

Glimpses of Contemporary *Dandabhukti*

Pijushkanti Sarkar
State Govt. Employee

A Passage to *Dandabhukti*

Dandabhukti was a prominent territorial sub-division of Ancient Bengal during the period of 6th Century A.D. to 12th Century AD that drew attraction of the historians like Acharya J. N. Sircar (1870-1958) R. D. Banerjee (1885-1931), Dr R. C. Majumder (1888-1980), Dr. D. C. Sircar (1907-1985) and others who tried to discover epigraphic pasts and the events of the ancient times of a proud Bengal to glorify the Bengali as a race with special characteristics of its own. *Bhashacharya* Suniti Kumar Chattopadhyaya (1890-1977) on the other hand tried to interpret the epigraphic discoveries of ancient Bengal in the light of Indian History from the holistic point of view.

Ancient *Rarh* or *Radha* region was divided into several smaller regions – *Kankagrambhukti*, *Bardhamanbhukti* and *Dandabhukti*, as parts of the *Radha* division. It is very much interesting to learn that the area under discussion was an integral part of that Gauda-Banga region which was a shadow zone to northern Indian society. The earliest reference to Bengal and Bengali speaking people contained in the text viz. *Aitareya Aranyak* written between 700 and 600 BC was indifferent to the instant society in terms of culture and civilization. ‘For a long time the river *Gandaka* of Bihar was taken as the dividing line between civilization and barbarism and the Aryans were advised to avoid the area to its east as far as possible.. ..’ [Sen, Sukumar, 1978, vol1]

It is thus astonishing to learn as to how a non-Aryan people dominated Bengal (though not known in the name) comprising the Deltaic Ganges-*Radhas* region and extra Gangetic *prachina* Plateau region that remained neglected throughout the Greater *Aryabarta* [also that remained out of the limelight of the region “*Shorhasha Mahajanapada*” (Sixteen Great Settlements) of the Northern India] turned into region of interests with Buddhism and Jainism religions and then how rebel Buddhism and Jainism religious areas were converted into the Brahmanical settlements under the patronage of the kings of that time and it is also praiseworthy to learn as to how a settlement like *Dandabhukti* comprising a portion of the South *Radhas* and Orissa took its shape based on a national lifeline-like road passing through the western Bengal and Orissa in the environment of Buddhist culture. Classical Indian philosophers peeped into livelihood of greater Bengal and took the place of stories of *Chandal* Harischandra-Shaibya, Hiranyakashipu, Satyakam and so on in the life of Bengalis living in the greater Bengal while the scripts of *Charyapadas* were then being recorded on papers of *Toolat Patra*, *Bhurja Patra* used for Punthi (*Puthi*)-*Patra*.

Even before the invasion of the Central Asian Muslim leaders-turned-administrators at the dawn of the 13th century AD, the greater Bengal was divided into

small independent states like Gouda, Radha, Banga, Sumbha, Barendri, Pundravardhana, Bardhamana-bhukti, Kankagrambhukti, Harikel, Samatata whence Dandabhukti and Tamralipti went into oblivion. Famous laureate Dinesh Chandra Sen mentioned the whole region of ancient Bengal as *Brihat Banga* (Greater Bengal). As far as the epigraphic study goes, before a period of one hundred year of the *Gauda's* emerging as a great settlement under the Guptas, *Dandabhukti* settlement came into limelight.

The Region Known to be *Dandabhukti*...

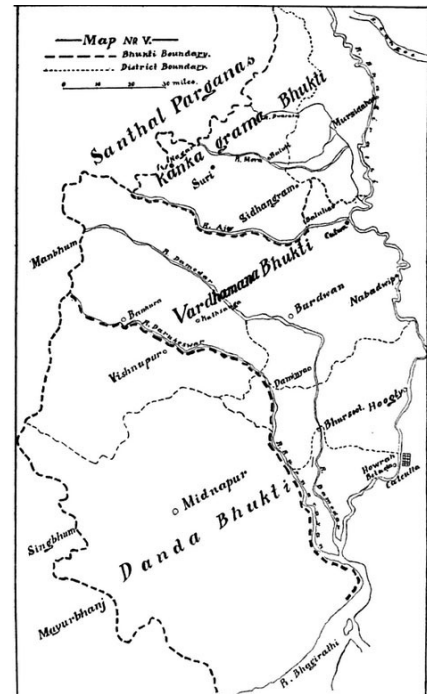
On the basis of evidences collected from different sources an outline of the state *Dandabhukti* can be drawn in the light of a map area comprising South-West of Bengal especially the South-Western part of modern Midnapore (undivided) District and a part of Balasore District of Orissa. The memory of *Dandabhukti* is survived in folklore, story and historical writings of Dantan. Different authors have also put stamp of validity of such acceptance.

Dandabhukti was an ancient and medieval territory spread across what are now Bankura, Hooghly, Paschim Medinipur and Purba Medinipur districts in the Indian state of West Bengal. More specifically, “the land lying south of Rupnarayana-Darakeshwar River i.e. Southern half of Bankura District, a piece from the western part of Hooghly District and the entire Midnapore District formed *Dandabhukti*.” JRAS 1935 January) A map is enclosed herewith as a ready reference.

We get the epigraphic information from the twin Midnapore copper-plates of Sasanka in respect of a independent feudatory state known as *Dandabhukti* in the southern part of Midnapore District from the 7th Century A.D. Feudatory (*Samanta*) *Maharaj* Somadutta and *Mahapratihar* Shubhakirti were its rulers (feudatory) under Sasanka like a full moon. The Gauda king Sasanka captured *Dandabhukti*, *Utkala kingdoms* and the *Kangoda* kingdom of Ganjam District (Andhra). Thence the *Shailodbhaba* kings ruled the *Kangoda* kingdom as feudatory rulers under Sasanka.

Two copperplates grants of *Bhaumakara* queen refer to *Dandabhukti-mandala* as being attached to the Uttara Toshali and having contained *Tamala-Khanda* and *Dakshina-Khanda* Districts. These two districts have been identified with *Tamlook* and *Dakinmal* respectively which are also mentioned in the Mughala Revenue Accounts of Midnapore District.

Komboja rulers of *Dandabhukti* Mandala recorded in Irda Copperplate (10th Century AD) that the said area was included in Bardhamanbhukti under their reign. In



Ramcharita of Sandhyakar Nandi the area was mentioned and its ruler Joya Sinha has also been referred to as feudatory of Ramapala, the Pala king.

Eminent historian Mr. R. D. Banerjee (1885-1931) identified the *Dandabhukti* area with the southern part of Midnapore District wherein it is a plausible conjecture that the entire *Dakshina Radha* with a very small portion of *Uttara Radha* formed the *Bardhamanbhukti* and the south of the area came *Dandabhukti* though Hara Prasad Shshtri identified *Dandabhukti* with Bihar because the Tibetans called it Otantapuri and it is designated Advand Bihar by Muslim Historians.

From different available sources it is also evident that the locality of the contemporary *Dandabhukti* was known as *Danda* which was the headquarter of a *Bhukti* or *Mandala*, the origin of which is unknown. At its earlier time *Dandabhukti* was found to be a *Mandala* under *Bardhamaanabhukti* (UttarRadha).

In Odishan language 'Danda' means 'pathway'. There is from long past an ancient path (also known as Pilgrim Road or Ahalya Bai Road or Jagannatha Road) running across this ancient state from Radha (or probably from North -West India via Magadha) to *Utkaladesha* or *Kalinga* or *Orissa*. During Mohammedan (Sultani) period revolutionary social leader Chaitanyadeva moved to Nilaachala Puri (Jagannatha-Dham) from Nabadwipdham (Nadia) across this road many a time with loud delivery of *namasangkirtana* by his *Kirtana-singer* associates for the arousal as well as uniting the weary Bengal overruled by the invader-turned administrators from the central Asia. The holy territory (*Bhukti*) existing in between rivers Darakeshwara and Suvarnarekha rivers at the juncture of the Rarha and Utkaladesha might have acquired the name after the said Path.

It is also interesting to note that on the occasion of describing the said path Benoy Ghosh in his voluminous works '*Paschimbanger Sanskriti*' (*Second Volume*) has mentioned the name of a place in the instant territory presently famous for archaeological excavation of Buddhist Architecture viz. 'Mogalmari' wherein for the suffix Marh he meant 'Path' and the name of the place 'Mogalmarh-i' meant route of the Mughals once dominating force of the region over the Pathans. The Rajas of adjoining Narayangarh was titled as 'Marhi-Sultan' meaning 'Kings of Path' or Rajas of Badshahi Path.

In this connection Moulana Abdul Wah stated it thus, "...to interpret the word differently would be historically, geographically and philologically incorrect." (Notes on Archaeological remains in Bengal, *Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. 20) Nonetheless, the impact of the road running across the territory from the time immemorial over the economic, social and cultural life of the contemporary society of the land is very much illustrative.

However, journey through the contemporary Bengal is a very illusive matter indeed. During the contemporary period Sasanka was certainly the most dominant personality second probably only to Harshavardhana in that period of intense political and military activities. Sasanka ruled from Karnasuvarna (situated at Rajbadidanga of

present day Murshidabad District of West Bengal). Sasanka also moved southwards and conquered south-west Bengal and Orissa by throwing out the Mana kings, the conquer of the Guptas and moved up to Ganjam. Midnapore copperplates confirm that *Dandabhukti* and *Utkala* or *Odra* formed integral part of his dominion and was conquered before he set out further to South.

The present day Block headquarter Dantan situated at its (*Dandabhukti*) central position bears the memory of the said ancient and medieval settlement of Bengal.

According to some hearsay as recorded in the report of the British administrator (H. L. Harrison) of the District in 1873 , “some say that about 200 years ago *Chaitana Mohaprabu* on his way to *Juggernath* brushed his teeth here and from which circumstances it got the name Dantoon (tooth brush)..... ” .Though crude history, the story grows interests in our life.

The State and the Society

Likewise the remaining part of contemporary Bengal the socio-economic features of *Dandabhukti* as revealed from the contemporary archaeological royal documents of the region are of very much progressive character. Definitive information of ancient Bengal is available through inscriptions, coins, land grant records and other sources discovered from fourth century A.D. It is interesting to note that up to the seventh century A.D. there is no mention of peasant (Krishak) in the literature of Bengal, which indicates that Bengal economy was not dependent on land then. References of social and cultural mixing are available in the land grant scripts of the contemporary the Hindu kings of *Dandabhukti* before the emergence of independent king Sasanka.

As evidenced from Joyrampur copperplate (Balasore, Orissa) of the Bengali king Gopachandra (6th century A.D.) of Gauda-Banga, the king patronized Buddhist culture and society wherein there is news of purchase of *Svetvalika-vithi* for donating the same in favour of a religious institution *arya-vikshu sangha* to establish Buddhist monastery (*Vihara*) and subsequent maintenance thereof. It certainly proves dominance of *Mahayani* Buddhism in the said *Dandabhukti* area at that period of time.

It is furthermore interesting to note from the Copperplates of Gopachandra discovered from other parts of contemporary Bengal viz. Burdwan (West Bengal) and Faridpur (Bangladesh) that the same king donated lands in favour of Brahmins in other parts as well.

The subsequent land-grant scripts of Gouda-Banga proves Brahmanical favouritism of the contemporary rulers having their faith in *Puranic* like *Shaiva* cults though they were not indifferent to other religions as well .

As per land grant scripts in the twin Midnapore Copperplates of '*Parambhattarak*' and '*Maharajadhiraj*' Sasanka the King was '*Paramdaivata* (Admirers of God)' in personal life and according to his epigraphic texts any attempt of grabbing the said land by his future generations would be equivalent to killing of Brahmins which was a great sin

during King Sasanka's time. Might be the Brahmins were then endangered in society during that period of time. From the same epigraphic record we get information of administrative setup equivalent to present day Panchayat Samity manned by Brahmin-heads. Irda (Balasore, Orissa) Copperplates of Kamboja-king Nayapaladeva states that Brahmins and priests were employed in royal palaces.

It is thus clear that during the Gupta period it was customary to the rulers to donate lands to Brahmins and the same continued in all parts including *Dandabhukti* in *Gauda-Banga* till the Palas. Royal favors like this helped Brahmins in getting their hard dominance in the region. Modern social researchers explored five sects of worshippers in Indian Society viz.-*Baishnava* (worshippers of Bishnu), *Shaakta* (worshippers of Power), *Shaiva* (worshippers of Shiva), *Shoura* (worshippers of the Sun) and *Gaanapatya* (worshippers of Ganapati) and certainly they have faith in the *Shastras* like *Veda, Smriti, Purana and Tantra either*.

Another interesting mention of *Chandal Pusakarini* (Low-caste-Pond) in Egra Copperplate issued during the reign of King Sasanka proves existence of personal title of low-castes on land during that period. According to Dr. D. C. Sarkar the matter was uncommon in contemporary Indian social history indeed.

On Some Pertinent Questions

Now, some pertinent questions arise in the minds of researchers on the *Dandabhukti* settlement. In course of ongoing process of historiographical studies: *Is Tabira of Midnapore* Copperplate present day Debra? *Is Svetabalika* village of Irda Inscription present day Mogalmari Buddhist ruins? *Did Dandabhukti* linger from Kamboja rulers to Pala dynasty? Are the Bhumidaan Patra (Land grant writings) formats prototypes of the deeds of conveyance executed in modern Bengal even after the emergence of English as official language since 1835 A.D.? In the history of Midnapore, ancient Tamralipti was famous for Buddhist settlement. The archaeological sites discovered so far at Dantan, Tamluk and Bahiri are also very important sources of linked antiquities showing connections with 'Dandabhukti' and its Buddhist socio-cultural and economic status of the people. The Accounts of Hsuan Tsang also proves Buddhists dominance over the lands at the time of his journey. King Sasanka is also present in his text as anti- Buddha. It is also presumed that the neighboring state *Dandabhukti* was also on his route-chart. Interestingly, perhaps the Mughalmari excavations of Buddhist Monastery remnants will be throwing light on those destinations gradually. Another Chinese pilgrim Fa Hien during his visit to Bengal at the beginning of the fifth century found that Aryan culture had taken root in Bengal with numerous monasteries and Brahmanic temples in Tamralipta.

Though the Svetabalika village of Irda Inscription has been identified with villages of Balasore in Orissa, but the discovery of Buddhist Monastery at Mogalmari (Dantan) near the Bengal-Orissa border gives rise to the possibility of existence of the Svetabalika village of Irda Inscription at Mogalmari (Dantan). During Gopachandra's rule Dandabhukti seems to have been included the region north of the river Suvarnarekha in the Balasore District as well as the area round the present Dantan in Midnapore District.

This region was in the charge of his feudatory *mahasamanta maharaja* Acyuta and he donated Svetavalika *vithi* for establishing a Buddhist Monastery (Vihara) which seems to have been situated in this area. However, coming days will speak as to whether Mogalmari site of Buddhist ruins can be identified with Svetavalika *vithi* (Gram) or not.

Among the localities mentioned in different land grant scripts discovered so far, *Tabira Adhikarana* was probably the permanent administrative headquarter of *Dandabhukti* king Somadatta from where both the copperplates were issued. Presumably the said feudatory king Somadatta issued the Soro Copperplates discovered at the Balasore District in Orissa from the temporary camps established there. Dr. R. C. Majumder (1888-1980) has identified present-day Debra, a place about 15 miles *south-east* of Midnapore town as the aforesaid *Tabira* of Midnapore copperplate .

Though subject to detailed all-out study, it is also not hard to believe that present day Mouza Kotapada, JL No.27 of Dantan is Ketakapadrika village of Midnapore Copperplate wherein was situated the Kumbharapadraka village. The Mouza-Kotapada may have gained its present name after long degeneration. Certainly the matter requires in-depth studies.

Bare-eyed study of the epigraphic land grants written in Sanskrit language reveals that those were the forerunners indeed in format and style of writing of the present day deeds of conveyance of lands. Like the copperplate land transfer scripts, the description of donors and donees, grounds of such transfer, the description of land (as per schedule of administrative fiscal division of the rule of land for the time being in force) under transfer are still the integral parts of a present day deed. Experts in evolution of deeds of conveyance may comment on the matter. Meticulous study of the epigraphic scripts can reveal multifarious socio-economic and political information of the contemporary society.

Unlike historical stories, history of a place bears some basic differences on true-false rule. On this score, seemingly before reaching final decisions on the aforesaid points confirmatory test on true-false rule is a must. However, mention of one thing may in this regard also be done that apart from the proficient touch of the eminent historians in discovering the aforesaid unearthed socio-cultural history of the region under discussion, the positive role of one Bengali administrator of Midnapore District cannot be ignored and he is ICS Benoy Ranjan Sen of third decade of the last century.