

Relocating the Past of Ancient Dandabhukti in Dantan

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With the discovery of a gigantic monastery (60Mx60M)¹ by Prof. Asok Datta and his team from the Department of Archaeology, Calcutta University following the excavations undertaken in six phases from 2003-2004 to 2011-12, researchers and enthusiasts have once again become interested in the elusive region of Dandabhukti. A general survey of the region around the modern-day mufasil town Dantan reveals that the entire region is rich in archaeological artefacts and certain place-names still contain the names recorded in the inscriptions from the 7th century. This article attempts to provide a general survey of the archaeological sites of the region as per the available records and artefacts, explore the options of relocating the ancient places as mentioned in the inscriptions and record some observations relating to its history and culture.

Three Legends about Dandabhukti and Dantan

Historians sometimes draw upon two legends while writing about Dandabhukti and the Moghalmari site: the Tooth Chronicle of *Dathavamsa*, a Sinhalese text and the oral epic of Sashisena or Sakhisena, written down by the Bengali poet Fakirram in the 16th century and by the Odishan poet Pratap Ray in the 17th century. Besides these, there is another story relating to the origin of the name of 'Dantan' involving Sri Chaitanyadeb. Let us see whether they can be used as materials for explaining Dandabhukti and Moghalmari.

Tooth Chronicle and Dantapura of Dathavamsa

Dathavamsa, "founded on an older, and ...no longer extant Dalada-vaṃsa in Sinhalese, [written] by Dhammakitti of Pulasti-pura..in the latter part of the twelfth century A.D., tells of a pseudo-historical tale of the miraculous transfer of the tooth relic of Buddha from Kalinga to Srilanka by Hemamala and Dantakumar from the port of Tamralipta:

"āgamum-aturitā te paṭṭanam Tāmalittim."²

The location of the city of Dantapura or Dantapuri is described thus:

"Dantapure Kalingassa Brahmadattassa rājino."³

From the similarities in name with Dandabhukti and Dantan some historians⁴ think that Dantapur was or could be Dantan, the capital of Dandabhukti, while others locate it near Puri, Odisha (Puri<Dantapuri). Those who argue in favour of Dantan put forward that, had Dantapuri been near Puri, they would not have come to Tamralipta to sail for

¹ "...the plan of the monastery was a 60Mx60M square structure with entrance in the northern part, although currently it is concealed under the huge gateway of the second structural phase of the monastery." Unpublished report sent to Bhatter College via email, date?

² *Dathavamsa* by Ven. Dhammakitti, edited by R.D. Rhys Davids & R. Morris, JPTS 1884

³ Ibid.

⁴ Rajendralal Mitra, Nagendranath Basu and Jogeshchandra Basu. J.C. Basu discussed it at length in Chapter V, *Medinipur Itihas* (History of Medinipur), Kalika Press, Kolkata, 1328 (Bengali year).

Srilanka as they could go there right from the port near Puri. With the discovery of the Moghalmari Buddhist monastic complex, the idea was once again floated. This is encouraging point but it does not at all validate the logic. First, the similarity in name is accidental. Secondly, Dandabhukti, as is evident from the CPIs, arose as consolidation of regional power restricted with a small geopolitical entity from the 6th century onwards and it depended heavily on agrarian economy for its sustenance. And there is neither record, nor any possibility that it could be the capital of as large a kingdom as Kalinga. The story—even if taken to be containing historical information, tells of a story which involved big powers and Dandabhukti as a small kingdom (which might not have come into existence in 3-4 century AD) could hardly lay its claim to such miraculous relic as the tooth relic of Buddha. Then again, we find a reference to Meruparbat where the relics were hidden:

“**ratana**girinikuñje nāgarājam apassi

.....
abhigami bhujagindam **Merupāde** nipannam”⁵

‘Ratangiri’ and ‘Meru-parbat’ can refer to Ratnagiri or Udaygiri (what Xuanzang described as Pushpagiri) situated on hillocks than to any other monastery like the Moghalmari monastery. As for the couple’s going to Tamralipta, it can be explained through the argument that they could leave the capital in disguise more effectively from other port than from a port where their disguise would be hardly effective. Another interesting thing to note is the movement of the couple: Dantakumar, in disguise, goes to the southern country, hides the tooth-relic in the sand and returns to the city, joins his wife and together they reach the spot and after many troubles they reach Tamalittim:

Kusumasurabhicuṇṇākiṇṇahatthāhi niccam

sakutukam-anuyātā kānane devatāhi

acalagahanaduggam khepayitvāna maggam

agamum-aturitā te paṭṭanam Tāmalittim.

(Having travelled by a path rendered difficult by hills and forests, and eagerly followed by the gods of the woods, who had their hands filled with flowers and scented flower, they slowly arrived at the city of Tamalitti.)

If one is to believe the geographical locations, hills down to the southern country along the coast can only refer to the Eastern Ghats and this will indicate a place down the southern part of Odisha, which extended in the ancient times to modern-day Andhra Pradesh. In the case of Dantan as Dantapura, such a natural setting is unthinkable. However, the description can also be just rhetorical. So far nobody has questioned the authenticity of the description of the places written by a Sinhalese writer who must have relied on others for his account. Did the poet commit an error while marking the point of departure from Tamralipta?

So far no epigraphic record bearing the name of Dantapur has been found, while ‘Danda-bhukti’ dates from the 7th century AD and logically it must have got its name from ‘Danda’ (whatever its meaning might have been) and not from ‘Danta’ etc. For ‘Danta’ (or ‘Danta-pura’) is very unlikely to have degenerated in ‘Danda’, while it is very likely that

⁵ Dathavamsa.

after the decline and disintegration of Dandabhukti in the 12th century ‘Danda’ degenerated into ‘Dandou’, ‘Dantou’, ‘Dantoon’, ‘Danton’, ‘Dantan’ etc. But whatever the logic the present can afford now, the past is full of uncertainties and the future may have different interpretation to offer following new evidences.

The Legend of Sashisena or Sakhisena

The oral epic of the love-story between Sashisena and Ahimanikya was very popular in Bengal and Odisha, and there is still a person living on the border of Odisha who was a singer-performer of the story. N. N. Vasu in his survey reported the popularity of the story in this part and recorded it at length. But the question is: how far one can depend on such story while looking for a history of the region? In plain analysis, the story fails to confirm to anything historical in this region. First, the story is written in the mode of fairy-tale having the basic structure of adventure, love and fulfillment without having any reference to any specific place and time. The simple reason is that it was an orally circulated epic or ballad, which the minstrels could use very effectively at any place—from Odisha to Bengal. It came to be written down in the 16th century by a Bengali poet Fakirram. But that does not confirm that the story was created by a Bengali poet or that the story refers to a historical location in Bengal or that the king Bikramjit alias Pratapaditya was a historical character as presented was by N.N. Vasu⁶. The only vague historical element or connection, it might have, is perhaps a substitution or mixing of Sashilekha with Sashisena in folk memory. Sashilekha was a historical person who donated land for the construction of the Shaivite temple complex of Nanneshwara in somewhere in Dandabhukti-mandala which was being ruled by her husband, *mandaladhipati* Magalkalasa.⁷

In fact, the story seems to have originated in Odisha, more particularly somewhere in Sambalpur or Sonepur, in the 7-8th century as a story of miracle among some tribe. Later on it was developed by wandering minstrels into an oral epic. In Sonepur one can find a temple dedicated to Sashisena⁸, and it was built in the 20th century on the spot where its old temple stood. It has still preserved the motifs of the story relating it to the Tantric Shakti cult of the area. Historian Sudam Naik said,

“The temple was built as a memory of the eighth century eternal love story of Ahimanikya, son of a dewan and Sashisena, the princess. It was after the original temple fell that the king of Sonepur Biramitrada Singhdeo rebuilt the temple. It is a small temple, only about seven feet high.”⁹

It may be mentioned here that the story seems to have transmitted from Odisha with the migration of many people to this part of Bengal during the British rule. So the story

⁶ N.N.Vasu, *The Archaeological Survey of Mayurbhanj*, 1911.

⁷ Snigdha Tripathi, “Dandabhukti as Known from Inscriptions”, *Journal of the Asiatic Society*, Asiatic Society, Kolkata, 1997, p. 775.

⁸ More details can be found in the write-up “Tourist attractions in Sonepur-temple city; the second Varanasi of India” by Dr. Sanjib Kumar Karmee, *Delft University of Technology the Netherlands*, available at <http://kddfonline.com/2009/11/21/tourist-attractions-in-sonapur-temple-citythe-second-varanasi-of-india>

⁹ Quoted in “Love story decays on walls Storyteller temple finds no audience”, *The Telegraph*, Calcutta, March 16, 2012.

cannot be relied upon as a literary source of history. But strangely enough, the Moghalmari mound has officially got a sign-board now “Sakhisenar Dipi”.

Sri Chaitanyadeb and His Toothbrush

Another story was in circulation claiming the origin of the name of ‘Dantan’ to Sri Chaitanya’s toothbrush, which he was said to have thrown at Dantan on his way to Nilachal. Of course, Mahaprabhu had touched this part of Medinipur during his journey, but Dandabhukti or Dantan had existed long before Sri Chaitanya’s visit. The story is also a product of crude imagination exploiting the accidental connotation of a corrupted term ‘Dantan’ (from ‘Danda’ and ‘Dandabhukti’) which has no connection with the tooth-relic of Buddha or a toothbrush of Sri Chaitanyadeb.

Moghalmari and Early Historiography

It is rather strange that in spite of significant documentations more than hundred years ago not much attention was given to the Moghalmari site. A 19th century report of H. L. Harrison the district of Medinipur is reported to have contained the following:

“On the occasion of excavating earth to get out bricks and stones for the use of Rajghat Road under construction several magnificent remains of the old buildings have been discovered at Satdeula and Moghalmari, and bricks and stones, it is estimated have been dug out, numbering above 26 lakhs, and some crores yet lie buried under the ground.

From this it appears that the above place[s] were once the residence of the ancient Rajas and exceedingly populous.”¹⁰

Then Nagendranath Vasu wrote in 1911:

“By the side of the entrance into Mughalmari from the side of Danton is a mound generally called Pathcala of Cacisena. Completely lost in ruins now, it was at one time a big structure of oblong shape, measuring 120 ft from east to west and 110 ft from north to south. Hidden under its debris, and scattered all around are to be found heaps of large bricks; and elderly natives assert that formerly a larger quantity of this material was lying about in the heaps which the people of adjacent villages have since utilized for their private purposes. Even now over and along the road, half a mile in length, which runs from the gada of Cacisena to the ruins of the palace of Vikramjit in the heart of village are to be found remnants of brick-built structures”¹¹.

He wrote also:

Originally this plot was one mile square but it has now been covered into orchards and corn-fields save where the royal palace once reared its lofty head, and even

¹⁰ H. L. Harisson’s *Report on the Account of the District of Midnapore* (No. 207, 1873), quoted in Jogeshchandra Basu’s *Medinipur Itihas* (History of Medinipur), Kalika Press, Kolikata, 1328 (Bengali year), pp. 114-115.

¹¹ N.N. Vasu, *The Archaeological Survey of Mayurbhanj*, 1911, pp 111-112

here only doleful remains of its former glory do call forth a sigh and a tear from the spectator.¹²

Jogesh Chandra Bose brought out a comprehensive history on the district of Medinipur *Medinipur Itihas* in 1921 and the book contained loads of information and discussion on the antiquities of the district, especially on Dandabhukti. But no serious exploration work was taken up.

One local historian and journalist, Lalit Mohan Samanta understood the value of conservation of heritage. He made extensive survey of the villages, collected valuable artefacts and published the news about the findings in various mainstream newspapers. With the help of some local people he established a museum named “Dantapur Museum” and frequently invited archaeologists to Dantan to examine the artefacts collected by him. He completed the documentation of 10 statues through Certificate of registration of antiquities. Not only this, he also wrote a history of Dantan, which was not published during his life-time. In his manuscript, dated 1952 he intuitively anticipated the archaeological nature of Dantan:

“From the famous village of Moghalmari of Dantan I collected a Buddha statue of about 7 inches and kept in the Dantan Public Library and publicized the finding through newspapers...from the open fields and big ponds at different places of Dantan, it seems that a number of monasteries must have grown up...At the village of Moghalmari many ancient coins, belonging perhaps to the Gupta Period, were found at the time of excavating a small Stupa. I collected some of the coins. It is a matter of great regret that people, out of ignorance [of the value of the artefacts], are reported to be selling the coins...”¹³

He prayed to the concerned authorities for excavation, research and conservation with full-fledged documentation¹⁴, quite exemplary of his time from a distant rural place. But none paid any heed to the cry of a local historian and for the next fifty years the place remained in complete ignorance of the academic world.

Archaeology of Moghalmari

Professor Asok Datta and the Discovery of the Moghalmari Buddhist Monastery

In 1999 a team of experts, including Prof. Bratindra Nath Mukherjee and Prof. Asok Datta, from the Department of Archaeology, Calcutta University in search of the archaeological evidences of maritime trade¹⁵ of Bengal during ancient times and came to Dantan following the course the river Subarnarekha and heard of a large mound, lying at the village of Moghalmari, locally known as ‘Sakhisonar Dhipi’ and also “Sashisonar Dhipi”. After inspecting the “structural mound”¹⁶ and the village and some related artefacts, they

¹² Ibid p. 111

¹³ Unpublished manuscript, p. 16.

¹⁴ The author is in possession of the applications and documents.

¹⁵ Ashok Dutta and Rajat Sanyal, “Excavation at Moghalmari: A Pre-Pala Buddhist monastic Complex”, *Ebang Sayak*, Vol 38, 2012. P. 37.

¹⁶ Ibid.

were confirmed of its historical importance¹⁷ and decided to undertake excavation at suitable time.

In 2003 when Prof. Datta became the Head of the Department of Archaeology, he “immediately decided to undertake the excavation”. After that for about a decade, from 2003 to 2012, the Department under Prof. Datta conducted excavations at Moghalmari in six different phases and discovered a huge monastery, Buddhist Stupas, stucco figures and retrieved many artefacts. An extensive volume *Excavations at Moghalmari (2003-04 to 2007-08)* was published by the Asiatic Society in 2008. His final observation was:

“On the basis of archaeological evidences including paleography and art form/style, we can safely place the early monastery to 6th CE and as it stands unique in terms of Stucco decoration and decorative bricks, it can only be compared with the similar monasteries of Vikramsila, Nalanda, Paharpur, Mainamati etc. of India and Bangladesh.”¹⁸



Prof. Asok Datta (1947-2012)

The discovery of the monastery and the human settlement dating from the 6th century AD is significant for establishing the region around Dantan as the ancient Dandabhukti, for the monastic settlement now stands as a standard reference site lending support to future researches. But Prof. Datta’s sudden death in 2012 turned out to be a big setback for researches not only on Moghalmari but also on the entire region.

Excavation by the State Archaeological Directorate

In 2013 the Moghalmari site was undertaken by the government of West Bengal and the State Archaeological Directorate conducted a quick excavation under Dr. Amal Roy. Within a very short period, many artefacts were discovered: broken tablet of Buddha, gold-mixed coin and an ornament. The site came into headlines with the news of the discovery of a seal bearing the name of the monastery. Initial reading was reported to have been Sribandak Mahavihar.¹⁹ However, full report of the excavation has yet not been published and so not much can be said on this. The State Government has undertaken massive conservation project which is indeed very praiseworthy. It will certainly contribute to the overall socio-economic development of the entire area. It is necessary to

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ From Prof. Datta’s report “Excavation at Moghalmari(2011-2012)”, sent to the Principal, Dr. Pabitra Kumar Mishra via email. Dated?

¹⁹ Bartaman Patrika, January 19, 2014.

emphasize here that the entire Moghalmari village is an archaeological site. Dr. Rajat Sanyal commented: “It is evident from the excavations and the findings in different parts of the village and from the various artefacts gathered from all over the place that the entire village was the site of the monastery.”²⁰ So the entire village needs to be given special attention.

Locating Dandabhukti

As per the available historical records, Dandabhukti was a ‘Bhukti’²¹ in a kingdom or in geographical entity which was governed by subordinate rulers and sometimes independent rulers. –bhukti as fiscal division of an administered land is typical of Gupta



Map 1: Map provided in Bhattasali's article



Map 2: Dantoon as a port in Renell's map, 1776

²⁰ Quoted in Suhrid Shankar Chattopadhyay's report in *Frontline* "Unearthing a Culture", February 22, 2013. <http://www.frontline.in/arts-and-culture/heritage/unearthing-a-culture/article4372313.ece#test>

²¹ –bhukti as fiscal division of an administered land is typical of Gupta system. This was again a collection of 'vishaya's—which are like British districts/Zilla-s. Now a bhukti could have been named after a central city/town, e.g. Pundravardhana-bhukti, Shrinagarabhukti ('Shrinagara' means capital, here, Pataliputra), possibly Vardhamana-bhukti, or it could be named following feature-specificity, e.g. Tirabhukti (Tira, here is a river-bank, the river being the Ganga) name applied to mostly Mithila/Videha (& Vriji?). We don't know how 'Danda' portion was conceived. Danda is also a standard/rod (hence relates punishment). This could carry a sense of 'highway'/standard road (and not a bypass). In such a case 'Danda' was a feature-specific name. Garbled description of Dathavamsa might have confused some earlier episodes and introduced a 'Dantapura' here.

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The name must have been current during first quarter of 5th century when it is supposed that Vanga (a territory between Eastern Sea & Kapisha/ Kasai was finally annexed by the Guptas. What is interesting is that the territory South-East of Dandabhukti had Odravishaya and other *vishaya*-s. They had *vishayapati*-s/ *vishayi*-s (now Bishi-s), but no *-bhuki* at all.

Controversy regarding its location perhaps started with Haraprasad Sastri's identification of Dandabhukti with Bihar. While explaining the route of Chola invasion of Bengal as recorded in the *Tirumalai Inscription of Rajendra Chola*, he "identified Dandabhukti with Bihar, because the Tibetans called it Odantapuri and it is designated Advant Bihar by Muslim Historians"²². A. C. Banerjee in "The Chola Invasion of Bengal" argued in favour of locating it in the south-western part of Medinipur:

"That the Midnapore area has always been a source of anxiety to the rulers of Bengal at different periods of Indian History is borne out by subsequent events. When Bengal came under Muslim rulers, the Hindu kings of Orissa had to be always on their guard against sudden raids organized by the independent pathan rulers of Bengal. Again when Orissa was occupied by the Marathas, their mobile cavalry almost always came through Balasore and Midnapore to ravage the plains of Bengal. Therefore it is not unnatural to assume that there were ways of communications through this area between the two neighbouring provinces; and along one such road the general of Rajendra Chola might have led his forces". P.66o.

There always remains a chance of grave error in historical judgement based solely on phonological similarity. But it needs to be said here that at the time of Hara Prasad Sastri there was a dearth of historical evidences²³. Later on some copper plate inscriptions were found from Medinipur and Baleswar attesting to the location of the administrative centres of Dandabhukti in the south-western border of Bengal and/or in the Balasore district of Odisha and Snigdha Tripathy discussed them in details.²⁴ Dr. D. C. Sarkar wrote: "Perhaps Dandabhukti comprised the south-western portion of Medinipur and the

²² A.C.Banerjee, "The Chola Invasion of Bengal", Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain & Ireland, 1935, p.659.

²³ Among the inscriptions issued during King Sasanka's period Midnapore Copper Plate Inscriptions were discovered in 1937 and Egra CPI was found in 1983. Source: D. C. Sarkar, *Shilalekha-Tamrasasonadir Prasanga*, 2009 edition, pages 66 and 74

²⁴ Snigdha Tripathy

adjoining areas of Odisha”²⁵. There are, however, evidences that the Bhukti sometimes expanded its territory and sometimes it lost considerable portions at different periods of time when the rulers of Bengal and Orissa vied for this region located in a strategically important position. Prof. Sarkar wrote:

Many think that the present name of the place ‘Dantan’ carries the memory of Dandabhukti. But this idea does not seem linguistically valid.²⁶

Prof. Nihar Ranjan Ray wrote without any hesitation:

Dandabhukti was a famous town of west-southern Bengal. This town became famous as the administrative establishment of Dandabhukti and Dandabhukti-mandala. The thana of Dantan and the Dantan town bear the memory of ancient Dandabhukti.²⁷

And

Dandabhukti was a town which was administrative headquarters of the territory of same name. Dantan in Paschim Medinipur district is derived from the name of ancient Dandabhukti.²⁸

As for the view of Dandabhukti in its expanded form we have N. K. Bhattasali’s view that:

Land lying south of the Rupnarayan-Darakeshwar River, i.e, southern half of bankura district, a piece from the western part of Hooghly district, and the entire Midnapore district formed the Danda-Bhukti.²⁹

Dandabhukti might have enjoyed this expanded status. But as per the epigraphic records, it seems to have contracted to a small region after the fall of the Kamboja Pala rule with the death of Komboja King Dharmapala. We have a literary reference of Jaysimha who is claimed to have defeated a king of Odisha, Karna-Keshari, an unidentified king. But Ramcharita was written in praise mode and cannot be fully trusted. In other words, invasion of the Chola and Ganga kings routed the local administrative powers in the region and the subsequent Sena rule in Bengal did not allow much for Dandabhukti to rise again in prominence. Slowly the administrative power-centre of the region shifted to Mayurbhanj and Dandabhukti got lost into oblivion and whatever was left contributed perhaps to the making of modern-day Dantan.

As per the epigraphic and literary sources we come across two capitals or administrative centres of Dandabhukti—Tabira or Tabir during King Sasanka’s time and Priyangu from the time of the Komboja Pala kings. However, these places have not been properly identified yet. This article will put forward some options to explore for researchers.

²⁵ “সম্ভবত মেদিনীপুরের দক্ষিণপশ্চিম এবং উড়িষ্যার সন্নিহিত অংশ নিয়ে দণ্ডভুক্তি প্রদেশ গঠিত ছিল। (Translated by the present author) D. C. Sarkar, *Shilalekha-Tamrasasonadir Prasanga*, 2009 edition, page 68.

²⁶ “অনেকে মনে করেন, বর্তমান দাঁতন নামটি প্রাচীন দণ্ডভুক্তির স্মৃতি বহন করছে। Ahnē dīleiv i jōi-বিজ্ঞান সম্মত বলে মনে হয় না। (Translated by the present author) D. C. Sarkar, *Shilalekha-Tamrasasonadir Prasanga*, 2009 edition, page 68.

²⁷ Nihar Ranjan Ray, *Bangalir Itihas*, 1993 Edition, page 298.

²⁸ Ibid, p.?

²⁹ N. K. Bhattasali, “The New Shaktipur grant of Lakshmansena”, *JRAS*, 1935, p. 113)

Rulers of Dandabhukti and Dandabhukti-mandala

There is not much information regarding the rulers of the region. From few copper plate and stone inscriptions, Sandhyakar Nandi's Ramcharita and few coins, a list of the rulers is prepared below:

Independent Kings (Dynasty)	Feudatory Rulers	Administrative Centres in Dandabhukti	Epigraphic/Literary Sources
Gopachandra (c. 525-540) ³⁰	Bijayasena (Mahasamanta)	Unknown	I. Gunaighara Inscription II. Mallasarul Inscription
	Achyuta (Mahasamanta)	Unknown	Balasore CPI
Dharmaditya (c. 540-560) ³¹		Unknown	
Samacharadeba (c. 560-575) ³²		Unknown	
Shashanka (c. 600-625) ³³	Subhakirti	Tabir/a & Ektakaksha	1 st Medinipur CPI
	Somadatta Prakirnadas	Tabir/a & Ektakaksha	2 nd Medinipur CPI
			Egra CPI ³⁴
Harshavardhana (some time after Sasanka's death)			
The Bhauma-kara dynasty (736-940 AD) ³⁵			
Sivakara II- Unmattakesarin or Unmatto Singha ³⁶		Unknown	
Sivakara IV		Unknown	
Tribhubanamahadevi II ³⁷	Mangalkalasa	Unknown	
	Kottabhanja	Taravartta	
Komboja Dynasty of Priyangu			
Rajyapala (c. 980-1005) ³⁸		Priyamgu	
Narayanapala (c. 1005-30) ³⁹		Priyamgu	

³⁰ B. M. Morrision, *Political Centres and Cultural Regions in Early Bengal* (Tucson, 1970), pp. 159-60.

³¹ Ibid

³² Ibid

³³ D. C. Sarkar, *Shilalekha-Tamrasasonadir Prasanga*, 2009 edition, page 66.

³⁴ D. C. Sarkar opined that this area was not included in the region of Dandabhukti-mandala at that time.

³⁵ Talcher CPI(c. 855 AD) Snigdha 74-75

³⁶ *Snigdha Tripathi, "Dandabhukti as Known from Inscriptions", Journal of the Asiatic Society, Asiatic Society, Kolkata, 1997, p. 74-75.*

³⁷ Tribhubanamahadevi II Boud CPI, Snigdha 75

³⁸ D. C. Sircar, *Pal-Sen Yuger Vamsanucharit*, Sahityalok, Kolkata, revised edition, 2009, p.351

³⁹ Ibid, p. 35

	Nayapala (c. 1030-55) ⁴⁰		Priyamgu	1. Irada CPI II. Kalanda CPI
	Dharmapala (c.) ⁴¹		Unknown	Tirumalai Stone inscription (1025 AD)
Pala Dynasty				
	Mahipala I (c. 977-1027) ⁴² Rampal (c. 1072-1127) ⁴³	Jayasinha	Kakrajit?	<i>Ramacarita</i> by Sandhyakar Nandi
Eastern Ganga Dynasty				
	Anantavarman Chodaganga Deva (1077-1150)		Unknown	
	Kapilendra Deva (1434-67)		Unknown	Belda CPI

It is evident from the historical records that a number of dynasties and feudatory rulers had long-term establishments at different parts of the region of Dandabhukti.

Komboja Dynasty of Priyangu in Dandabhukti

Pala-s of Kamboja lineage at Dandabhukti vis-à-vis the Imperial Pala-s of Gauda and at least one offshoot of Kamboja king of Gauda (Kunjaraghatavarsha) has been discussed last time some 30 years by D. C. Sircar. As no new data is forthcoming, hardly anything dramatic can be added to his assertions, except re-interpreting existing data squeezed to yield something more.

D. C. Sircar considered Rajyapala, the first Kamboja of Dandabhukti as feudal planting by the Imperial Palas of Gauda in a similar line as Samudravarman of Kamarupa, as a pratyanta-nrpati of the Gupta-s during Samudragupta (~350 AD), and he assigned his period at ~980 AD. DCS considered Rajyapala of Gauda for (920-). Here Prof. Sircar is superseded by new data, he considered Narayanapala, father of Rajyapala directly after Surapala of Dharma-Deva line, and Pala territory was flooded by Mahendrapala (885-908) of Pratihara dynasty, North-Western adversary of the Palas. Nowadays it has been shown, Gauda had a Mahendrapala, earlier to the Pratihara one & another Gopala in Dharma's line, before Narayanapala. Thus Rajyapala cannot be placed earlier than ~930 AD, and he cannot rule much beyond ~965 AD. A plausible compromise may be found in D K Gangopadhyay's Intro to D. C. Sircar's *Pal-Sen Yuger Vamsanucharit* 2nd ed, 2009, as (932-964).

Moreover, his argument regarding start of Kamboja Rajyapala seems debatable; he placed it on 980, which on all account is certainly within the period of Mahipala I (977-1027)—

⁴⁰ Ibid, p 35

⁴¹ D. C. Sircar wrote “চোল সৈন্য কতক পরাজিত দন্ডভুক্তি রাজ ধর্মপাল কন্মোজ রাজবংশ সম্বৃত বলে মনে হতে পারে। f1bj j qtf1m1 p1j 21 IR1ne 1Lej hmj L1Wez” (*Pal-Sen Yuger Vamsanucharit* p. 101.). On the other hand, J.C. Basu in *Medinipurer Itihas* explained at length the literary figure Dharmapala of Dharmamangala and concluded: “We consider Dharmapala of Dandabhukti and Dharmapala of Dharmamangal the same person.” (“Bj1j d1bh1ktir dh1rp1l1 1 dh1rm1ng1l1 k1by1 dh1rp1l1k1 1k1i b1kt1 b1l1 b1b1c1n1 k1r1”), p. 118.

⁴² Ibid, p. 77

⁴³ D. C. Sircar, *Pal-Sen Yuger Vamsanucharit*, p.83.

this is reasonably fixed. If Rajyapala is to be related to Gauda monarchs in terms of political expediency why should he assume a name of a king who had long expired? The name should have been that of Mahipala. Prof. Sircar might have been influenced by the name of Nayapala of Kamboja lineage as a contemporary of his namesake in the Gauda monarchy. This compulsion has forced him to discount another name, Dharmapala (as a continuation of Nayapala, to be placed earlier to him) from the dynastic list.

Dharmapala was recorded as King of Dandabhukti, routed by Rajendra Chola's army in its North-Eastern Campaign during ~1021-2 AD. We think after this Kamboja dynasty here was gone, and polity here was reorganized on behalf of the Gauda administration rather flimsily. The route remained vulnerable militarily; Kalachuri Gangeyadeva/ Karna might have made many inroads through this "Danda", shaking the Gaudas further. Such a consideration would place Rajyapala of Kamboja junior contemporary of Rajyapala of Gauda, say at ~950-960 AD. His elder son Narayana may not last long, junior son, Nayapala's 14-15th RY can be placed in the first decade of 11th cent.

Identity of the Kamboja dynasty that ruled at Dandabhukti and at Gauda, at a slightly earlier date, has been discussed. Their inter-relationship, as well as possible relation with the Pala military aristocracy is also enquired into.

Most of the later, say from the second decade, inscriptions of Narayanapala of Gauda is confined in Bihar area and nowhere in the Varendra/ North Bengal. On the other hand Gauda monarch of Kamboja lineage cannot be placed after Rajyapala of Gauda. An inscription from North Bengal by one of his officers proved his possession there. The inscription suggests that the officer was by then promoted twice in his post, suggesting that Rajyapala's recovery over there happened quite early of his reign, we think it can hardly likely to be placed after ~940 AD.

In the same vein Rajyapala recovered many domains including one named 'Mlechchha'. It has been suggested that by 'Mlechchha' the poet might have meant the Muslims of Sind area, hence it should be poetic verbose at best. Interestingly, there was another Pala-line of Kings in contemporary Kamarupa (whom unfortunately local historians there consider to start at a period of first decade of 11th cent, ignoring all synchronism with Gauda & Vanga kings). That dynasty at Kamarupa claimed that they replaced a Mlechchha dynasty to revive the Bhagadatta dynasty.

Such a claim by Kamarupa kings was simply ignored outside their own domain. One of their kings Indrapala (~960-990) boasted of win over a Vanga king Kalyanachandra (975-1000), whereas Kalyana's inscription claimed of defeating a 'Mlechchha' king. Possibly Sylhet area was the bone of contention, and Kalyana succeeded in retaining it. This shows the Palas of Kamarupa could well be the required 'Mlechchha' of Rajyapala.

A Kamarupa king, Ratnapala of Brahmapala lineage, was claimed to have defeated Rajyapala of Gauda near the Ganges (the King's own inscription ignored to put the feat in his inscriptions, it was his grandson at a much later day when everybody was likely to forget the outcome, did it on his behalf). As Rajyapala really recovered the territory for good, it appeared that Kamarupa king in fact trounced the then Kamboja ruler at an earlier period. The ousted ruler, or his other scions, surrendered before Rajyapala, who now with the help of the Kambojas (and possibly with the help of Srichandra of Vanga) campaigned to wipe out the Kamarupa-'Mlechchha'-ruler, and wisely took the Kambojas

into his array of military aristocracy. One result was planting a Kamboja settlement as a border-guard at Dandabhukti, against any advancement from Kalinga side.

DCS has also shown that Srichandra of Vanga in his inscription of RY 5 (~930 AD) mentioned mysterious activities of Kambojas at Samatata (Comilla of SE British province of Bengal at present) just prior to his father Trailokyachandra's expedition over there. Srichandra ruled for 50 years, his son too ruled for a mature 25 years. This necessitates that Trailokya died rather young, not more than early middle stage of life. So we can say his activities at Samatata can be very well around ~920 AD, and Kamboja activity there cannot be placed much earlier. This can again happen if Kamboja rule is placed at Varendra and North Bengal immediately before this. So Kambojanvayaja Kunjaraghatavarsha is to be found there at this very time. This is the time Narayanapala's inscriptions drawn a blank here. Moreover, we are forced to conclude that Kamboja revolt was planned, not by Kamboja themselves. There was a political aspirant group who allied with this armed clan to do the havoc on Pala polity. Eastern domains, from whence apparently the dynasty evolved during the middle of 8th cent (as the Siyan Inscr. of Nayapala apparently showed regarding the activity of 1st Gopala at Samatata,) was full of resources for the survival of Pala empire, it is here the strike was enforced to choke the polity of vital supplies. Hence all the activities at Northern Bengal can be put around ~920 to a few years earlier.

Kamboja Nayapala remembers Rajyapala, his father as the progenitor of the dynasty at Dandabhukti. Vasukalpa's verses nowhere mention his patron's name, anybody of at least three, if not four (if we take Dharmapala of Rajendra Chola fame in the line, which almost certain) kings could be his target. On the other hand Mahodadhi definitely mentioned Rajyapala's name. Association of Elephant army, mud to dust in their march might hint at Rajyapala of Dandabhukti (Not that Rajyapala of Gauda could not have Elephant army, still Orissa is more renowned for its elephants, and Elephant was a symbol of location here). Vasukalpa have no such indication. Still he certainly mentions memorable associations for his patron's second and immediate ancestors. His mentioning Bhima might be adjective-use. Most interesting is his mentioning with praise the land of Pragjyotisa and one naval hero Sahasamalla as an adversary of Gauda. Dandabhukti being landlocked didn't need formidable navy. Apparently he remembered past events pertaining to his own as well as his patron's lineages. Sahasamalla might have been the leader who kept Gauda monarchs at bay (confined to S Bihar) along the Ganga and had lead the Kamboja army to Samatata, as said above. In that case the patron king is Kamboja Rajyapala.

The king was in charge of a territory from where he was to keep Kalinga-mandala at bay. Nothing is said about Utkala, strangely. First half of 10th century was a time when Bhauma-Karas of Utkala was being dissipated by the Somavansis of Daksina-Kosala. Their whereabouts was unknown immediately after ~940 AD.

কুখ্যদগন্ধ-করীন্দ্র-দন্ত-মুখল-প্রেক্ষাল-দীপ্তানল- জ্বালা-পাতিত-কুম্ভ-মৌক্তিক-ফল-ব্যুৎপন্ন-লাজাজলৌ/

হস্তেনাসি-ময়ূখ-দর্ভলতিকা-বদ্ধেন যুদ্ধোৎসবৈর্ রাজা যেন স-লীলন্ উৎকল-পতের্-লক্ষ্মীঃপুনর্ভূকৃতা

//কুখ্যদগন্ধকরীন্দ্রদন্তমুখলপ্রেঙ্খোলদীপ্তানল- জ্বালাপাতিতকুম্ভমৌক্তিক ফলব্যুৎপন্নলাজাজলৌ/

হস্তেনাসিময়ুখদর্ভলতিকাবদ্ধেন যুদ্ধোৎসবৈর্ রাজা যেন সলীলমুত্কলপতের্লক্ষ্মীঃ পুনর্ভূঃ কৃতা (১৭৬৬) বসুকলপস্য.

This poem by Vasukalpa clearly shows that his patron was a kind of shelter for Utkalapati, king of Utkala. This is a situation immediately after ~940 AD when Bhauma-Karas were being eroded out by the powerful Somavanshis of Kasala who were approaching from Kalinga-side where their power was first consolidated.

The Lost Capitals and Places

Ekatakaksha

During a period spanning over 1000 years the kings and their subordinate rulers must have built and shifted their administrative centres for certain strategic and economic reasons. From the epigraphic records issued during the reign of Sasanka we come to know of two places functioning as administrative centres: Ekatakaksha and Tabir/a. The reference to Ekatakaksha is found in the Egra Copperplate Inscription which was recovered from the village Panchrol near Egra, Paschim Medinipur. This CPI contains that “Parama-Mahesvara Sasanka was ruling and addressed to the officers of the Ekatakaksha-vishaya records the creation of a perpetual endowment of land in Kapardipadraka to be brought under the plough in order to provide maintenance of Bhatta Damasvamin of the Kousika-gotra by Antaranga Doshatumga, for the merit of his parents and himself”⁴⁴. It is now perhaps not possible to locate Ekatakaksha exactly. However, one can find a corrupt linguistic equivalent of the name in the modern-day ‘Egra’ (Ekatakaksha> Ektakasha> Egtakaksha> Egta> Egra), though at the same time ‘Egra’ might have been derived as a corrupt form of some ‘Agrahara’ (Agrahara>Agra>Egra) mentioned in the Egra CPI. It is interesting to note that still today a number of places, bearing some resemblance to the ones mentioned in the CPI, can be found in the areas of modern-day Mohanpur and Egra.

<i>Ancient Names</i>	<i>Modern names of places around Panchrol</i>
Kapardipadraka	Kamardiha, Daharda, Dhukurda, Khourda, Khakurda
Traneka-agrahara	Tanuya
Taroktodarbho-agrahara	Turka
Loddabba-agrahara	Dubda
Akhbatayik-agrahara	Akpura, Akandi
Bingshotikhaddan	Satkhandra, Gotsanda
Mrigata	Mirgoda
Gurjarapadraka	Garura
Kapalashaka	Kasbagola, Palashia ⁴⁵
Sarshapabasini	
Brahmanpadraka	Bamonda
...agrahara?	Agarara

⁴⁴ Indian Archaeology 1979-80: A Review, Ed. Debala Mitra, ASI, 1983, p. 91.

⁴⁵ It is interesting to note that several places have almost same names at Dantan.

Pryangu	Angua
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Of course, it is not prudent to look for places-names around a particular place where the CPIs were recovered; but after visiting one such site, present-day Antla at Mohanpur near Egra, we gathered certain valuable information.

At Antla (near Mohanpur, Dantan) we talked with the grandsons and great grandsons of Mian Surath Khan who donated two copperplate inscriptions, now known as Medinipur Inscriptions, and some religious manuscripts (his descendants claimed) to Medinipur Sahitya Parishad perhaps in 1937 probably via the then magistrate of Medinipur, Binayranjan Sen and first reading of the CPIs was published by the editor Manishinath Basu in *Madhabi* (1345 Bengali year), the official monthly journal of Medinipur Sahitya Parishad.⁴⁶ We could not collect that issue, but in some subsequent publications most unfortunately his name was dropped. We found his descendants rightly aggrieved at the fact that the contribution of Mian Surath Khan was not acknowledged properly. As per their report, Mian Surath Khan was a very liberal zamindar of his time and he allocated land for a Hindu temple and a pond attached to it for his Hindu subjects. But where are the religious manuscripts donated by him?

We could not get the information regarding the circumstances of the discovery or recovery of the CPIs and the manuscripts. But thanks to an archaeologist who provided the information about the place, we saw a big structural mound beside a courtyard of the house of his younger son, which, the archaeologist considered after professional inspection fit for excavation for unearthing unknown facts.

Tabiradhikaran

The Medinipur Copper Inscriptions revealed many information on Dandabhukti, but scholarly focus was shifted on to the evidence of Sasanka's rule down the southern part of Bengal and the northern part of Odisha. Information gathered from the CPIs were less used in researches on the local areas of Dantan. The discovery of the Moghalmari Buddhist Monastery by Prof. Asok Datta and his team provided much needed solid archaeological evidences on the antiquarian nature of the place, and now using Moghalmari as a standard reference point further studies and researches can be undertaken and the history of Dandabhukti can be re-written more confidently.

The first Medinipur CPI, issued in the eighth regnal year of Sasanka's reign, records⁴⁷, that Subhakriti, the Mahapratihara of Dandabhukti donated forty dronas (of land) and one drona of homestead land at the village Kumbharapadraka in Ketakapadrika *uddesa*, to Brahman Damyasvamin belonging to Bharadvaja gotra and Madhyandina school, for the increase of the merit of his father. The second Medinipur CPI, issued in the nineteenth regnal year of Sasanka's rule, records⁴⁸ the land grant of the village Maha-Kumbharapadraka by the Samanta-maharaja Somadatta to Bhattesvara, who belonged to Kasyapa gotra and who was an Adhvaryu priest." Both these CPIs were issued from

⁴⁶ D. C. Sarkar, *Shilalekha-Tamrasasonadir Prasanga*, 2009 edition, p. 66.

⁴⁷ *JRASBL*, 11, 1945, p.9; pp.24-25.

⁴⁸ *JRASBL*, 11, pp.1-8; pp.26-27

Tabira-karana. “Perhaps Mahakumbharapadraka village was adjacent to Kumbharapadraka mentioned in the other CPI”⁴⁹.

Now, before identifying Tabira, Tabira-karana or Tabiradhikarana, it is necessary to locate the villages mentioned in the CPIs. Some think, on the basis of the pattern of pottery, that the modern-day Kotpada, situated on the bank of the river Subarnarekha, is the ancient village of Ketakapadrika. However, apart from some pieces of pottery not much archaeological evidences have been found so far. On the east of Kotapda, there is a village named Bakurpada, which may be corrupt remnant of the ancient Kumbharapadraka or Maha-kumbharapadraka:

Maha-kumbharapadraka>Ma-kumbharpadraka>Ma-kumhar-padraka>Ma-kuhar-pada>Makurpada>Bakurpada.

Such equations are risky indeed, but it is an attempt at finding out the missing links from evidences present in the landscape itself however thin or ethereal they may be. Following this line of thinking based on observation of the landscape, one can reach another place nearby named Doberia just after the village Bakurpada, not far from the river Subarnarekha and the Moghalmari village. This village is situated on the bank of a vast and ancient lake locally called Mahabila, which might have been created as a horse-shoe lake by the river Subarnarekha. Once very deep, but now, as per the local people, it is about 20 feet deep down from the normal surface level. It is connected to the river via narrow channels or canals, and when the river overflows with flood the entire lake is filled with water. The local people reported that it takes almost 24 hours to fill the lake and it allows the villagers to escape to safe places in the meantime. Interestingly, there is a place or a low-lying mound on the southern part of the lake locally called Jaha(j)dubi or the place of shipwreck. Nobody knows what the small mound contains but certain it refers to an accident that had taken place long ago. It is also worth mentioning here that a very important canal or channel named Palania Khal (canal) passes through the lake and goes down few kilo meters south and falls in the river. Several such canals indicate that these canals were once part of water management system of Dandabhukti, which rose up in prominence based mainly on its agrarian resources.

Going back to the name Tabira, we may presume that the name might have come from the name Trabira (a place surrounded by fence or protected by fortification) and Tabira was actually Prakrita derivation. This name, along with other names, got corrupted in the course of time and might have come to our days in very unfamiliar form. Now, going back to the original form a supposed corrupt derivation is a dangerous task and may result in complete misinterpretation. Still, since there is no other way at this moment let us think over a simple equation. The question is: can Doberia be a corrupt form of Tabira? It may be:

Trabira>Tabira>Dabira>Dobira>Doberia

There is also a chance of the name coming from Dobira, meaning a place surrounded on or protected from its two sides. However, one encounters a place exactly surrounded on its three sides by water at Borah, a name which seems to have gone through tribal influence and got its present name. But it can also be a case of dropped

⁴⁹ D.C. Sircar, *Tamra-Sashonadi Prasango*, p. 71.

name and shortening as can be seen with other places too in this region: Tabira>Bira>Bara>Bora>Borah. Dr. R.C. Majumdar identified Tabira with modern-day Debra. It is not known by the present author whether he depended on solid historical evidences other than the linguistic one. But the proximity of the Moghalmari settlement to Doberia or Borah forces one to think over the matter seriously. No archaeological record has so far been recovered from Doberia or Borah, but there are other places too having the evidences of being surrounded on its side. The Moghalmari village itself is surrounded by long trenches and some parts are still functional. Even the signs of water management system are still visible to a great extent. Given its proximity to Kotpada (if taken for ketakapadrika), chances are not less likely that Tabira was the Moghalmari settlement. But before any solid historical evidence comes up, such conclusions should not be reached.

Few other places at Dantan also bear traces of fortified settlement and some of those have yielded some considerable artefacts: Angua, Satdeulia (Ektarpur), Kakrajit, Uttar Raibarih etc. Let us see whether we can find traces of ancient capitals at those places.



Map 1: Satellite view of the area



Map 2: Satellite view of the area

Prinyangu or Priyangu-nagar and Angua

Few copperplate and stone inscriptions have established beyond any doubt that a new dynasty of Kamboja Pala kings rose up in the south-western part of Medinipur in the last quarter of the 10th century AD, and if Dharmapala of Dandabhukti belonged to this dynasty, it thrived for about 45 years and had significant cultural contribution in this region. We find references to their capital Priyangu or Priyangu-nagar at a number of historical records, but it has not been located yet. Some tended to locate it at Pingla and some at Pingbani. However, if we consider Angua as the ancient capital of Priyangu, new things may come up for discussion. Let us first look at phonetic affinity. The name 'Priyangu' is taken from Sanskrit and in its time it might have some special connotations which are now lost, whereas the name 'Angua'⁵⁰ does not mean anything in particular in Bengali. So it must be a corrupt form of some lost name. It might be the case that the name 'Priyangu' got corrupted in the course time spanning over centuries and turned into 'Angua' (Priyangu>Pri-angu>Angu>Angua) through a process of shortening after the place lost its glory and went into oblivion.

There more vital points to consider this hypothesis because of its strategic position, proximity with the supposed places mentioned in the Irda Plate inscription and the nature of techno-complex there. The strategic importance of Angua lies in the fact that it is located near the junction of a number of important roads—Egra-Solpatta Road (probably it stretched up to Tamralipta, and even if not so, it was connected to Ekatakaksha or some Agrahar at Egra) and Jaleswar-Chandaneshwar Road (allowing access to the sea coast and marine resources) and Orissa Trunk Road leading through Odisha. Not only this, Angua has been connected to the villages through a network of paths, which must have been in use following the patterns of agrarian economy and also perhaps the military strategy from very distant times.

⁵⁰ Some wrote it is derived from 'Aguan' or "the village on the front".

In 1942 an attempt was made by Jogesh Chandra Ghosh to identify and locate Priyangu somewhere in Medinipur and the donated village Brihat-Chhatibonna, mentioned in the Irda Plate, in Gobiballabhpur area of south-western part of Medinipur following similarities in names:

The golden rampart walls of the city of priyangu have been described as resplendent as fire...This leads us to think that they were built of the red laterite stone. So the capital must have been at a place, where in the vicinity of which, these stones abound. The district of Midnapur, in Dakshina-Radha, lies on the border of the Balasore District, from where the plate has been obtained. It contains laterite soil, and some forts are still to be found here built of laterite stone. It is not, therefore, unlikely that the seat of the kingdom was here. There are two places in this district, which comes nearer to the name of Priyangu. One is thana Pingla, and the other is the village of Pingbani, in thana Garbeta, with ancient remains. The latter seems more likely. The soil is lateriferous.⁵¹

It needs to be mentioned here that Garbeta has yielded several sculptural remains of the distant past and a dynasty with the name Vagadi or Vagdi or Vagri, which relates it to the rulers from Mayurbhanj, who ruled here. However, if one goes by the evidence of the lateritic stones, it has to be taken into account that such stones are also available from Keshiary area adjacent to Dantan and also on the other side of the river Subarnarekha at Raibania, which is very close to Angua.

More than anything else, the schematic pattern of the village with its long lines of trenches surrounding the important places and thick walls of the bamboo bushes, which were invincible to any attack of projectiles before the arrival of cannons. It will be relevant here to quote what O' Malley wrote about the Mayna fort for understanding the nature of fort in the plain lands of Medinipur:

The fort was evidently constructed by excavating two great moats, almost lakes, so that it practically stands on an island within an island. The earth of the first was thrown inwards, so as to form a raised embankment of considerable breadth, which, having become overgrown with dense bamboo clumps, was impervious to any projectile that could have been brought against it 100 years ago. Inside the larger island, the outer edge of which is this embankment, another lake has been excavated with the earth thrown inwards, forming a large and well-raised island about 200 yards square. On this stands the residence of Mayna Raj.⁵²

The moats—which are now at places transformed into ponds and the thick bamboo walls are still there. Few statues of lateritic stones were once found but at present the statues cannot be found. There is a mysterious artifact made completely of sandstone having a kind of sink-like structure with four turtles facing a big hole in the middle. This was recovered from a pond nearby and so far none could properly interpret it. A stone statue of Vishnu is also found in the adjoining village of Benapura, and it seems to be belonging to period later than the high period of Pala culture.

⁵¹ Epigraphia India, Vol. XXIV, 1942, p. 46

⁵² L. S. S. O'Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteers: Midnapore*, (Calcutta: The Bengal Secretariat Book Depot) 1911.

However, these artefacts are not enough to forward a case of Priyangu for Angua. Another important thing to be considered here is what happened to the high walls of lateritic stones. There is no answer to it other than a simple guess that the materials were shifted on to a new establishment somewhere. To Raibania, which is exactly on the western side of the river few kilometers away and where even today we can find structures of lateritic stone?



Map: Satellite Map of Angua



Image 1: A view of the trenches



Image 2, 3, 4: Structure made of stone with Turtles, Kalichandi, Vishnu Statue

Whether Priyangu or not, it is clear from only surface observation that once this place was a fort. Locally Angua is still called Angua-garh, based on the fact that local zamindars resided here and their family members are still living there. They might have revived the system of defence, but it is possible that it was prepared long ago for resisting intrusion.

Brihatchhatibonna

J.C. Ghosh went on to locate Brihat-Chhattobonna thus:

The donated village of Brihat-Chhattivanna is described as adjoining to Kanti, Sammasha and Badakhanda, within Dandabhukti-mandala...Mr. Majumdar identifies this village with Chhatina, near Belyabera and Nayabasan, on the Subarnarekha. It is probably in thana Gopiballabhpur. There is a village named

Chhatina, in *thana* Salbani. Besides, there are three villages of the name of Chatna, in *thana* Daspur. The donated village is said to have contained salt-mines (*lavan-akara*), which probably means that some part of it was a saline tract, where salt used to be manufactured. This discloses contiguity to sea-coast... There are, however, two villages of the name of kantichak in *thana* Danton, and Kanthi in *thana* Gopiballabhpur. As we find both Chhatina and kanti in *thana* Gopiballabhpur, lying on the western part of the district, Chhatina suggested by Mr. Majumdar may be the donated village. The existence of madhuka trees in the donated land also supports this view, as they grow in western part of the district. But this village must have extended up to the sea-coast of Balasore, along the Suvarnarekha, for we have already seen that a portion of it was saline tract. This also shows that the village was a very big one, which the prefix Brihat also suggests.

...Belyabera or Beliaberia is also a Jungle estate, owned by a family of Praharaj Chaudhuri of the midnapur District. The [Irda] plate belongs to a Praharaj Chaudhuri of Irda...Balasore. It is possible that both belonged to the same family and, with their original home in Chhatina...It may be that the Praharaj family was in some way connected with the done, or it might have been found somewhere within their Zamindari.⁵³

The arguments here seem to be founded well on some circumstantial evidences except for one that “this village must have extended up to the sea-coast of Balasore....the village was a very big one.” This is based on an information that the village Brihach-Chatibonna had ‘*lavan-aka[ra]h*’ or salt-mine. This distance now from Chhatina to the sea-coast is more than 150 km and it is quite improbable that a village can be as long as, say, 100 or even 50 km. Again, it is improbable that the any village in the area of Gopiballabhpur would have mines manufacturing salt from saline water of the sea. Should there be any salt-mine, it would have to contain rock-salt. But it is not known whether the area contained rock-salt or not.

In order to find saline water salt-mines it is necessary to look to the southern portion of the land along the sea-coast. We find few places with the names of Kanti; for instance, in Purba Medinipur, Kanthi or Contai where we find a very ancient site at Bahiri. But we cannot find any place here bearing similarities with other villages mentioned in the CPI: Sammasha, Badakhanda and Brihat-Chhatibonna. Going back to the south-western side of Medinipur we find some places bearing similarities in name, where the existence of ancient salt-mines is possible. We find a village Kantabania at Khaira block of the Balasore district of Orissa. Besides, two places—Kanti-bhaunri⁵⁴ and Sanuasa are found situated on the very old course of the Subarnarekha. On the northern side of kantabania we find two places bearing distant similarities with Badakhanda: Dihikakhada and Akendi. Expert investigation can reveal whether Kantabania is corrupt form of Chhatibonna or whether Kanti and Chhatibonna merged together to form Kantabania. It is interesting to note here that there is a place named Praharajpur in this area. One point,

⁵³ Epigraphia India, Vol. XXIV, 1942, p. 46

⁵⁴ Bhaunri, meaning whirlpool.

however, goes against the argument of the possible location of Chhatibonna: the presence of mango and Mohua trees near the coastline is improbable. The confusion with the reading might have been with “lavan-aka[ra]h”, for if it is interpreted differently like “lavanaka” or if it is treated as a rhetorical expression along with “sahakara-manduka-aditaru”, conflicts in interpretation may be resolved. There is a place named Kantabania just few kilometers down in the south from Irda near the seashore in Balasore, Odisha and the name occurs in some other places too.

Satdeulia

The reference to a place-name ‘Satdeulia’ or ‘Satdeul’, now extinct, can be found perhaps only in the writings of H.L. Harrison, Nagendra Nath Vasu and Jogesh Chandra Basu.

Then Nagendranath Vasu wrote:

There is a tradition current here to this effect that this Chandaneshwara is Svayambhu (self-evolved) linga and it was installed by the queen of Vikramajit. Daily she came here to worship this God, while her husband went daily to Dantan to offer his homage to the famous image of Shyamaleswara. *At that time the principal gate of Moghalmari was close to the Sat-deul of Dantan.*⁵⁵

Sri Surya Nandi, a local historian, tried to identify Satdeulia at present-day Ektarpur-Takinagar mouza of Dantan in an article “Satdeulia Theke Moghalmari: kimbadanti o Itihaser Sandhane” (From Satdeulia to Moghalmari: in Search of History and Legend) in the special issue on Moghalmari of the magazine *Ebam Sayak* (Vol. XXXVIII, 2012) after consulting few archaeologists like Prof. Asok Datta and others and after consulting some old people who would call it ‘Satdoula’. As per his report Prof. Datta commented that the extensive remains of the brick walls and statues of stones and decorative lateritic stone pieces belong to the Pala Period.⁵⁶ There is ample amount of mystery associated with Satdeulia. First, even if the name has surfaced, nobody knows what Satdeulia had been: a temple complex of seven temples, a royal establishment or just a guarded residence for the rich people. One promising point is that the place still contains remains of the outer walls and it has yielded significant artefacts. But so far no inscription has been found, and this leaves people clueless about its real identity.

However, few vague clues are found there, but depending on these it would not be prudent to come to a definite conclusion. First, there is a huge unidentified or unfinished statue of some deity made of stone. The size points indirectly to a huge temple needed to accommodate it. Secondly, in 2010 a broken piece of head of Bhairaba was recovered from a pond nearby, measuring 43cm x 41 cm x 24 cm. A huge broken piece of hand decorated with snakes was also found from the same pond and perhaps it belonged to this statue. If the other pieces are found and calculated together the statue would be about 8 feet high. This also points to a large temple complex. Now, where would such a huge statue be installed? Perhaps as Kshetrapala near a temple complex dedicated either to Shiva or the

⁵⁵ N N Vasu, The Archaeological survey of Mayurbhanj, 1911, p.111.

⁵⁶ “Satdeulia Theke Moghalmari: kimbadanti o Itihaser Sandhane” (From Satdeulia to Moghalmari: in Search of History and Legend) in the special issue on Moghalmari of the magazine *Ebam Sayak* (Vol. XXXVIII, 2nd Ed. 2013), pp.95-96.

Saptamatrikas. Such customs are to be found in many temple complexes in India. Some pictures are given here for consideration and expert judgement of scholars in the field.

In fact, the village-cluster here presents schematic imprints of olden times. Besides trenches, there are few big ponds. One of these is Dharmasagar and inside it is found a pillar-like structure, made of lateritic stones, with a circular top having the radius of about 4 feet. Perhaps it is the foundation pillar of the pond, but it does not point to any definite historical link. However, if we consider its name 'Dharmasagar', we can find some possibilities: perhaps the king Dharmapala of Dandabhukti excavated it or perhaps people following the Buddhist creed excavated it. It needs to be mentioned here that a huge piece of broken throne of some deities was recovered from the pond and the artistry found on the broken piece attests to a high level of art. Professional researches and excavations need to be undertaken to unearth its past history.



Images 5, 6, 7 & 8: Bhairaba, an unidentified statue, remains of ancient walls.

Kakrajit

Situated a few kms away in the east of Moghalmari, Kakrajit is now a locally famous Vaishnava site. A new temple has been constructed on an elevated landmass surrounded by broad trenches on all the sides except the north-eastern point. It means whatever had existed there—temple complex or residence, it was a protected one and had its opening in the north-eastern point. On the northern side of the temples there is a big pond, known as Kunda Pukur. From the name it is apparent that originally the term 'Kunda' (sacred pond) was attached to some descriptive word, which was dropped or forgotten in the course of time. This pond has yielded many important artefacts:

Two big slabs plaques of lateritic stone...one of them (Tri-ratna) is 96 cm long and 86 cm broad. Three plaques were carved on it. The middle one is 39 cm long while the other two on the left and right are both 31 cm long...

The second plaque is a broken piece and it is the upper portion of a big Chakra.⁵⁷ As per the villagers' report, a beautiful statue of Lord Vishnu in stone was recovered from the pond, but some administrative officers took away the statue to some place. Besides, few broken statues were recovered from the pond: three statues of Surya (one of them

⁵⁷ As recorded by Dr. Bankim Chandra Maity in "Pratnakshetra: Moghalmari" (Moghalmari: the Archaeological Site) in the special issue on Moghalmari of the magazine *Ebam Sayak* (Vol. XXXVIII, 2nd Ed. 2013), pp.61-63.

may be of Avalokiteshwara) made of stones, one circular piece with figures sculpted on it and a big statue of a seated lion. One of the statues is strikingly reminiscent of the Astachala-gami statue of the Sun temple of Konark. The presence of the statues of Surya indicates that once the people of this place worshipped the Sun god. Another statue of the god, kept in Dantan Public Library, was found somewhere at Dantan.⁵⁸ In this context, what N. N. Vasu wrote about the Mitra cult in the surrounding region sounds interesting:

Traces of the ancient Mitra-cult are still to be found at Ayodhya, Puranagao. Kausalu, and Domagandara in Nilgiri State (Mayurbhanj border) and also at Adipur and Kiching—of Mayurbhanj state. Among the statues discovered – are figures of Mitra in two different postures, one sitting and the other representing him standing on seven horses. These are of great interest and deserve special mention.⁵⁹

The presence of different deities and artefacts belonging to the Buddhist and the Hindu religions implies that the site had been sacred to the people for many years and they must have built temples for worshipping them deities. Now, another question arises: was Kakrajit a capital or administrative centre?

Some local historians have tried to find a clue in the name of the place Kakrajit (>Karna+Jit). They tend to think that the name got its name from the victory of Jaysimha, ruling Dandabhukti as an ally of the Pala king Rampala, over Karnakeshari, ruler of some portion of Odisha.⁶⁰

Professional investigation may unearth more information regarding its exact location.



Images 9, 10, 11: Broken statues of Surya and other artefacts from Kakrajit

Uttarraibarah and Dantan Proper

Lachhmikant Uttarao, a soldier in the army led by Todarmal against Daud Khan, received rewards for his bravery in the battle around 1575 or so.⁶¹ For some reason he settled at a place at Dantan, which came to be called Uttarraibarah (<Uttarraobarh). Naturally the adjoining area was transformed into a small medieval fort following the indigenous tradition. Later on the descendants of Lachhmikant Uttarao were recognized local ruler with the title 'Raja' and they shifted their residence to Monoharpur near

⁵⁸ Recorded as "Torso of the Sun God" in the "Certificate of registration of antiquities", Registration No.MID/W.B.80,dated 06.12.77, Directorate of Archaeology, Western Circle Burdwan, West Bengal

⁵⁹ N N Vasu, The Archaeological survey of Mayurbhanj, 1911, p xv

⁶⁰ The only source of this incident is *Ramcharitam* by Sandhyakar Nandi

⁶¹ Lalit Mohan Samanta

Moghamari. The remains of the *garh* at Uttarraibarh are still to be found. But what is more interesting is that not just the residential area but the entire settlement zone seems to have been a fortified settlement with big ponds and trenches. A few significant antiquities were recovered from this place: one of those is the broken statue of the Jain Tirthankar Adinath and another is the huge stone statue of some mysterious figure locally known as Jatadhari Baba. Prof. Rupendra Kumar Chattopadhyay *et al* have identified the figure as a powerful Shaivacharya and suggested the existence of a *matha* or monastery here:



Image 12: Adinatha

The corpulent physique of the image not only suggests the spiritual strength attained by the *ācārya* but also his sole command over the monastery, the one and only master of the concerned institution. Again, we never will know whether he was a preceptor or a *rājaguru* and whether his carved form was a repercussion of royal patronage. Epigraphic sources have time and again referred to the fact that well-known *maṭhas* were erected by these *Śaivācāryas*, for instance at Bangarh, where the inscription refers to their connection with royalty. Here, we would like to recall the fact that Viśveśvara-śambhu, founder of the Viśveśvara-Golakī-*maṭha*, has been referred to in the Malkapuram inscription as hailing from *Dakṣiṇa Rāḍha*. The Moghamari region was a part of ancient *Dakṣiṇa Rāḍha*.⁶²

These statues establish the site as a very old one and place it much further back in time than the Uttarao establishment. Prof. Chattopadhyay *et al* noted:

The ...[Uttarraybar]specimens along with the temple complexes of Śyāmaleśvar in Dantan itself, Caṇḍneṣvar in Moghamari, besides the large tank known as Sarasāṅkha at Dantan, one behind the Śyāmaleśvar temple complex, and others, certainly conformed the involvement of the ruling authority in consolidating the Śaiva ideology. The extant structural remains found from places which can be identified within the distribution zone of villages/temple complexes referred to in the copper plates (both Egra and Midnapur) of Śaśāṅka, besides the remnants of *maṭha* complexes at Bahiri, Kakrajit and even in the Śyāmaleśvar temple complex, all this evidence suggests a dual relationship between the tremendous growth of Śaiva doctrines and their patronage by the local ruling lineages.

One such ruling figure patronizing a Shaiva establishment was found in “two copper plate records issued by the Bhaumakara queen Tribhuvanamahādevī II...during the Bhauma year 158 (c.A.D. 894)”⁶³:

It is stated in these two grants that Śaśīlekḥā, wife of maṇḍalādhipati Maṅgalakalaśa, with the permission of Tribhuvanamahādevī II, granted lands situated in Daṇḍabhuktimaṇḍala, in favour of the self-constructed Śaivite temple

⁶² “The Kingdom of the Śaivācāryas” by Rupendra Kumar Chattopadhyay, Swati Ray and Shubha Majumder in *Berliner Indologische Studien*, 21 . 2013.

⁶³ Snigdha Tripathi, JAS, Vol XXXIX, No. 1, 1997, p. 75.

complex named Nannesvara on the occasion of the consecration ceremony of the deities of Umā-Maheśvara within the said temple complex...named after her father Nanna.⁶⁴

The temple complex has not been identified yet, but interestingly there is a Shiva temple named Narmadeshwari. It is to be considered whether this can be identified with the Nanneshwara temple complex of the inscription.



Images 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18: probable pictures of Shaivacharyas and their followers

The areas surrounding Uttarabharh—Bhabanipur Mouza, Joypura mouza, Jhinukpalasia mouza with their mathas constituted a religious and cultural zone.

N.N. Vasu gave a very interesting account of this area:

Shyamaleshwara, the name of the celebrated Mahadeva of Dantan, seems to be only a corrupt form of Shramaneshwara, which is one of the names of Buddha. The temple of Shramaneshwara on the banks of Suvarna-rekha in ancient times attracted pilgrims from very distant places. No trace of it now remains except in the ruins near the old bed of Suvarna-rekha. By its side stands the modern temple of Shyamaleshwara, built by a Shaiva devotee, who had set up a linga and a beautiful image of the sacred bull of Shiva. Some relics of the Buddhistic age have, however, been discovered, five to seven cubits below the surface of the earth, at the village of Dantan. It is therefore expected that some definite and historical evidences of the Buddhistic period may come to light, if excavation be regularly carried on here.⁶⁵

Whether Shyamaleswar is derived from Shramaneshwar is a matter of debate, but that the present temple is built upon the ruins of an earlier one is more or less true. For, massive stone blocks, decorative lateritic stone fragments including a part of the amalaka and lateritic building blocks in huge considerable quantity were recovered from the pond attached to it. However, his assertion that the temple was built “on the banks of Suvarna-rekha in ancient times” does not seem to be correct as the river must have flowed down this place much earlier than the early medieval period. In fact, the Palania Khal is actually the old course of the river. Sri Samanta recorded the findings of Buddha and other statues from this area too. Another structure—locally known as Charkapara Shiber Than, is now turned into a kind of mound of old bricks with a broken Shivalinga on top. This site needs to be professionally explored.

While describing the Chandaneshwar Shiva temple complex N.N. Vasu seems to have suppressed some information for some reason unknown:

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ N.N. Vasu, *Mayurbhanj*, pp. xlvii-xlviii.

In the south of the village [Dantan proper] is the temple of the Chandanesvara Mahadeva. But the one that we now see, has, like the Phoenix, grown out of the ashes, as it were, of its former self.⁶⁶

Whatever it might have been, it is clear that the complex previously covered bigger area. Remains of the past can be found even now scattered over the area. Findings of artefacts are also reported from this area too.

Culture

From all the evidences—archeological, historical, literary and landscape analysis, it appears that the people of Dandabhukti followed certain vital ways of life and thrived on the natural resources and positional advantages and reached high levels of cultural accomplishments, the remnants of which are to be found even in the architecture and sculpture of Moghalmari, fragments of statues of stone collected from various places and in the Sanskrit poetry of the 10th century Kamboja court poet of the area, Vasukalpa, who interestingly composed lines on Buddha and Shiva, and finally in the water management system of the periods. The CPIs record, on the one hand, Brahminical establishments in the form of ‘Agrahara’ (places exempted from tax), on the other, a thriving agrarian economy after a consolidation of administration at the local level.

As Ryosuke Furui wrote:

The most conspicuous point of the procedure [related to land purchases] is the participation in the process of decision making by at least dominant section of the local society through the organisation called *adhikarana*. Such activities presuppose the existence of a local social network through which local people gather and decide important matters related to themselves.⁶⁷

This agricultural system supporting the economy, in fact, depended much on the local water management system, which is still used today though the knowledge about the technology is lost. Prof. Sylvia Herrmann from the Institute for Environmental Planning, University of Hannover Germany demonstrated for the first time how the huge lake Sharashanka was created originally as a hydrological project.⁶⁸ Besides this, there are numerous big ponds and long canals excavated in distant part for utilizing water for various purposes. This aspect, however, needs further elaborations and it will be dealt with somewhere in another article in future. Perhaps the economy was also depended to a considerable extent on an inland port, connected to Tamralipta and Odisha for maritime

⁶⁶ N.N. Vasu, *Mayurbhanj*, p. 111.

⁶⁷ Ryosuke Furui in the PhD thesis *Rural Society and Social Networks in Early Bengal from the Fifth to the Thirteenth Century A. D.*, JNU, 2007, p. 53.

⁶⁸ Dr. Hermann delivered a speech in a seminar at Bhatler College, Dantan after conducting a survey of Sharashanka in 2013.

trade. But very little data are available and it is very difficult now to identify its location and explain its significance.



Image 19: Maheswari; Image 20: Surya; Image 21: unidentified (Yakshi?); Image 22: Hand fragment with *anguree*



Images 23 & 24: Fragments of various stone statues

With the consolidation of royal power after the dissolution of big kingdoms within a small feudatory kingdom like Dandabhukti also helped a number of trades and professions to prosper, and in some cases and to a great extent certain parts of their culture took urban turns because of the space for power and leisure created by the dominant classes. And this allowed art, architecture and literature to flourish in Dandabhukti.

Finally Falls the Curtain

Just as Dandabhukti prospered because of its strategic location, it also suffered the worst just because of this too. For few centuries the south-eastern part of Medinipur became a constant battle ground for different ambitious armies from South Indian kingdoms, Odisha and Bengal. First, it faced the imperial territorial expansion of Anantadeva Chodagangadeva, and from this time the name 'Dandabhukti' seems to have gone out of record. Then came the Pathans who carried their invasions into Odisha through this part and the process of destruction and decay started from this period. The Mughal army met the Pathans in a decisive battle at Tukaroi and this great battle must have had very shocking impact on the life of the people here. With the imposition of the Mughal rule, new administrative system was introduced. Though during this period certain trades like cottage industry of silk at Keshiary prospered, Dandabhukti could never regain its economy and culture. Finally, the marauding Marathas ravaged this part of Bengal during the peiord of the Nawabs of Murshidabad, and when the Nawabs fell to the East India Company, Dandabhukti or Dantan became a free zone for dacoits and miscreants. Only with the introduction of railway some stability was established. But that was not sufficient to revive the economy in any way. Naturally, locked in marginalized location, Dandabhukti was shrunk to Dantan in the course of several centuries of devastation, neglect and historical amnesia.

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