



Princely State of Gangpur

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Abstract:

The story of Odisha says a history of some thousand years ago. It has experienced a wide narration of valiant warfare, adoption of variant dynasties, insertion of public representation in monarchy and many more. Even during the English period the Feudatory system has gained an important role that has also put pressure in obtaining rights for its indigenous people. The post independent era has also witnessed a fair participation of royal family members i.e., kings, queens, Pattayats, Chhotrays, Deewans and more in democracy. The infrastructures built during state time still act as core houses for implementing development activities in our state. This article will focus on the establishment of Gangpur feudatory state and its role during the statehood and also revisit the infrastructures of that time. But many of them are still in a miserable condition. This attention may put a beam of light on them to spread our culture, conservation of history and promotion of participatory tourism.

History & folklore

It is a story of more than a thousand years ago, when the entire Kalinga, Udra and Kosala were under the rule of Somavamshi kings. The ruler at Jajnapur of the entire empire Janmejaj-II falls into trouble by the Gangas, Chhindaka-Nagas and Kalachuri kings. They disturbed the Somavamshi Keshari kings through repeated attacks and conspiracy. Janmejaj and his allies became unable to control the disturbances; as a result they witnessed the decline in their imperial power gradually.

Janmejaj's contemporary Kalchuri king, Prthvideva I [i] assumed the title of Sakala-Kosaladhipati, which suggests that he has seized Kosala region. Similarly the Ganga king Rajaraja-I Devendravarman and his son claimed to have

defeated the kings of Utkala and Kosala, Chindaka-Naga chief Someshvara I also declared to have defeated the Udra chief and captured six lakh and ninety-six villages of Kosala. Sometime it is said that after the arrival of Gangas the Bhanu Ganga-III has sheltered himself here at the Sundargarh region. Different epigraphs found in several places of western Odisha suggested so.

But these evidences never confirmed that the rulers of Keshari dynasties were completely wiped out. In some places they remained as chieftains under the supremacy of the Gangas, Kalachuri and Chindaka Nagas. From among such kingdoms Gangpur presently known as Sundargarh was one of the most discussed states that kept its existence till Indian independence. The cave paintings, lithics and copper plates



excavated from different places of western Odisha have recalled the stories of Keshari kings here.

But the present royal family members of Gangpur don't bear the blood of the Somakula or Keshari dynasty. They claimed themselves as Sekhar Vamshis. This Sekhar dynasty again a foreign entity came from Singhbhum. Several stories are there narrating the beginning of Sekhar raj in Gangpur. One of such stories can be mentioned here to understand the socio-political situation during emergence of Sekhars in Gangpur. When the Keshari or lion line died out, the tribes or aboriginal people of the land called as Bhuyans searched for a king to rule over them. As the tradition of tribal ruling was not prevalent earlier and the Bhuyans used to act as chieftains under the imperial rulers like Kesharis or Gangas. The old Zamindaries of Gangpur named Sarapgarh, Sargipalli Hemgiri, Nagra, Hatibari also witnessed Bhuyan chieftains as their revenue and administrative heads.

During this search of a king, some of the influential Bhuyans stole a child from the Sekhar family of Singhbhum or Panchet and elected him as the Chief [ii]. The Bhuyans as guardian were regarded as 2nd decision maker next to the king. And they used to coronate the new King each time after the loss of the ruler. This tradition is still continuing at Gangpur palace as a token of Royal custom.

Folklore of Gangpur says that the Bhuyans after coronation or Tilak ceremony named the stolen child as Gangadhar Sekhar Deo and he is believed as the founder of Sekhar dynasty at Gangpur. After him not less than 20 kings of this lineage have ruled over Gangpur. This has got a princely state status during the British. A unique story of rule of queen as regent is seen here. During the queen rule under Rani Janakiratna Devi Gangpur has achieved milestones in modern administration and education under British patron.

This Sekhar Vamshi kings have also took asylum of the Chauhans of Patnagarh during Raja Prithwi Singh of Patnagarh. According to the then British Commissioner HB Imphey, Prithwisingh Dev was the 4th king of Patnagarh in Chauhan rule and he included Bonai, Gangpur, Bamanda and Suraguda in his kingdom. [iii]

The state was under the suzerainty of Sambalpur, which formed part of the dominions of Maratha Rajas of Nagpur. It was ceded to British East India Company in 1803 by the treaty of Deogaon with Maratha king Raghuji Bhonsla. In 1821 the feudal supremacy of Sambalpur over Gangpur was cancelled and the chief of Gangpur was given with a Sanand to rule over Gangpur under the British direction. The state was transferred to Odisha division from Chhotnagpur Division in 1905.

Present Raja

Presently Samarendra Sekhar Deo is sworn in as the Raja of Gangpur. He is considered as the 23rd heir of this dynasty. He is a very young and dynamic guy with keen interest in day to day politics. His mother was actively involved in politics. He along with his mother, wife Vignyani Kumari-daughter of Maharaja Charanamrit Singh Deo Bahdur of Maihar and one issue are staying at the Kishore Mahal Palace. In an interview he has expressed his desire to make the palace as a heritage Hotel and so started renovating this. As Gangpur is considered as a very important place for tribal tourism in Odisha this idea of making the palace a heritage hotel will attract the visitor- he believes.

Physical Situation:

After the cancellation of dominion of Sambalpur over Gangpur the state was demarcated with an area of 2492 square miles. It is bounded on the north by Jashpur state and Ranchi district of British dominion. On the south



by Sambalpur and Bonai and Bamra states; On the west by Raigarh state of Central provinces.

River Ib is considered as the lifeline for Gangpur state. It enters to the state from Jashpur. In Sambalpur it joins with Mahanadi and latter at Panposh it joins with Sankh and koel. This river system controls the entire agriculture production of the state. Depending upon the river courses we found habitats on each side. Beside agriculture River Ib is considered as the main dependant transport system. It is said that diamonds have occasionally found in the sands of Ib. Some group of people identified as Jhorias search for diamond and gold in the flowing water and beds of the river.

The Union of Sankh and Koel near Panposh have created a scenic beauty for the Gangpur state. It has attracted the British and tourists also. *In the Hindu mythology, Sage Parasara was attracted to this beauty and then to the amour of a fisherman's daughter named Matshagandha. The relationship with Matshagandha gave birth to Sage Vyasa, who compiled the Mahabharata. As Vyasa was born at this place this site is named after him as Vedavyasa and is also acting as a major tourist spot in Sundargarh.* An image of sage Vyasa is here to narrate and remember the mythological event.

Gangpur during British Administration:

The East India Company (1821) granted first Sanad in favor of Raja Indra Sekhar Deo of Gangpur. It was revised in 1827 after the permanent cession for a term of five years. At that time Parsuram Sekhar Deo was the Raja.

This was allowed till 1875. The queen granted Sanad in 1899 and when Gangpur separated from Chhotnagpur a fresh Sanad was issued in 1905[iv]. By this Sanad the chief of Gangpur enjoyed powers on behalf of the British crown. A stability of administration was observed during the

British raj and new state buildings were also made during this period.

There are three Palaces in Gangpur built in a very close proximity. The oldest building is in a ruined condition and the 2nd one is used as the residence of the royal family members. The most important House for the then administration was considered as the Kishore Bhaban situated on the bank of the River Ib. Now also it is identified as the royal palace of Gangpur. 18th king Raghunath Sekhar Deo is believed to have built the palace in 1915, when more place for royal families were in need. The Palace is named after Yubraj Birkishore Deo who was deceased in a very young age.

Raja Raghunath Sekhar Deo succeeded the Gaadi in November 1858. At that time he was a minor. His uncle and brother of late Raja Janardan Sekhar Deo, Lal Giriraj Sekhar Deva was appointed as the Sarbarahkar during his minority. In 1865 Raghunath took the charge of administration.

Raghunath Sekhar Deo was trained to administer the state by the British during his minority. Therefore he has a great inclination to the English men. He adopted many welfare activities in the state. He started a population census and new settlement methods, suppressed the long time continued disturbance among the Gaontias and Naiks, and also put the foundation stone for modern education with the help of the English officers. His attitude and respect for British administration has made the English Officers to offer him the title of *Maharaja*. But at the early age of his regime he was also punished by the crown because of promoting witchcraft. In 1875 he was arrested and put behind the bars at Ranchi.

During his period first time the British Govt has appointed one Diwan or chief executive for smooth running of the administration. After him



Bhabani Shankar his grandson became the ruler. He shifted the King's residence to the newly built Kishore Mahal. From his period the ruler used to stay at the Kishore Mahal with their families.

Kishore Mahal is a two storied building with Anglo-Indian style of architecture built. The entire palace is divided into three parts. Court yards are there to provide a well ventilated atmosphere inside the rooms. 1st part was dedicated to Sentries and security personnel. The second part was residence of the Raja and his family. Third part was for the servants or *Poilis*. In the second courtyard two beautifully carved *Mandaps* are found. These two are made by Maharaja Raghunath for the thread ceremony of his grandsons.

Maharaja Raghunath Sekhar Deo built the Jagannath temple in the year 1916. Probably it is the last temple made during statehood of Gangpur. Now it stands as a symbol of Utkalian culture and tradition. A marble piece at the entrance of the temple establishes the foundation date of the temple. This temple is managed by a separate trust board.

Bhabani Sankar acquired the Gaadi in 1919 and remained as Raja for only 11 years. He passed away in a very young age of 32 only. He was a very well behaved and benevolent ruler. Sometimes he took decisions but couldn't stick on that so he again returned to the old policy. This was because of his immaturity in administration as told by the historians.

Rani Janakirathnayamarjee:

Bhabanishankar's death has turned the Gangpur administration to a new direction. Queen Janakirathnayamarjee assumed the charge of the state as the Regent Rani Sahiba. She was a learned woman with wide vision and determination. She belonged to the Royal family of Kurupam, situated in Modern

Visakhapatanam of Andhra Pradesh. Her father was Raja Vyiricharia Virbhadra Raju Bahadur Garu and mother was Rani Sahiba Narasayamma Patta Mahadevi Garu. During the study at Mayo College of Ajmer Bhabanishankar visited the city and fell in love with Janakirathnayamarjee. Then they got married and settled at Gangpur. After assuming power she devoted her time to reconstruct Gangpur. First of all she requested the British Govt to appoint one talented officer as Diwan for her state. With her request Khan Bahadur Abdul Khan was appointed as the Diwan replacing HD Christian. She established modern systems for collecting revenue and extending developmental administration. With a new mind and broad ideas she started imparting English education in the state and involving people in the administration. So a new council building was made aside the main palace in 1944. She acted as the president of the council and to help her in administration two ministers were nominated from among the *Prajas*. This may be due to the pressure raised by the British rulers on the princely states to suppress the people's agitation at different parts. Now this council building is not in the possession of the Royal family.

Different departments were made during her period. About 7 UP schools and 19 LP schools were established. Jail, Police, Court buildings were built during her period. When the 2nd world war broke out Rani Janakiratna helped the British force both by money and manpower. She had donated 20 thousand rupees to Imperial relief fund. Respecting the request of the English administration she bought war bonds and also sent soldiers to France.[v]

The British officers were impressed by her skill of administration and awarded her with prestigious CEB title in 1945. At that time she staged her son Udit Pratap Sekhardeo as the ruler. He was the last ruler and signed the merger treaty with India.



Society and people:

Beside Bhuyans other five types of tribes like Gonda, Oraons, Khonds, Majhis and Agarias lived here in Gangpur state. The tribal dominated Gangpur was based upon many superstitions. Colonel Dalton admitted that Human sacrifice was a regular tradition at the shrine of Kali in Sundargarh.

The girls betrothed at a very early age but remain in their father's house till they grew up to women. This indicates that the child marriage tradition was little bit improved and modified. Widow marriage and re marriage were also allowed in this system.

Beside agriculture, business like importing sugar, salt, exporting articles like cotton, sesamum, lac, honey arrowroot, wax and catechu to other places by road and waterways continued during the royal administration.

Merger :

This state has seen a vigorous agitation from the inhabitants in the name of *Praja Andolon* as seen in other states also. The Amco-Simco violence is considered the most important one. Though, it ended with a blind firing that claimed loss of 32 tribal lives, but opened the eyes for others. It is alleged that people didn't give any revenue to the Royal court and disobeyed the rules of the state. The King Bir Udit Pratap Sekhar Deo became afraid of this movement and stayed out of the state at his maternal uncle's state i.e., Visakha Patnam. He considered Vizag as safer than Gangpur. So the estate at Gangpur lost its importance gradually.

After India's independence, a movement for merger of princely states in India was started by the Union Home ministry. To protect self interest of the royalty in Odisha Maharaja of Patna made an ally with some states in the eastern region and put demands before Sardar Ballav Bhai

Patel the then Home Minister of Indian Govt. This charter was consisted of four major charters. First of all they demanded Odisha legislature should be of bicameral and the Upper House should bear the rulers of the 26 princely states and their heirs as permanent members. The second important point was regarding fixed and guaranteed Privy Purse, protection of private properties and personal privileges[vi]. Sardar Ballav Bhai Patel and his secretary VP Menon considered all these demands and assured them for a dignified life by passing the demands to the state Govt to make them fulfilled. After a long discussion at Cuttack the ruler of Gangpur signed the merger agreement with Union of India at Cuttack and let the state to be part of the Odisha state in December 14, 1947. From 1st of January this has been executed and Gangpur is considered as an important District of Odisha with the modern name Sundargarh as its Headquarters.

References :

- [i] Prithwideva ruled from 1065-1090, Devendra Varman from 1070-1078, Someswara-I 1069-1097 CE as mentioned in <http://puratattva.in/>
- [ii] LEB Cobdain amsay: The feudatory states of Odisha, Logos Press.
- [iii] Mukteswar Patel: Swarnaprasu Gangpur; Abinash Publications: Mukteswar Patel was an employee under regent Rani janakiratna devi.
- [iv] LEB Cobdain amsay: The feudatory states of Odisha, Logos Press.
- [v] Indian Nobility
- [vi] VP Menon, Integration of India; Orient Blackswan.

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