

Making Dantan a Destination of Archaeological Tourism

Tarun Tapas Mukherjee
Bhatter College, Dantan



Introduction

History of Dantan needs to be rewritten. Many scholars like Haraprasad Sastri, Nagendranath Basu, A. K. Banerjee, B. N. Mukherjee made a number of guesses on Dantan. Long ago Nihar Ranjan Ray clearly identified Dantan with the ancient and medieval province Dandabhukti, the capital of which must have been in a few places of Dantan. For, a number of provincial rulers—sometimes in the status of independent monarch, ruled here and built their settlements. The archaeological remains of those sites are still visible here and there. The entire region of Dantan has yielded large number of ancient artefacts which are still to be studied academically. In fact, Dantan remained a neglected place for a long period—culturally and economically. It is high time now that we reconsider the historical and academic importance of Dantan in a new era of information technology.

Discovery of Moghalmari Buddhist Monastery

It was Prof. Asok Dutta who—through his intensive research for over a decade and scientific excavation—unearthed a Buddhist Monastery at Moghalmari. The monastery occupies a small area of an entire Buddhist settlement scattered at the Moghalmari village. Many structures are either unexplored or buried beneath the earth. Unearthing them will also open up a new chapter in the history of Bengal. But Moghalmari is not the only archaeological site here. In fact the entire region from Raibania (Orissa) through

Dantan to Keshiary (even it can be extended to Daintikuri where still stands a pre-Muslim brick-temple) has a glorious history and is rich in archaeological artefacts.

Below are brief descriptions of the possible sites which need to be explored:

Satdeulia (Ektarpur-Takinagar and the so-called “High School Maidan”)

Satdeulia, a small village is situated on slightly elevated land at Ektarpur village of Dantan. The place derives its name probably from seven temples or ‘Deul’. From the archaeological remains it is clear that the seven temples really existed. The temples are all gone and only seven small ditches exist around a big pond. However, we still could see foundations and debris of massive walls around the village in rectangular shape. It is found in Harrison’s report that 2600000 bricks from this place were taken away from this place to make Rajghat Road. He wrote:

On the occasion of excavating earth to get out bricks and stone 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 about 26 lakhs and some crores yet lie buried under the ground. From these it appears that the above place were once the residence of the ancient Rajas and exceedingly populous”.

Some big stone statues have been recovered. One of them is a big life-size statue of some unidentified deity. May be this huge statue was left unfinished or it was deliberately defaced and damaged by some humans. The same is the case with a huge Bhairaba statue, the remains of which are found in parts. Definitely some destruction activity was there and one may relate this to the misdeeds of Kalapaharh. The pond still contains many statues and waits to be unearthed.

Just in parallel with this elevated space there is another place, which is now used as a playground. Interestingly the place is a circular one and remains of trenches are still found. However, no excavation work has been undertaken there



Sharashanka

Sharashanka as a large pond is very famous. Legend has it that it was dug up by King Shashanka and re-excavated by the Odissan King Mukundadeb. But the site has not been fully examined by archaeologists. As per Sri Lalit Mohan Samanta's (a local historian of 1950s) documentation some ancient artefacts were found from this area. Archaeological enquiry will definitely yield some invaluable information.

Kakrajit

Kakrajit may be called an ancient archaeological site following the old statues recovered from a big pond, Kundu Pukur, nearby. This place, not more than 5 km from the Moghalmari site, must have been culturally connected with the Moghalmari site. Prof. Asok Datta found trace of a Dharmachakra there. Remarkable is the fact that some statues of the Sun God Surya have been recovered from the pond. If we notice the emergence of the Surya cult in the 10-11 century in Orissa, we can understand that these statues were related to that cult and the chronology suggests that the cult came into existence when the Moghalmari Buddhist Monastery was in decline.



Uttarraibarh

The area around Urraraibarh has been suggested to have been the settlement of Shaiva matha. The discovery of a massive statue of a Shaivacharya (locally known as Jatadharibaba) attests to the assumption. More facts may come up if proper exploration work is taken up.

Kurumbera (Gaganeshwar)

“Built in the year 1438-1469 (written in Oriya inscription) during Kapileswar Deb's period, it also has structures built during the Aurangzeb's period by Mohammed Tahir (stone inscription). Despite being a protected monument, under the ASI, there is no data available about this fort. Folk legends believe that the fort was built in a single night, when Ram, Sita visited the place, during their Vanvas....The fort contains a three domed structure over a platform, along with a sacrificial altar. Though the most parts of this fort

and its structures are in ruins, the ASI, has taken considerable effort to protect the structures from collapsing by using cement and lime mortar for holding the external pillars. The pillars hold a roofing which is shaped as a flower. The usage of circular pillar to the rear of the left-dome seems interesting. The presence of an inscription stating about its usage is present right behind of the domed structure. Though the script resembles Oriya, locals state that it is not decipherable.” from Wikipedia.



Some Temples of Dantan

There are few temples which deserve to be preserved because of their architectural and cultural value. The most important of them Shyamaleswar Temple (perhaps dating back to the 16th century) is a rare Pirha-Deul of Bengal. Other temples like Jagannath Temple and Chandaneshwar Temple—built in the 19th century in the Odissan Deul structure need equal attention.

Some places around Dantan in Odisha

Raibania

“Raibania fort is a group of ancient forts in Baleswar district, Orissa India. Though three forts have been recorded in the Ain-i-Akbari there are totally four forts found here, 2 of the larger ones are closer to the village Raibania and the other two are closer to the village Phulta (Phulahatta). According to The Balasore Gazetteer the forts were devastated after the Kalapahada invaded Utkala. Post invasion remnants of the forts except Raibania have been utilized for construction by the local Zamindars and villagers of the locality. Raibania fort complex is located in Laxmannath which is 9 miles (14 km) from Jaleswar and 2 miles (3.2 km) from the river Subarnarekha.” [Wikipedia]



“The fort is built of laterite stone and in the shape of an irregular pentagon with walls of various dimensions ranging between 2,640ft and 4,950ft. Sir John Beams, the collector of Balasore, who conducted a study in 1872, presumed that the fort was built by Mukunda Dev (1559-68) to protect the north end to prevent constant aggression by the Afghan Sultans ruling in Bengal. However, disputing Beams’s ideas several historians have proposed that the fort was built during the reign of Langula Narasingh Dev (1238-1264).” [Wikipedia]

Lakshmannath Rajbari

Lakshmannath Rajbari can also be attached to the tourist schedule of Dantan. The palace is unique in having British architecture mixed with the Muslim style.

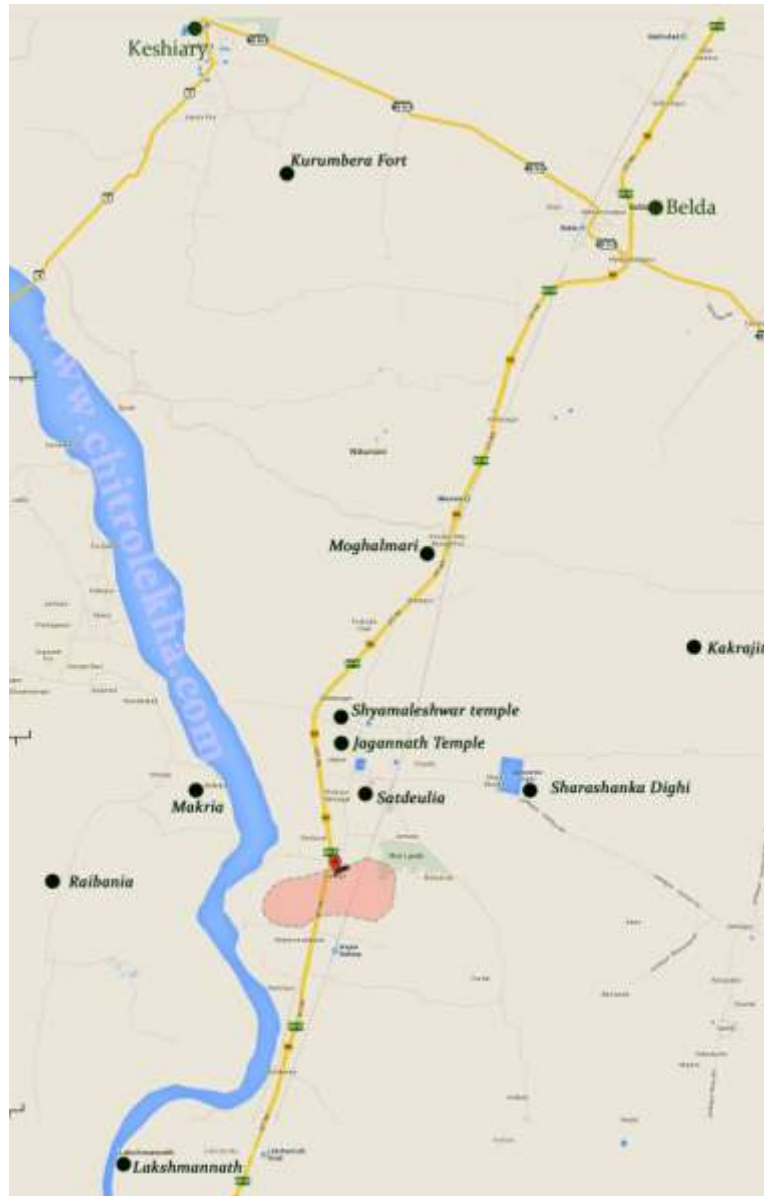


Makria

Makria is a village situated on the other side of the river Subarnarekha. Its importance lies in its unique production of Tasser silk products. The village must have come into existence many centuries ago when the place around Dantan, including Raibonia Fort and Dantan Port, was in a very prosperous condition.

Steps to be taken for Developing Tourism

1. First of all, an advanced Tourist Lodge and Information Centre and a Museum and a Research Centre need to be built at Moghalmari. The entire building needs to be designed following the structure a Buddhist Stupa (for instance, the Stupa at Dhouli). The building needs to be built near the NH 60 and it will attract the attention of the people. A multi-cuisine restaurant needs to be there for providing food to the tourists.
2. Local youths may be trained for acting as paid guides.
3. The Club right on top of the Moghalmari mound needs to be taken down and shifted to some other place.
4. A well-calculated tourist route needs to be chalked out.
5. Dhauli Express should allow a stop at Nekurseni Station for the tourists.
6. The roads leading to the sites need to be newly created or repaired for smooth journey of the tourists.



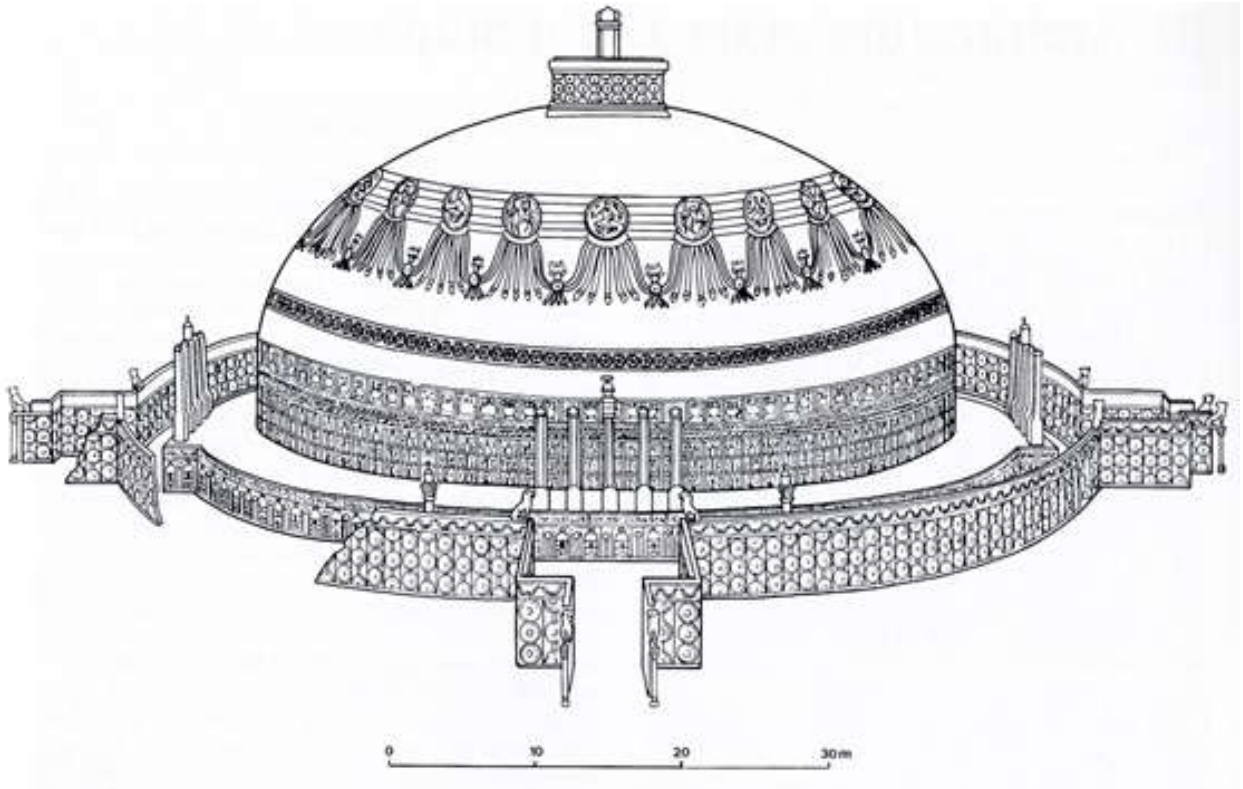
The Tourist Map

Dandabhukti Museum and Research Centre

The Museum to be made should be named Dandabhukti Museum following the name of the ancient province of Bengal. This will serve three purposes:

- (i) Vast number of artefacts--statues and seals can be accommodated in one place for viewers and researchers and this will increase the size and variety of the museum;
- (ii) The name Dandabhukti prefixed to the museum will add more value to an ancient entity and indirectly add more substance to the tourism possibilities of the place;

- (iii) Dandabhukti Museum can serve as a model for other historical and archaeological sites of Bengal.



The Design of the Tourist lodge, Museum and Research Centre

Plan for a Historical and Archaeological Research Centre

Thrust Areas for Research:

1. The location of Dandabhukti and its capital has been a matter of long-time controversy. Whereas H.P. Shastri opined for its location in Bihar, Nihar Ranjan Ray located it right at present-day Dantan without any hesitation. Modern research works need to be initiated for determining conclusively whether Dantan was Dandabhukti once upon a time, though archaeological evidences strongly suggest its location at Dantan.
2. Kamboja Pala kings ruled from a capital named Priyangu. A copperplate inscription has been found in Baleshwar, Orissa; and from this some think that the capital might have been there. But the exact location of the place has not been found yet. Since they ruled in or around Dandabhukti, there is a strong possibility that they had their establishment at Dantan, probably at Angua (which got its name from long degeneration of the name 'Priyangu')
3. The vast area of Satdeulia of Dantan needs to be researched upon. The name itself suggests that once seven temples existed there. One can still find extensive brick

walls running around the village in rectangular shape and many stone statues have been found from a big pond there.

4. Plans may be taken to re-excavate the pond first for cleaning it and for searching archaeological artefacts.
5. The village Kakrajit seems to be rich in archaeological artefacts. One can find a number of big statues found from the Kundu Pukur nearby. The collection includes a number of elaborate statues of Surya, and from this it may be assumed that once there was a Surya temple there. We know the cult of Surya worship started in Orissa, and so the statues and the lost temple might have been from the 11 to 12 century.
6. The location of Dantan port can be an important task involving multidisciplinary project.
7. The Kurumbera Fort at Gaganeshwar, Kukai, Keshairy has a simple history so far. But the architectural pattern suggests that some big temple might have been there (still some foundations are there) and the entire structure was either a Buddhist or Hindu temple complex.
8. The ground at Kierchand needs proper study.
9. The forts and temples at Nayagram need can be explored academically.
10. The Fort of Raibania needs to be studied as an important defence area of the region.

For all these, holistic multidisciplinary approaches need to be followed, and for this academic institutions, organizations, heritage trusts, government agencies and independent scholars need to come under umbrella projects. All these will contribute to the overall development of the area and enrich our knowledge of the heritage lying in neglect.