

A Note on Sarasanka Dighi

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For a long period of time in history, the Kharagpur Railway Station of the South Eastern Railway Division of Indian Railway has remained the longest platform (1072 meters) in the world (it has lost its glory in recent past to Gorakhpur Railway Station). At a distance of 52 km from the Kharagpur Railway Station en route to Puri, Odisha, a station named Dantan is situated, which marks almost the end of West Bengal in the south-west. Towards the eastern side of the Dantan Station, at a distance of three kms, there lies an enormous *Dighi* (Lake) known as Sarasanka Dighi. According to the survey report conducted by the Fishery Department of the State Government of West Bengal, the area of Sarasanka Dighi comprises 146 acres and 17 decimals, while the satellite image gives an account of its size to be 142 acres 37 decimals. The perimeter encompassing the Dighi is almost 3009 meters 248 centimeters, while the total area of the boundary surrounding the lake is measured to be approximately 150 acres. This massive lake Sarasanka covers areas from two Mouzas- Ekmalipur Mouza (J.L. No. 123) and Sarasanka Mouza (J.L. No. 120). Some parts of this lake in its western side are included in Kuhuda Mouza. In the year 1982 a massive project of excavating tanks and ponds in the rural areas had been undertaken by the then Leftist Govt. in the State, as a result of which some twenty eight large and small scale ponds were dug up.



There is not any authentic historical document available, which could determine the exact date of its excavation; neither can it be traced during whose reign it was excavated. But hypothetical conjectures are always available. Certain sources posit that it had been excavated during King Sasanka's reign in the seventh century, after whose name it had been christened "Sarasanka"; again, the name of King Choda Gangadeva of Odisha of the seventeenth century is much discussed and often predicted in this regard. This mystery of the lake's formation is further augmented by an anonymous researcher's remarkable observation that it might have been created as a result of meteorite fall in some distant past. Again, the rectangular shaped *dighi* (lake) with its length towards North-South direction and width in East-West direction bears the trace of Hindu *bastutantra* design and it is often presumed to have been a benevolent project of a benign king. Nevertheless, there are certain presuppositions that the lake might have been excavated some two thousand years ago during the reign of emperor Ashoka who had undertaken the project of excavating water reservoir beside roadways. But in the twelfth century, such kinds of water reservoir were known to have been made by the Muslim rulers too, which embellishes the popular belief that this might rather be the creation of some Muslim ruler. Again, it has often been surmised by some historians and scholars that during the British reign in India, such kind of endeavours of excavation of water reservoir was very popular among the Hindu zamindars (i.e. wealthy landlords) who built temples at the very centre of the lakes as an emblem or hallmark of Hindu construction. There could be traced nine such *dighis* surrounding the Sarsaranka region which are more than 5 acre in size, with its expansion in length towards North-South direction and width in East-West direction.



According to a research report conducted by a team of researchers from Liventitz University of Hanover, Germany, headed by Prof. Sylvia Herrmann from 20th to 26th January, 2014, this enormous lake might have been created as a hydrological project for irrigation. Evidences of this assertion can still be found in the present day irrigation system where the water enters from three different sides and flows in a specific drainage system. Satellite images prove that there might have been a waterway stemming from the eastern bank of Subarnarekha River in the village Bora and passing through the successive villages like Tararui, Moghalmari, Bejda, Kakrajeet, Salikotha before it entered Sarasanka and then finally merges into the sea through the Nimpur waterway. Till the present day the rainy water flows likewise crossing the cultivating lands. But drastically this route has been changed as a result of a massive earthquake of April 1762 as seen in the case of Ganges which also changed its route near Nabadweep.



Along with its historical accounts and geographical facts this dighi has its own cultural records too. This enormous lake is sacred to its nearby inhabitants. A village fair, known as 'Pous-Sankranti Mela' is held annually on the auspicious occasion of 'Pous-Sankranti'. On that very day deceased village folk are being cremated on the banks of this lake. A number of Hindu Temples can be seen around the banks of this dighi. Interestingly, a Majhar (shrine) of Peer Laskarganj Deewan is situated in the south-east bank of the lake.

Peer sahab's ardent followers believe that he breathed his last on the day before the Pous-Sankranti and on that particular day he had his solemn burial. There are legends that this 'Pous-Sankranti' mela has been annually held in commemoration of his glowing memory.



To reach Sarasanka, one has to take the eastward road from Dantan railway station and has to stop at Bokultala stop which is situated at the western bank of Sarashanka. There are two temples: one Shiva temple, and the other one is Jagannath temple. Whereas Shiva is the cult figure of the masses, Jagannath is being worshiped by the wealthy landlords. The Shiva temple of the Sarashakana mouza has lately been renovated and reformed by the villagers. The 'Gajan Utsav', in honour of Lord Shiva is performed occasionally by the village folk. Asish Chakrabarty is the present priest of this temple. And the famous Jagannath temple is situated on the western region of the Shiva temple, which itself is located on the west bank of the lake. This ancient temple having the idols of Jagannath, Balaram and Subhadra is now in a dilapidated state. Each year the 'Ratha Yatra' is being observed in honour of Lord Jagannath by his followers in an ecstatic way. This festival has traditionally been organized by the Das Mahapatra family, the present chief priest of which is Biswajit Pahari.



Adjacent to the Ekmalipur Shisu Siksha Kendra on the eastern region of the lake there are other two temples; one of Sitala Devi and the other of Jhingembar Shiva.



A recently built Kali Temple by the villagers is situated on the eastern bank of the lake adjacent to the Pous-Sankranti fair ground. Prior to the establishing of this temple, the idol was kept generally under a thatched hut. This area is known as “Samsan Kali” due to its being in the region of cremation ground.

A Baiswar Shiva temple is located towards the south side of this Kali Temple. Bijoy Pahari is the present priest of this temple and this temple is now being looked after by the villagers of Mirzapur.



The Majhar (shrine) of Peer Laskarganj Deewan is located on the southeast corner of this lake. Mulayam Shah, who resides at a distance of two kilometers from this Majhar at Salikota village, is the present caretaker of this shrine. A woman named Kanchan Das who

lives nearby the Majhar looks after the Majhar now and keeps it clean on a regular basis, a task which is handed down to her from her mother-in-law. On the very day of Pous-Sankranti Mela this shrine is visited and the Peer is paid a glowing tribute by all of his followers irrespective of Hindus and Muslims.