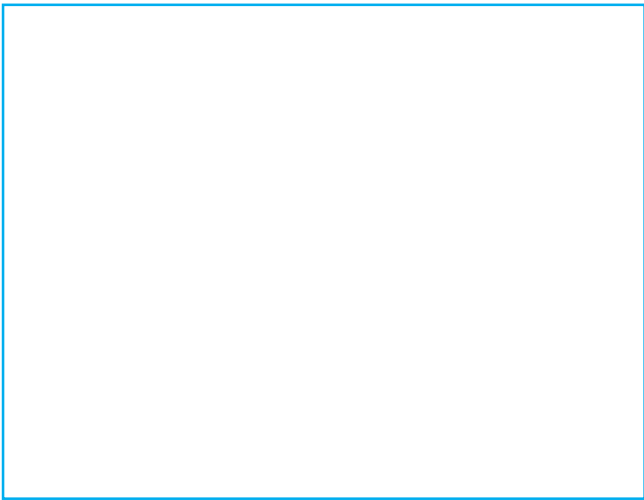
from Angkor with Ta Uan តាអ៊ូន or Grandfather Uan. She gave birth to a child or twins in Prasat Ta Uan which had allegedly been built by Ta Uan and stands in the west of Angkor Krau village. Prasat Ta Uan has a nickname “Prasat Leak Kon” បាសាទលាក់កូន or Ancient Temple to Hide a Child. This child or children are believed to be the ancestors of the villagers of Angkor Krau.

Another legend related to the ancestors of Angkor Krau village who was expelled from the royal palace of Angkor Thom is Thnanh Chey ធីនញ៉ាយ, or Ton Chey ទន់ជ័យ as more commonly known among the population, who was the advisor of the king. Ton Chey was evicted by the king to Krau Angkor having outwitted and mocked the latter. One part of the north-west moat of Angkor Thom which lies in the south part of Angkor Krau village is called Trâpeang Ta Chey ត្រពាំងតាជ័យ or Pond of Grandfather Chey (meaning ‘victory’). Angkor Krau was said to have been called Phum Achey ភូមិអាជ័យ meaning ‘Village of a Victor.’ The Ton Chey story is written on ancient palm scripts stored in monasteries as well as having been taught at school

throughout the modern history of Cambodia except during the Pol Pot regime, and the Hun Sen Government is planning to reintroduce this story in a school text book shortly.

of their relatives and descendants can be found in Angkor Krau village, Kôk Ta Chan village ភូមិតោកតាច័ន to the south-west of Angkor Thom, and Kôk Beng village ភូមិតោកបេង to the west of Angkor Thom. Rice cultivation and the exploitation of forest products, as well as grazing rights, were banned by the Heritage Police in the year 2000, just before the celebration of Khmer New Year. No alternatives were provided to the local community.

Some of the people who are known descendants and relatives of Ta Nak, Suong, and Kom have had in the past exclusive rights to pick mangoes, sugar palm and coconuts from the area around Srah Srei. They have also inherited rice fields inside Angkor Thom, namely Srae Ta Tuot ជ្រៃតាទួត or ‘Ricefield of Grandfather Tuot’ to the east of Prasat Ta Tuot, and Baoeng Senthmie បឹងសិនធូរ or ‘Senthmie Lake’ to the south-west of the royal palace ground. Some



The relationship of Angkor Krau and their ancestor’s original land, Srah Srei, did not cease in the Angkor period. One of the villagers, who works as a labourer for the World Monuments Fund’s restoration project at Preah Khan, is a known descendant of kings. His grandfather, Ta Nak តាណាក់, and Nak’s two sisters called Suong ស្លុង and Kom គាំម៉ុ, were remembered by some of older villagers of Angkor Krau to have lived near Srah Srei around fifty years ago. Ta Nak was said to have been related to King Angkor Yaem and worked in his court until the time of the Siamese occu-

One family from Angkor Krau headed by a grandson of Ta Nak and two families from Kôk Ta Chan village were also said to have cultivated the fields between Prasat Suor Prat and the Royal Terrace during the French Protectorate.

From 1970 to 1973 when Angkor was a battlefield between the Khmer Rouge and the Lon Nol government, approximately 30,000 to 40,000 people moved into Angkor Thom from their villages and stayed in the area from the North Gate down to the south of the Bayon temple.

Baoeng Ta Trau village ភូមិបឹងតាត្រៅ lay next to a lake with the same name to the west of Bapuon. A villager of Kôk Ta Chan, whose grandfather – Ta Meas តាមាស – was said to have also lived inside the royal court in Angkor Thom, from whom he inherited part of rice fields in Ta Tuot and Senthmie as well as Yieng trees around Senthmie. According to him, some people who had lived near Srah Srei moved to the area of Baoeng Ta Trau after the expulsion by the French, then continued to move to Baray. According to another grandson of Ta Meas who lives in Kôk Beng, Ta Meas's wife was a first cousin of Ta Nak. Baray villagers have mostly moved to Kôk Beng village recently because of water problems. Another family of Kôk Ta Chan related to Ta Meas had cultivated rice in Baoeng Ta Trau until last year.

Baoeng Thom បឹងធំ or Large Lake which lies near the south-west corner of Angkor Thom has been cultivated by some families from North Teaksen village ភូមិទក្សិណខាងជើង (administered by Trâpeang Seh village chief in Dai Thmei village) and some families from Kôk Ta Chan village until the recent ban. It seems that the inheritance of this land was more recent. According to one informant, Ta Suos តាសួស of North Teaksen and Ta Bin តាប៊ិន of Kôk Ta Chan who had worked as guards of Bayon asked the French to allow them to cultivate the land. The land had been cultivated by their descendants since then until last year.

A small pond called Trâpeang Kapaok ត្រពាំងកាប៉ោក which lies to the east of Baoeng Thom was first cleared and cultivated by one family of Trâpeang Seh around fifty years ago. The same family also owned some land in Baoeng Thom. The owner of this land sold it to three persons who live in Dai Thmei village just last year.

The moat of Angkor Thom has also been cultivated by the people whose villages are nearby. They are said to have inherited the land from their ancestors. Some say that these fields were royal rice fields, parts of which were given by the king to the people in exchange for 2kg of gold. The moat has different names according to the section. The following are the names of the different parts of the moat:

(1) Trâpeang/Srae Ta Nook ត្រពាំង/ស្រែតានូក (south) and

- Kôk Ta Nak គោកតាណាក់ (north) located from the north-east corner to Tvear Dai Chhnang ទ្វារដៃឆ្នាំង or the North Gate have been cultivated mostly by the villagers of Angkor Krau.
- (2) Trâpeang Ta Chey ត្រពាំងតាជ័យ (east) and Trâpeang Ampil ត្រពាំងអំពិល (west) located from Tvear Dai Chhnang to the north-west corner have been cultivated by the villagers of Angkor Krau.
- (3) Don Ân ជួនអន (north) and Trâpeang Snao ត្រពាំងស្មៅ (south) located from the north-east corner to Tvear Ta Kao ទ្វារតាការី or the West Gate have been cultivated by the villagers of Angkor Krau and Kôk Ta Chan.
- (4) Ta Kao តាការី located from Tvear Ta Kao to the south-west corner has been cultivated by the villagers of Kôk Beng, Kôk Ta Chan and Bakheng បាខែង.
- (5) Don Hok ជួនហុក (west) and Ta Set តាស៊ីទ (east) located from the south-west corner to Tvear Tonle Om ទ្វារទន្លេអូរ or the South Gate have been cultivated by the villagers of Kôk Ta Chan.
- (6) Ta Riet តារីត located from Tvear Tonle Om to the south-east corner has been cultivated by the villagers of Kôk Doung (east side of Tonle Om) and Bakheng (west side of Tonle Om).
- (7) Don Peou ជួនពៅ located from the north-east corner to Tvear Chey or the Victory Gate has been cultivated by the villagers of Angkor Krau and Kôk Ta Chan, and some by the heritage police for the last three years.
- (8) Srae Andaek ស្រែអណ្តើក located from Tvear Chey to Tvear Khmaoch ទ្វារខ្មោច or the Gate of the Dead has been cultivated by the villagers of Angkor Krau, Kôk Ta Chan and Kôk Doung.
- (9) Ta Riet តារីត (south) and Chong Reang (north) located from Tvear Khmaoch to the south-east corner has been cultivated by the villagers of Kôk Doung. Chong Reang used to be cultivated by four families of Kôk Ta Chan and one family of Kôk Doung but the former lost their land to Kôk Doung village during the communist regime since 1979. One family of Kôk Doung moved to Leang Dai village in Angkor Thom district, who continued to cultivate the land until the recent ban.

In addition to the rice fields, many villagers of Angkor Krau, Kôk Ta Chan, Baray - Kôk Beng, Kôk Doung, and Trâpeang Seh used to own Yieng trees with grey barks inside Angkor Thom, from which they tapped resin. The ownership of trees was passed down from one generation to another, but it could be sold from one family to another without cutting trees. The forests had thus been maintained by these villagers who cared for young trees, and the tapping of resin was conducted regularly in a controlled manner, and until recently the ownership of these trees has been mostly respected. Some families owned

more than three hundred trees while others less than a hundred. Likewise, the forest inside and outside Preah Khan ព្រះខ័ន had been maintained by the villagers of Angkor Krau until the recent ban. The villagers of Trâpeang Seh owned many Yieng trees in the east of Angkor Thom near the Siem Reap river. While some resin was used to make torches for home consumption and sometimes sold to their fellow villagers, an extra resin was sold mainly through middlemen from their village, Phnom Krom ភ្នំក្រែម, Siem Reap, Chriev ជ្រៃវៀវ or Puok ពួក to business people or fishermen in Tonle Sap. The other people went to Siem Reap to sell resin directly at a market or to fishermen in Phnom Krom. The income from the sale of resin constitutes an important portion of supplementary income for these families whose main occupation is rice farming. Unfortunately many large trees in and around Angkor Thom were felled from 1979 to 1989 by both Cambodian and Vietnamese soldiers.

Besides the inherited land and trees in Angkor Thom, the local population in general used to collect other natural materials that Angkor Thom could offer them, before the practice was banned. These included firewood, rotten trees and resin to make torches, bark to make joss sticks, vines, rattan, wild potatoes, edible insects, herbal medicine, fish, crabs for fishing, and birds. It also provided their cows plenty of grass to eat.

Apart from the socio-economic importance of the ancient city to the local population, the religious and spiritual importance has been enhanced since seven monasteries were reconstructed there in the 1980s. The only monastery which has not been reconstructed was the one which used to exist at the west of Preah Ngok Vihear ព្រះង៉ោកវិហារ around 1948/9. In the latter half of the 1990s some monks gathered to live near Preah Pitu, who are mostly dedicated to meditation. It is not really considered as a monastery since there has been no ordination of monks, but a meditation centre. With the exception of Wat Prampil Lveng វត្តព្រំល្វែង, all the other six monasteries are headed by monks from nearby villages, i.e. four from Angkor Krau, one from Trâpeang Seh and the other one from Kôk Beng. Many of the monks who stay in these monasteries and their clients are equally from the nearby villages, in addition to people from Siem Reap and other provinces.

The caretakers of Buddha statues at the Bayon temple and Preah Ngok Vihear are among the eight-precept followers of the local community. The majority of the people are again from Angkor Krau village.

Many prominent Angkorean monuments and temples are surrounded by interesting folktales and legends, which enrich the mind of the local population, and provide good explanations about how and when they came to be built and the reasons for

the names and specific features.

Another important relationship between the Angkor monuments and local population is that the latter has provided important labour forces for the restoration work conducted by the Angkor Conservation Office (ACO) led by French managers from the beginning of the twentieth century to 1972 (some continued even after the departure of the French) and new and renewed efforts to restore or conserve them in the 1990s. Some of the labourers might even be descended from the original constructors of Angkor monuments: at least the majority of former ACO workers among them demonstrate their sense of responsibility to pass down 'their' heritage to the posterity in better conditions while all recognise the universal value of the heritage. It is interesting to note that the chief monks of six monasteries in Angkor Thom except Wat Prampil Lveng and many achar អាចារ្យ (intermediary between monks and lay persons to officiate religious ceremonies) and their assistants used to be restoration workers of ACO. This situation in Angkor is considered fairly unique in the world: once physical labourers to conserve cultural heritage, they are now preservers of spiritual and moral life as well as quiet observers and serious critics of today's conservation work.

CONCLUSION

The people of Angkor have many contenders for their social space in Angkor. Ever since Angkor was designated as 'Park' at the beginning of the twentieth century and more recently after having been inscribed on the World Heritage List, local inhabitants have been increasingly pushed out of 'the Angkor Park' as 'exploiters of natural resources,' without proper research having been conducted to understand the context of their 'exploitation.' Angkor is not only a heritage site for the nation, region and world but also for the local community. It is also a 'Living World Cultural Heritage Site,' meaning that the local community is expected to take active roles in the conservation work and management of 'their' heritage site and not to be excluded or disadvantaged by 'living' in the site. Through this research I attempt to demonstrate the important aspects of the relationship between the local people and Angkor heritage site from a variety of angles and time span, and examine the catalyst and processes of change, to fill in the gap in our understanding of the whole 'social space' of Angkor. In this article, I focused mainly on the traditional relationship between 'the site and people' to provide the readers some 'food for thought.'

ការស្រាវជ្រាវផ្នែកនវវិទ្យាសង្គម ស្តីអំពី
“ប្រជាពលរដ្ឋខ្មែរ”
ចិត្តសាស្ត្រនៃវប្បធម៌និងវិញ្ញាណប្រតិបត្តិការពលរដ្ឋ
 (ដោយ កេតូ មីយ៉ូរ៉ា)

ប្រាសាទអង្គរវត្តគឺជាវប្បធម៌ដ៏មានមរតក តំបន់ ជាតិ និង ពិភពលោក ដែលមានការប្រកួតប្រជែងគ្នា មិនឈប់ឈរពីសំណាក់អ្នក ស្រាវជ្រាវជាច្រើនដែលបានបង្ហាញ និងផ្សាយនូវសញ្ញាណ និងបរិយាកាស សង្គមដោយឡែកៗ របស់ពួកគេ ។ បរិយាកាសសង្គមអង្គរត្រូវបានប្រើប្រាស់ តាមវិធីផ្សេងៗគ្នាដោយអ្នកប្រកួតប្រណាំង ផ្នែកស្រាវជ្រាវផ្សេងៗគ្នា ។ សញ្ញាណប្រពៃណីអង្គរត្រូវបានបង្កើតឡើងដោយអ្នកគ្រប់គ្រង និង អ្នកមាន អំណាច ទាំងខ្មែរ ទាំងបរទេស ជាយូរអង្វែងមកហើយ ។ ឯសញ្ញាណ និងទស្សនាទានដែលអ្នកស្រុកបាន ប្រកាន់ខ្ជាប់នោះ យើងដឹងបានតិចតួចនៅ ឡើយ ។

តាមរយៈការស្រាវជ្រាវថ្នាក់បណ្ឌិតរបស់ខ្ញុំ ខ្ញុំនឹងប្រឹងប្រែងស្ថាបនា អង្គរតាមទស្សនៈអ្នកស្រុក និងបំភ្លឺអំពីការយល់ដឹងអំពីជីវិតរបស់គេជុំវិញ ទីតាំងបរិវេណអង្គរ តាមរយៈជំនឿសាសនា និង វិស័យសេដ្ឋកិច្ចសង្គម។ ដោយឡែក ខ្ញុំបានពិនិត្យនូវទំនាក់ទំនងជាប្រពៃណី រវាងអ្នកស្រុក និង វិសាលភាពសង្គមអង្គរ គឺអ្វីដែលជាការលើក និងដំណើរការ ប្រែប្រួល និងតើអ្នកស្រុកយល់ដឹង និងដោះស្រាយរាល់ស្ថានភាពប្រែប្រួល និងបញ្ហា ចោទឡើងយ៉ាងណា? ។ ក្នុងប្រតិបត្តិការនេះ ខ្ញុំកំណត់ការពិភាក្សារបស់ខ្ញុំ ចំពោះការទំនាក់ទំនងជាប្រពៃណី រវាងប្រជាជនក្នុងស្រុក និងសង្គមអង្គរ ហើយគ្រាន់តែគ្របដណ្តប់តំបន់ជុំវិញអង្គរ និង អង្គរធំប៉ុណ្ណោះ ។

ចំពោះសហគមន៍ក្នុងស្រុក និងប្រជាជនកម្ពុជាទាំងមូល ដំបូង ឡើយអង្គរគ្រាន់តែជាកន្លែង ជាទីសក្ការៈបូជាខាងជំនឿ និងសាសនាមួយ ប៉ុណ្ណោះ ។ ប្រាសាទអង្គរមិនគ្រាន់តែតំណភ្ជាប់សាសនាព្រហ្មណ៍ ឬ សាសនាព្រះពុទ្ធប៉ុណ្ណោះទេ ក៏ប៉ុន្តែជាលំនៅដ្ឋាននៃព្រលឹងអភិបាលហៅថា អ្នកតានិងបងបត់ ឬ អារក្ខទេវតាជាម្ចាស់ប្រាសាទបុរាណទៀតផង ។ ជាពិសេស អង្គរវត្ត ជាកន្លែងតំណាងអោយតំលៃស្មារតីខ្ពស់ និងជាទីមិច្ឆាបដី ឧត្តុងឧត្តមនៃជាតិកម្ពុជា ។ លើសពីនេះទៀត មនុស្សជាច្រើនក៏ទទួលស្គាល់ ផងដែរនូវតំលៃជាសាកលនៃកេរ្តិ៍មរតកអង្គរចំពោះសហគមន៍ ដ៏ទូលំទូលាយ ក្រៅដែន ស៊ីម៉ាណែនជាតិខ្លួន ។

ក្នុងសម័យសង្គ្រាមនាដើមទសវត្សរ៍១៩៧០ ប្រាសាទជាច្រើននៅតំបន់ អង្គរ និង អង្គរធំ បានក្លាយទៅជាទីជ្រកកោន របស់អ្នកស្រុក ។ ពេល ចារឹកមកដល់ប្រជាជនមួយចំនួនក៏បានរស់នៅក្នុងបរិវេណ តាមបណ្តោយ គូ ជុំវិញប្រាសាទ អង្គរវត្តដែរ ហើយអង្គរធំ ក៏មានភូមិជាច្រើន ប៉ុន្តែអ្នកស្រុកទាំងនេះ ត្រូវបានចារឹក បណ្តេញអោយទៅរស់នៅខាងក្រៅវិញ។ អ្នកដែលធ្លាប់រស់ នៅជិតខាងប្រាសាទអង្គរវត្ត ត្រូវបានគេជំនឿសចេញទៅ នៅកន្លែងផ្សេង ចំនួន ពីរលើក ប៉ុន្តែអ្នកស្រុកខ្លះបានបន្ត រស់នៅ ឬអ្នកខ្លះទៀតបានវិលត្រឡប់មករស់នៅទីតាំង ភូមិចាស់ ដែលសព្វថ្ងៃយើងឃើញមានស្រែ ចំការ ច្បារដំណាំ និងអនុស្សាវរីយ៍វិយកុមាររបស់ពួកគេ នៅសេសសល់នៅ



ឡើយ ។ វត្តអារាមទាំងឡាយនៅអង្គរវត្ត និងអង្គរធំ បានបំរើធ្វើជា មជ្ឈមណ្ឌលសំរាប់ការសិក្សាអប់រំ និងសកម្មភាពផ្នែកវប្បធម៌ សង្គមផ្សេងៗ។ ព្រះសង្ឃ អាចារ្យវត្ត អ្នកថែរក្សារូបចំលាក់ ផ្សេងៗ និង កម្មករជួសជុល ភាគច្រើន គឺជាមនុស្សមូលដ្ឋាន ។ រឿងព្រេង ខ្លះដែលអ្នកស្រុកបាននិទាន អាចអោយយើងដឹងអំពីរាជវង្សានុវង្ស នៃព្រះមហាក្សត្រ អង្គរធំ ។ កូនចៅណាដែលគេដឹងថាជាបង្កើនស្រឡាយ ស្តេច គេមានសិទ្ធិបេះ ឬរើសផ្លែឈើនៅជិតស្រះស្រីក្នុងរាជវាំងអង្គរធំ ហើយក៏ជាម្ចាស់កម្មសិទ្ធិដី ស្រែមរតកជាច្រើន កន្លែងទៀតនៅបរិវេណ ទីក្រុងបុរាណនេះ ។ អ្នកស្រុក នៅភូមិជិតខាងជាច្រើន ក៏មានដីស្រែ ជាកម្មសិទ្ធិជាច្រើនដែរ នៅក្នុង បរិវេណនៃអង្គរធំនេះ ។ មិនតែប៉ុណ្ណោះ ដើម្បីយើងនៅអង្គរធំ ប្រាសាទ ព្រះខ័ន និងតំបន់នានាជុំវិញប្រាសាទនេះ ក៏ជាកម្មសិទ្ធិរបស់អ្នកស្រុកខ្លះ ដែលបានប្រកបរបរស្វាមីដើមឈើយកដំ ធ្វើចន្ទុះ ឬ ដើម្បីរកប្រាក់ចំណូល បន្ថែមលើការធ្វើស្រែរបស់គេ ហើយថែម ទាំងបានរក្សានូវព្រៃឈើផង។ គេបានប្រលែងគោ ក្របីរបស់ខ្លួន អោយស៊ីស្លោយ៉ាងសប្បាយ នៅក្នុងព្រៃ អង្គរធំ និង ព្រៃផ្សេងៗទៀត ។ ទាំងនេះគ្រាន់តែជាសកម្មភាព ប្រពៃណី សំខាន់មួយចំនួន ដែលអ្នកស្រុកនៅ អង្គរបានអនុវត្ត តែសកម្មភាពទាំងនេះ ត្រូវបានគេរំលងបេតិកភ័ណ្ឌ បានធ្វើការហាមឃាត់ចាប់ពីខែមេសា ឆ្នាំ ២០០០ នេះ ដោយឥតបានផ្តល់អ្វី ផ្សេងជាមធ្យោបាយជំនួសឡើយ ។ កាលពីអតីត ក៏មានការហាមប្រាមខ្លះដែរ តែពុំមានធ្វើឡើងទាំងគំហុក និង ឥតគិតក្រែងបែបនេះឡើយ ។

អ្នកស្រុកនៅអង្គរ បានទទួលនូវអ្នកប្រកួតប្រជែងជាច្រើនក្នុង វិសាលភាពសង្គមរបស់ពួកគេ ។ ចាប់តាំងពីអង្គរ ត្រូវបានគេដាក់ងារជា ឧទ្យាននៅដើមសតវត្សរ៍ទី២០ និងក្រោយពេលបានបញ្ចូលទៅក្នុងបណ្តី បេតិកភ័ណ្ឌពិភពលោក នាពេលថ្មីៗមក អ្នកស្រុកក៏ត្រូវបានជំនឿសចេញ កាន់តែច្រើនពី “ឧទ្យានអង្គរ” ដោយចាត់តែថាជា “ជនកេងប្រវ័ញ្ច” ធនធានធម្មជាតិ ប៉ុន្តែឥតមានធ្វើការស្រាវជ្រាវសមរម្យ ដើម្បីស្វែងយល់អំពី បរិបទនៃ “អំពើកេងប្រវ័ញ្ច” របស់ពួកគេឡើយ ។ អង្គរមិនគ្រាន់តែជា ទីរម្យនីយដ្ឋានមរតកសំរាប់ជាតិ តំបន់ និង ពិភពលោកប៉ុណ្ណោះទេ ប៉ុន្តែ ថែមទាំងជាកេរ្តិ៍ដំណែលនៃសហគមន៍អ្នកស្រុកទៀតផង ។ លើសពីនេះទៀត អង្គរគឺជា “រម្យនីយដ្ឋានមរតកវប្បធម៌មតៈនៃពិភព លោក” មានន័យថា ជាសហគមន៍អ្នកស្រុក និងបំពេញនូវទិដ្ឋភាពសកម្មរបស់ខ្លួនក្នុងកិច្ចការអភិរក្ស និងការគ្រប់គ្រងរម្យ នីយដ្ឋានមរតករបស់គេ ហើយពួកគេនឹងមិនត្រូវ បដិសេធឬជំទាស់ដោយគ្រាន់តែរស់នៅក្នុងបរិវេណទីតាំងនោះឡើយ ។

តាមរយៈការសិក្សាស្រាវជ្រាវនេះ ខ្ញុំមានបំណងស្រាយបំភ្លឺនូវកត្តា សំខាន់ៗនៃទំនាក់ទំនងរវាងអ្នកស្រុក និង រម្យនីយដ្ឋាន មរតកអង្គរតាមទស្សនៈផ្សេងៗ និងរយៈពេល ហើយធ្វើ ការពិនិត្យមើល កាតាលីករ និង ដំណើរការប្រែប្រួល ដើម្បីបំពេញបន្ថែមនូវកង្វះខាតនៃការយល់ដឹងរបស់យើង លើវិសាលភាពសង្គម ទាំងមូលនៃអង្គរ ។

ក្នុងប្រតិបត្តិការនេះ ខ្ញុំបានផ្តោតជាចំបង ទៅលើទំនាក់ទំនង ជាប្រពៃណីរវាង “ទីស្ថាន និងប្រជាជន” ដើម្បីផ្តល់ជូន ជាចំណីអាហារដល់មិត្តអ្នកអាន ។