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BANGARH: ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES OF DAKSHIN DINAJPUR DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

The ancient history of Bangarh is quite rich. There are numerous specimens of Maurya-Shunga-Kushan and Gupta period in Bangar, later stages of Gupta period and Pala period. The Shunga and Kushan periods date from 130 BC to the first half of the first and second centuries AD. It was preceded by the Maurya period from 321 BC to 165 BC. That is, in the 2400 year old history of Bangarh. The discovery of this resource is again the archeological survey of Bengal workers. Devkot is in Bangarh. The name of the vehicle is still unknown to many in various ancient texts; Bangarh is also referred to as Devikota and Dvikota for millions of years. According to the historians of North Bengal, it is one of the most important ancient sites of North Bengal It is mentioned in the ancient literature of the local area In the Gupta period, the name of this place with the symbol of ancient city and fort was 6 The city was protected by a fortified wall inside a deep moat The walls of the fort were eight feet higher than the height of the city There were eight guard camps at the entrance to the city in the north-west Attached to the moat was a huge tank and the lake was connected to the Punarbhaba river In other words, when the water level in the trench decreased, water was supplied from the tank, and the river was connected to the canal so that the water in the tank did not decrease. There was also an improved sewerage system, which is proof of a modern city. The main settlement was to the north and east of the average According to archaeologists, Bangarh covered an area of 1,200 acres, of which 141 acres included forts. Some of it can be seen in the excavations today.

Introduction:

Bangarh is one of the leading Ancient and Early-Medieval City of Eastern India. Now, the ruined City is located at Shibbari Gram Pachayet area, one and half mile to the north of Gangarampur Municipality (in Muhammedan times which was called Dam-damaand it's real name was Devikot), on the eastern bank

of the River Punarbhava, (this river was tributary of the Ganges and branch of the Padma River) and about 45 Km. from the District Headquarter of Balurghat town, in the District of Dakshin Dinajpur. D.C.Sen claims that the identified ancient Kotivarsa is the synonyms of present Bangarh. Now, Kotivarsa has identified by the archaeological evidences, with the name of Bangarh, a capital city of the legendary *Daitya* (but not Demon) king Bana or Banasur (The first Kirat king who ruled central Nepal and he had killed by Lord Krishna). According to the works of Barua Bahadur, during that period, Dravidians were designated as Daitya, Danavas, and Asuras etc.

Excavations at the site began in 1937-38 at the initiative of the University of Calcutta and under the leadership of the historical professor Dr. Kunjagobinda Goswami and continued till 1940-41 AD. It may be mentioned that the excavation was assisted by the then Raja of Dinajpur Jagadishnath Roy, District Magistrate AD Khan and Divisional Inspector of Education Fakirchand Banerjee. As a result of the excavations, the ruins of the capital of Banaraja were discovered in the center of the whole region. Excavations have revealed that the site survived from the Maurya period to the Muslim rule. Data from the Bangar Archaeological Society show that the area of Bangar was about eighteen hundred (1800) feet long and 1500 feet wide. The city was surrounded by moats and walls. To the east was the main city gate which is no more. There was a palace in the center of the city. There is a folk tale about Bangarh.

Although the excavations were not very large, they were excavated at the highest points of the ancient city, surrounded by moats and castle walls. Maximum 10.75 m. Until deep excavations were conducted. It is known that the level of cultural settlement from the Maurya period to the Mughal period has been revealed. Inside Bangarh, the first excavations at the Rajbari Stupa revealed the remains of a large Gupta-era wall and some quadrangular corrugated coins of all artifacts and copper. The ruins of a Pala-era temple are now unearthed at the entrance to Bangarh, where a shallow five-and-a-half-foot-diameter brick shack is found just inside the cruciform house. In the upper part of which there were sixteen lotuses and below that there was a reservoir with Atkon. A deeper excavation reveals a wall surrounding a large and heavy brick city. According to historians, the city dates back to the Maurya period. Excavations have yielded pot wells, various types of red shiny black pottery, various types of stone garlands, cast copper coins, etc. The terracotta statues of the Tachara Shunga period include terracotta statues, terracotta shillings with Brahmi inscriptions, various types of earthenware, glossy black earthenware vessels, terracotta casings made to protect the city, etc.

Capital of Banasur (BanRaja):

Maharaja Pundra was the powerful king of Pundra. Each of them was known as Paundra Kshatriya. Traces of ancient civilization of Pundradesh are found from Mahasthangarh and Bangarh. In the mythological era, Baliraj Pundradesh built a strong empire. After his death, Birputra Ban ruled this kingdom. Banaraja established his capital near Shivbari Hat, near the town of Gangarampur in the present South Dinajpur district. The capital of Banaraja was called Bananagar and his kingdom was called Banaraja, which is known to the

locals as Bangarh. The most important historical place in the district is Bangarh; It is one of the oldest ruins in the district. Located 45 km from Balurghat and 75 km from Maldah. From the time of the Gupta period, Bangarh was the capital of the court year subject, which was included in the Yakina Pundravardhana Bhukti. One of the ancient names of this subject is Devkot / Devikot, Dhasavan, Kortivarsha, Shonitpur etc. Remains of a variety of artefacts are found from a wide area over a radius of about 4 km.

At the same time various historical monuments of Maurya, Gupta and Pala eras were discovered. The place is known as 'Bangarh' or 'Ban Rajar Garh' in modern history. Kotivarsha or Bangarh was a 'subject' or 'district' of Pundravardhana and one of the administrative centers. The size of Bangarh was eighteen feet long and fifteen hundred feet wide. The palace was surrounded on three sides by beautiful moats and on the west by the river Punarbhava, which still flows. There was a high bridge over the moat to communicate with the palace. Members of the royal family used to enter the palace through that bridge. At present there is no sign of that bridge. The whole palace stands in a ruined heap. And all around is just a mound of broken bricks. Two tanks can be seen to the south-east of the palace. The two tanks are called 'Jivat Kund' and 'Amrit Kund'. It is said that dead people get back to life by using the water of the living well. Even if a dead child is laid on the bank of a living pool, it becomes alive. And immortality can be achieved by using the water of Amritkund. Currently, the two tanks are unusable and abandoned. All those stories have remained only in folklore.

Four pillars of red granite were found standing at Shivbari village near Bangarh. Each pillar is six feet high and four feet in diameter. It is said that the place with four pillars was formed as the roof of the wedding of Usha and Aniruddha. Raja Ramnath Roy took most of the beautiful architectural and sculptural specimens of the palace to the Dinajpur palace. According to folklore, if one can hold each pillar one by one with a fence, one's wish is fulfilled. However, in most cases, it is beyond the reach of the fence. Nowadays, due to lack of maintenance, local people keep cows and goats tied up in those pillars.

Excavation at Bangarh:

The excavation site at Bangarh was up to fourteen feet deep in Surrey. It is known from the poem written by Sandhikar Nandi Ram that Bangarh was a temple city. Excavations match its many forms. The main temple of this city adorned with innumerable temples was the Bodhisattva Lokesh Temple and the Tara Temple. Tashara, Murti Shiva Mandir and Bhu Bhushan Mandir, these two temples are famous for Puja Parvan, Utsav Bhuban. As a result of excavation of Bananagari, thin brick, narrow walls, dochala roof, all these patterns are indicative of the architecture of the Gupta period. The spices used in the construction of the building in Bangarh are mud clay mixed with suraki, lime and suraki mixed in masonry. The use of bricks of different sizes can be seen in the architectural work of the second excavation of Bangarh. Bangarh had a reputation for architecture with stone pillars. The pillars were made of solid sandstone. The glory of the civilization and culture of Bangarh was incomparable in the stone sculpture industry. Enlightened aspects of the terracotta industry were discovered

in the Bangarh excavations. The artisans here have left their mark on the terracotta plaques with their delicate and artistic ornaments. Most of these artifacts are from the Kushan period. The special plaque inlaid with statues of women bathing in cloudy water with companions on both sides found from Bangarh is a unique example of Bengali terracotta art.

Devikota was now under Mahasthangarh, the capital of King Pundravardhana of Bangladesh. Later, during the Chandra dynasty, Varman Raja and Sena Rajas, he also had a reputation. It is mentioned in the third century Vayupurana and Brihasanghita Named Uma, Usha, Banpur, Shonitpur in the 10th century Dictionary Charitanam and Purushottam's Trikandrashesha. Even in the writings of Sandhyakar Nandi, there are descriptions of the dighi and civic beauty here. At the beginning of his reign in Bengal in 1204, Battiar Khilji kept his capital at Devkot on the banks of the Punarbhaba for some time. Excavations here in 1936 led to the discovery of a Pala-era temple complex. That's when Bangarh 7 caught my eye. From the treasures that have been discovered twice in a row, it is thought that a new direction in the history of Bengal may be revealed in this ancient city of Bangarh. Many red and black pottery, copper utensils, houses and fireplaces made in Otel and Dumb method (small bamboo landscaping) have been found in Devkota, Bangar. Indigenous people still build houses in the Otel and Dumb method, which is considered to be the oldest method. Evidence of such houses has also been found underground in Ayodhya. Ancient coins, idols of bulls, pigs, and many other stone deities have been found in Bangar. Besides, many utensils and jewelery made of copper and various metals have been recovered. Which was the use of these materials at that time. Many of them are said to have been made in the Pala period (seventh to ninth centuries). Most recently, an arched statue of an archer, a basalt stone Buddha's head and a watering can used in a Buddhist monastery have been recovered. The rescue of a small boat proved that the city was adept at shipping. Banaraja was a devoted worshiper of Shiva. Shiva loved him more than his own son Kartik. So the idol of Shiva has been discovered around the palace of Banaraja. That is why the place is known as Shivbati or Shivbari. He used to chant in the name of Shiva on the bank of a lake 18 km south of Gangarampur.

Bangarh under Kotivarsha Vishaya:

One more historical event is found about Bangarh. It is known that Mahabir, the founder of Jainism, came to Pundesh in the sixth century BC to spread the religion. Here he initiated a man named Sudharma, a resident of the city for millions of years, into Jainism. Sudhirma, a disciple of Mahavira, again introduced Jambu Swami, a resident of this city, to Jainism. Jambu Swami preached Nigram and sat on the seat of the gods to the people of this region. He died at Kotikpur and was buried there for millions of years. The city became a place of pilgrimage due to the tomb of Jambu Swami at Kotikpur. It is known from the large-scale Kosh text written by Harishen that Nigriddham was widely spread in the city for millions of years during the establishment of the Mauya Empire. There was a king named Padmarath in the city for millions of years. His queen's name was Padmashree. There was a Brahmin named Somashrama under the protection of this king. Karen, the only son of Somashrama, was born in this

billionaire city. The son's name is Bhadrabahu. The talented gentleman had an incredible tendency to listen to reading from his childhood. His only job was to do good to the people. Seeing the talent of Bhadrabahu, Sri Gorvadhanacharya was pleased and initiated him into Jainism. Later, when Shri Gorvadhanacharya died, Bhadrabahu was appointed as the leader of Jainism. At this time, Chandra Gupta Maurya, the founder of the Maurya dynasty, became a recluse. In this state Chandra Gupta Maurya took initiation to Bhadra Bahu. Bhadrabahu, the guru of Chandra Gupta, the emperor of the Maurya dynasty, was the fifth Srutakebali. Cable means reincarnation. They were followed by five other "listeners".

According to the *Bangarh Grant* of Mahipala-I, (who ascended to the throne in 980 A.D. and had conquered the whole of North Bengal) recovered at Bangarh Village, which revealed during the reign of Nayapala (son of Mahipala-I, king of the Pala dynasty) and also the *Belwa* Copperplate Inscriptions of Bhoja Barman, which had issued in the fifth year of his reign, i.e. in 993 A.D., those refers that once Bangarh was belonged as an important city in the name of Kotivarsa. Dr.K.G.Goswami suggests that Vajjayanti, Devikotta and Kotivarsa of the ancient and medieval fame were the same. During the reign of Pala dynasty, Bangarh was a *Visaya* and flourished as a local administrative centre under their Empire. Four Damodarpur Copperplate Inscriptions of Gupta period, dating on 443 A.D., which discovered from Dakshin Dinajpur District, it has referred that Kotivarsa was a *Visaya*, (*visaya* was divided into several *vithis*), a famous city, and the chief administrative centre, belonged to Pundravardhana Bhukti (important administrative divisions of north-eastern-India, were then regarded as "Bhukti" at the same time).The fame and importance of Kotivarsa, was very remarkable then, like other cities of ancient India, i.e. Mathura, Ujjain, Patliputra, Konauj, Koushambi etc. Certainly, Kotivarsa was a famous city, like any International city, during the conquering period of Bhoja Barman (whose name is one of the most renowned in India, but of whose exploits no record has been preserved), the King of "The Barman dynasty".On the other hand, another Copperplate Inscriptions of Damodarpur, has referred that at the same time, Bangarh was a chief administrative and cultural centre of Kotivarsa *Visaya* and Mahasthangarh was its Capital. R.K.Gupta suggests that during the reign of Pala dynasty (specially, during the reign of Kumar Pala-I) Kotivarsa *visaya* had been more flourishing as a trade center than earlier, besides other administrative centers of ancient Bengal. However, Rakhaldas Bandyopadhyaya, pioneer historians of ancient India, who has advocated that the whole northern part of Varendri or Varendra, was then recognized in the name of "Kotivarsa" from the beginning of fifteen hundred years ago. The above statements have further proved by the statements from the "*Bangarh Grant*" of Mahipala-I (who had tried to recover his father-land, i.e. the entire ancient Bengal) revealed in the 9th year of his reign. "Prajnapana-granth" of Jaina, it has indicates that Kotivarsa, was then belonged as a *Visaya* under the Rarh Bhumi.

Devkot or Devikotta:

However, the Turkish Invader named Iktiyaruddin Muhammad Bin-Bakhtiyar Khilji, who had attacked Bengal and forcibly entered into the palace of Lakshana Sena (who was renowned as Goureshwar, mentioned on 32nd stanza in

the Madhainagar Copper-Plate Inscriptions), the king of Bengal, during the 13th century A.D. conquest of Nadia or Navadwip. Md. Bin-Bakhtiyar applied his mind to arrange a new expedition with him a large army towards Bhootan, Assam and also in the Tibetan regions. On the way of his so-called Tibet expedition, he captured Kotivarsa and had settled there an army camp for sheltering his troop. After that, he founded the Muslim rule in Rarh and Gouda (Taranatha, a Tibetan monk, who wrote a history of Buddhism early in the seventeenth century of our era, mentions that Chandra Gupta's son and successor of Bindusara, who was born in the country of ancient Gauda) or Lakhnawati (During the Muslim times, the city of Gouda was also known by the name of Lakhnawati, according to the name of Lakshana Sena) in 1205 A.D. and established his capital at Kotivarsa for his ruling area. From that time, the identification of Kotivarsa has become gradually been changed and recognized with the name of Devkot. Soon after the Turkish conquest of the Bengal delta in 1204, Muslim immigrants from different places were settled down in Kotivarsa, besides other emporium like Gouda, Pandua, Sonargaon, Deotala and Chittagong, principally as long distance traders, administrators, soldiers and literary. Medieval historian of Sultanate period, Minhaj Siraj, who visited Bengal forty years after Bakhtiyar's "Inroads of Bengal" and then he personally collected some oral traditions concerning it, where Bakhtiyar had settled himself firmly as a governor or ruler of Bengal. Dr. Ahmed Sharif said that he was indeed the maker of the medieval history of Bengal.

During the period of Bakhtiyar Khilji, the ancient Devkot had been flourishing day by day as a second capital of his reign and soon it had also emerged as an early urban settlement of the Muslim rule in Bengal, which had continued to keep gradual development up to the reign of Ali Mardan. Ali Mardan, who came to Kativarsa as the Governor of the Muslim rule in Bengal, appointed by Qutub-ud-din (who was originally a Turkish slave) after the death of Iktiyar-ud-din in A.D.1206. It is important that, "Ancient Devkot" or "Deokot" was then flourished as the first capital city during the Muslim rule in Bengal. In the next time, Ghyas-uddin Iwaz, who transferred the capital of Muslim Bengal from Devkot to the historic city of Gouda-Lakhnawati during the year of 1219-20 but the real causes for transferring the capital, remained doubtful and unidentified even today. Certainly, the ancient "Devkot" was then recognized as an active administrative centre of Muslim power in Bengal, especially during the reign of Bakhtiyar Khilji and after 20 years of his death. As per the written records of J.F. Bourdillon, who advocated that at the same time, Deokot or devkot was a local trade centre and also a capital city of Varendra or Varendri. In the ancient times, it may be identical with Kotikapura or Banapura and as the Capital of Kotivarsa *Visaya*. According to A.B.M. Habibullah, the same *Visaya*, i.e. Kotivarsa has identified with the name of ancient Devkot or Devikotta, which locally known as Bangarh under the Pundravardhana Bhukti.

The ancient name of Bangarh i.e. Devikotta or Banapura, which now totally existed their earlier terms, mentioned in some records which recovered within Kotivarsa *Visaya*. In the same way, Sandhyakara-Nandi, who has dictated in his great works of the "*Ramcharita*" and it has also clearly mentioned in the book, "*Brihatsangita*". According to the records of Abhidhanachintamani by

Hemchandra, Devikota or Diw-kot, Umavan, Ushaharan, Shonitpur, Banapur etc. were might be synonymous of Kotivarsa. “Purushottomer Trikhandashesha,” refers that Bannagar or Bangarh was then recognised by different names i.e. Devikot, Deokot or Diw-kot, Kotivarsa etc. It has further proved after the excavations, led by the Director of Archaeological survey of India on the ruined place of Bangarh in the year of 2009. Dr.W.W.Hunter, who has clearly referred in his great book, “A Statistical Accounts of Bengal, Voll-v,” at the advent of the Muslim era, Devkot Pargana was belonged to the north of Madnabati pargana under Pundravardhana Bhukti. The Secret Book of Jain, “*Jaina “Prajnapana”*” has attributed that Kotivarsa or ancient Devkot, as a city, flourished in Radha Mondala (At the same time, the administrative divisions of South India are called “Mondala”). Thus, we can reach in the final calculation that the ancient Kotivarsa, Devkot and Bangarh were the same city or Nagara belonged to Pundravadhana Bhukti.

Conclusion:

Nearly two thousand years ago, F.B.Hamilton, who visited the site of Bangarh in 1833, tracing the routes of Hieun Tsang (who visited India in the 7th century A.D.), he reported that the ruins of ‘Bannagar’ occupied the east bank of the Punarbhava which at this point flew from the north-east to the south-west for about 2 miles, beginning a little above “Dum-dumah”. The unknown Komboja intruder, who expanded his territory in North Bengal and then he built a temple of Lord Shiva at Bangarh, which is now almost vanished. The above statements have learned from “A Pillar Inscription” of Kamboja dynasty, which has discovered from Bangarh Village. At the same time, the rulers of Kamboja family were introduced their possession of North Bengal, led by Rajyapala (learned from Dinajpur Pillar Inscriptions) during the reign of Pala dynasty but soon he driven away among them. Actually, Bana or Banasur, the king of Bangarh, himself was a great worshipper of Lord Siva, that’s why; he excavated a tank at the village of Tapan, which recognized as Tarpandighi, about 20 km. towards south of Bangarh, from where a Copper Plate Inscription of Lakshana Sena, has discovered. Then and even today, people of the locality regard about the tank, i.e. Tarpandighi or Tapan Dighi, as a holy tank.

Moreover, there was a beautiful Buddhist Monastery at Devkot, i.e. the ancient city of Bangarh, which had destroyed by the attack of Turkish Soldier, Bakhtiyar khilji, probably in 1199 A.D. He also demolished there many Hindoo temples and built Mahommedan mosques, palaces, and caravanserais built with the materials. Though, he was not bloodthirsty and took no delight in massacre or in flinching misery on his subjects. On the eve of the advent of the Muslims in India that the significance and numbers of the ancient deities had greatly changed. Most of them had disappeared from the popular pantheon, the importance of others had enormously varied, and a number of new ones had risen into favors. Sandhyakara-Nandi, the biographer of Ram Pal, who has composed the book of “*Ramcharita*, (The Varendra Research Society has therefore earned gratitude of the scholarly world by sponsoring the publication of an improved edition of the *Ramcharita*) in the 12th century A.D. and praised on his book about the excellence of Bangarh. He also described that there were, located many temples, beautiful

lakes, gardens, ponds, many unknown trees etc. here and there, at the same time. Today, many visitors come from different places, they wait and see the historical place and then they go back to their own destination but the sweet ancient memory will be lying there forever, day by day.

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