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Traking the Historical Journey of a Region's Evolution from Gauda Janapada to Malda

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ABSTRACT

Malda District is a district of the Indian state of West Bengal. The current Malda district was earlier known as Gauda Janapada. Places like Gauda, Pandua, Lakhnauti, Eklakhi etc. in the present Malda district were the vvcapital of Bengal during the same period of Mughal rule from the time of the Pala Kings. But when the capital of Bengal was moved from Gauda in 1595 AD, the fame of Gauda began to decline. However, before the fall of Gauda Township (Janapad), the name of the region gradually came to be known as Malda from the Sultanate period. Inscriptions found in Malda district and descriptions of native and foreign tourists identify Malda district. In 1666, foreign tourists Alexander Hamilton counted Malda as a large town. I have tried to point out the origin of Gauda Janapada as the original form of Malda district and the spread of fame of this Janapada in Bengal and beyond Bengal, and above all, a through account of how the present Malda district was formed. The study is based on historic research. Qualitative research is used in this study. Complete the study used the descriptive method. Primary and Secondary sources are used for data collection.

KEY WORDS

Gauda, Janapad, Capital. Independence, Malda.

INTRODUCTION

Malda district was formerly part of Gauda Janapada. The journey of political rise of what we mean by undivided Bengal started from this Gauda Janapada. If we look at the map of undivided Bengal, we can see that this Gauda Janapada is located in the

middle of the western border of Bengal¹. India's main river Ganga enters this town of Gauda Janapada, flows through various parts of Bengal and finally falls into the Bay of Bengal. Located midway along the western Frontier, the town of Gauda Janapada served as the gateway to Bengal for trade and commerce with the rest of India. After all, if any external power wanted to attack Bengal, it would have been possible to easily stop that external power Gauda Janapada. Hence, since ancient times, this town of Gauda Janapath played a role as fertile field for the rise of the royal power of Bengal. The prosperous city of Gauda Janapada maintained its glory for a long time. Even as Gauda established itself as the capital of Bengal for many centuries, it also played an important role in the political ups and downs of the entire North India.

Panini's Ashtadhyai mentions the name of a region called Gaurpur in Eastern part². Arthashastra the book of Kantilya refers the name of Gauda along with Vanga and Pundra³. The six Janapadas Gauda, Pandrak, Tamralipta, Bardhawan, Vanga and Samatata are mentioned in the book of Brihatsamhita of Varahamihir⁴. It can said that, Pandrak, Tamralipta, Bardhawan, Vanga and Samatata are located in Eastern part of India and Gauda is mentioned together with those, Gauda was located in Eastern India. The Haraha Inscription of Isanavarman has been said that the people of Gauda left the realm and settled on the beach.⁵ The Inscription proves that some coastal area were included in Gauda. Alexander Cunningham mentioned his book 'The Ancient Geography of India' that, "Hiuen Tsang places the capital of kie-lo-na-su-fa-la-na-, or Karanasuvarna, at 700 li, Or 117 miles, to the North -West of Tamralipti, and the same distance to the North-East of Odra or Orissa".⁶ Hiuen Tsang spoke to the king Sasanka of Karnasuvarna. On the other hand, contemporary book Harsa-Carita mentioned the same ruler is called as the lord of Gaurda.⁷ Therefore, Sasanka was the lord of Gauda during the visit of Hiuen Tsang and his capital was Karanasuvarna.

Jaggery is one of the many products mentioned in Gauda Janapada. At one time a large quantity of fine sugarcane was cultivated here and a large quantity of molasses produced from it was also exported abroad. Probably the name Gauda originates from this molasses province. Gauda was formed with Murshidabad and part of Malda of West Bengal. Pundrak or Pundravardhana was the North-Eastern part of the modern Malda district. Barendrabhumi or Barendri is a biggest part of ancient Pundravardhana. Today's Pandua is a modified version of the ancient Pundravardhana. G. E. Lambourn said, "The district of Malda contains within its limits the sites of Pandua and Gauda, the two towns are almost equidistant North and South from Englishbazar and on opposite sides of the Mahananda, Gauda being on the Western and Pandua on the Eastern".⁸ Presently the towns of Gauda and Pandua are situated about 15 km South and North respectively of the two Engrezbazar towns.

Kautilya's reference to Arthashastra to Gauda makes it clear that Gauda belonged to the Mauryan Empire. Maurya Emperor Chandragupta Maurya was initiated into Jainism under the influence of Jaina Guru Bhadrabahu, Gauda's son.⁹ Under the influence of Bhadrabahu, Jainism prevailed over Brahmanism in the Gauda Township. Towards the end of the Gupta period there was a moral decline in Buddhism. During this time, Gauda's son Bodhi Dharma went to China and Japan to improve the moral standards of Buddhism. Who is worshiped throughout the East as the 28th successor of Buddha.¹⁰ As the Gupta Empire weakened in the sixth century, Shashanka united the isolated territories and established an independent kingdom at Gauda in 606 AD. Historian Ramesh Chandra Majumdar said that, "Shoshanna was the first sovereign Narapati (king) among the Bengali Kings"¹¹ Shashanka's capital was Karnasuvarna which is now in Murshidabad district. Shashanka's territory extended South-West to Kongod in Ganjam district of Odisha and Varanasi in Northern India. After Shashanka's death, the next 100 years saw an era of anarchy in Bengal. Just as the big fish in the pond shallows the small fish, the strong oppress and oppress the weak in the society Ramesh Chandra Majumdar identified this chaotic situation as the 'age of fish Justice'.¹²

In order to get rid of this chaotic situation, 'Prakrutipunja of Bengal' elected Gopal Devas the king and put him on the throne. The Khalimpur Inscription states that, "Gopala was made to take the land of fortune by the people in order to put an end to Matsyanyaya (the practice of gishers, i.e anarchy)".¹³ Therefore Gopal

was the founder of the Pala dynasty. Gopala probably ascended the throne between 740 and 750 AD. The Pala dynasty ruled Bengal for about 400 years. Dharmapala, Devpala, Mahipala-I, Rampala, were notable kings of the Pala dynasty. The Pala Empire became one of the major political powers of Aryavarta. Noticing the influence of Pala king Dharmapala in Northern India, the Gujrati poet Soddhal mentions him a 'Uttarapatha Swami' In his book Uday Sundry Katha.¹⁴ Ramesh Chandra Majumdar said that, "Dharmapala in the dawn of Bengali life".¹⁵ After Dharmapala in the reign of his son Devapala (810-850) the glory of the Pala Empire reached its highest point. His Empire stretched from the Himalayas in the North to the Bindu Mountains in the South. Badal Inscription is mentioned "DEVAPALA the Lord of 'the earth' bounders by the father of REVA (Vindhya), 'the father of GAURI (Himalaya) and the oceans in the West and East'.¹⁶ Rampala (1082-1124) was the last notable king of the Pala dynasty. Education, culture, literature, sculpture and painting and economic affairs flourished during the Pala period. In the last quarter of the 10th century, during the reign of Mahipala-I, the unique form of the Bengali alphabet is evident".¹⁷

After the Pala dynasty, Sena rule began in Bengal. The Senas came from Deccan and first appointed as a high ranking officials of the Pala kings and later took the power due to the weakness of the Pala kings.¹⁸ The Sena Dynasty was ruled by Samanta Sen, Hemanta Sen, Vijoy Sena, Ballal Sena and Lakshmana Sena, Bijoy Sena was the first independent king of the Sena dynasty.¹⁹ The capital of the Sena kings was Lakshmanavati and the temporary capital was Navadwip.²⁰ Ikhtyar ud-Din Mahammad Bin Bakhtiyar Khalji, the Commander of Sultan Qutubuddin Aibak of Delhi defeated the Sena dynasty king Lakshman Sena of Bengal in 1204 AD (1206) and established Muslim rule in Bengal.

Bakhtiyar Khalji established his capital at Lakshnavati (Lakhnauti). Lakhnauti is currently located near Englishbazar town in Malda district. After the conquest of Bakhtiyar Khalji, various Muslim Rulers ruled in Lakhnauti until 13th century AD. But during their reign the majority of the kingdom did not expand much. Later, Sultanate Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah and Sikandar Shah of the Ilyas Shahi Dynasty ruled Bengal independently. During their time the capital of Gauda was at Firujabad or present day Pandua. According to Firishta, "The Riyaz represents Ganesha as having attacked and killed Shihab ud- Din and seized the throne".²¹ Raja Ganesha ruled Bengal till 1418 AD. He ruled Bengal till 1418 AD. He played the role of 'king maker' of Bengal for some time. After the death of king Ganesha, his son Jadu converted to Islam and ruled Bengal under the name Jalal ud- Din from 1418 to 1433 AD. He shifted his capital from Pandua to Gauda. Jalal ud- Din succeeded by his son shams-ud- Din Ahmad Shah and ruled till 1436 AD. Ganesh's reign ended with death of Shams ud- Din.

The Ilyas Shahi Dynasty reigned again for some time in Gauda after the Ganesha dynasty. The most famous king of this period was Rukun ud - Din Barbak Shah (1460-76) AD. He was a secular Sultan. He conferred the title of 'Gunraj Khan' on Maladhar Basu, the author of 'Sri Krishna Vijay Kavya'. During his reign Krittivas Ojha wrote Ramayana in Bengal. From the overall point of view, Rukun ud- Din Barbak Shah deserves excellence among the Sultans of Bengal.²²

After the Ilyas Shahi Dynasty Gauda was ruled by the Hafsi dynasty for some time. Ala ud- Din Hossain Shah ascended the throne sometime between November 1493 AD and July 1494 AD, resorting to various forms of diplomatic diplomacy and low cunning.²³ With this, the rule of Hossain Shahi Dynasty began in Gauda. 1519 AD after Hussain Shah's death, his son Nusrat Shah ascended the throne in Gauda. Along with Nusrat was defeated by the Mughal Emperor Babar in the Battle of 'Gharghari' In 1529 AD.²⁴

After Nusrat Shah, Pathan power developed rapidly in Eastern India under the leadership of Sardar Sher Shah, leader of the Sur Dynasty. Bihar was the center of Pathan power. Sher Shah's son Jalal Khan 1538 AD besieged Lakhnauti and ousted Mahmud, the ruler of Gauda and Gauda temporarily fell to the Pathan.²⁵ With that came the end of two hundred years of rule of the independent Sultans of Gauda. From this time the decline of the city of Gauda began.

Within a few days, the Mughal Emperor Humayun captured Gauda (July 1538) and renamed it Jannatabad or the city of Heaven.²⁶ But Humayun was expelled from India after the defeat of Sher Shah at the battles of Chausa in 1539 AD and Kanauj in 1543 AD, establishing Afghan rule in Delhi and Bengal.²⁷ In 1556 AD Humayun reestablished Mughal rule in Delhi, but continued Afghan rule in Gauda. Finally in 1576 AD Bengal Sultanate Daud Khan Karrani was defeated by the Mughal forces led by the Quli Beg alias Khan-i-Jahan sent by the Mughal Emperor Akbar at the Battle of Rajmahal, ending Afghan rule in Gauda or Bengal and Bengal came under Mughal rule.²⁸

Gauda Janapada lost its political status when the capital was shifted from Tanra (Tanda) to Rajmahal in Bihar in 1595 AD and Dacca (Dhaka) became the Provincial Capital of Bangal in 1612 AD during the Mughal period.²⁹ But in the early 18th century the Dewan of Bengal Subah Murshid Quli Khan shifted the capital from Dacca to Murshidabad in 1704 AD³⁰ and he started ruling Bengal as an independent Nawab from 1717 AD.³¹ The political dynamics of Bengal began to center around Murshidabad. Finally, when Nawab Sirajdaula of Bengal was defeated by the British in the Battle of Palashi in 1757 AD and Nawab Mir Qasim was defeated in the Battle of Buxar in 1764 AD the independence of Bengal began to decline as the independence of the whole of India began to decline.

Formation of Modern Malda District

The present Malda district was the main center of Civilization and Culture of Bengal in ancient and medieval times special parts of historical areas like Pundravardhan, Varendri belong to Malda district. In ancient and medieval period Gauda, Pandua, Lakhnouti (Lakshmanavati), Ramavati, Tanda (Tara) etc. the capital of Bengal were located in this district.

However, there are different opinions about the origin of the name of Malda. According to an opinion, the origin of the word Maldah is the combination of Persian 'Mal' and Bengali 'Dah'. The word 'Dah' means Sea.³² That is Maldah means 'Ocean of wealth'. Malda region was the main trading center of ancient and medieval Eastern India. The silk textile industry manufactured here was exported to the country and abroad. So, many haat, nagar, bazar, ganj were developed in this region. As a result, the region had a lot of income from industry and trade. So, it is natural to expect such a name associated with wealth (Mal).

There is a prevailing opinion of naming from the ethnic point of view. Malo people once lived in Malda, whose as a Malpahari tribe existence is still present. They earned their livelihood by catching fish from large reservoirs. Hence the name Maldah can be derived by combination from 'Malo' race and large reservoir or 'Dah'.³³ However, it can be assumed with certainty that, Maldah is formed by combining the two words 'Mal' or 'Dah'. Even the names of various places in Malda district are found with the words 'Mal' and 'Dah'. Such as: Maldanga, Maligram, Malopara, Khutadah, Mashaldah.³⁴

Malda generally refers to the present Old Malda which rose to prominence during the Sultanate period. Most of the evidence related to early Malda has been found in this region. The oldest evidence of the name 'Malda' is found in an inscription now over the enclosure door of Shaha Jada's Shrine near the katra really, record the creation of Mosque by one Hillal in the region of Nasiruddin Mahmud Shah-I in dated 19th Shaban 859 A. H. (4th August 1455 AD).³⁵

Then during the reign of Sultan Hussain Shah, sources with the name Malda were found in no less than nine Inscription, with the boundaries of Old Malda in dated from 899 to 938 A. H. (1493-1531).³⁶

In his book Ain-e-Akbari, Abul Fazal mentioned eleven mahls in village adjacent to 'Malda'.³⁷ On the one hand, the presence of a place called Malda can be noted here, on the other hand, the mention of villages adjacent to Malda suggests that, Malda was a city at that time.

The name Malda is also found in the description of foreign tourists Alexander Hamilton came to Malda in 1666 AD. He mentioned that, "Malda is a large Town, well inhabited and frequented by Merchants, and the

English and Dutch had Factories there”.³⁸ Therefore, Malda was famous as a trading center and Town long before the formation of the district by the British. James Rennel also refers “Mauldah is a pretty neat city— It arose out of the ruins of Gour— This, as well as Cossimbazar, is a place of trade, and in particular produces muce Silk”.³⁹

At that time Malda was the main medium of communication between East India and the rest of India. Moreover, it established itself as the administrative Capital for a long time. Hence, it flourished as an industrial and trading city and spread it’s fame at home and abroad. Naturally attracted industrialists and businessmen from home and foreign to set up business and industries in the region. The English East India Company first established trade link with the district in 1676 AD.⁴⁰ However, the Dutch had established with the district before the British. In 1680 AD Fytch Nedham purchased 15 bigha of land from Raja Ray Chowdhury, the landlord of Mokdumpur, present- day Englishbazar, two miles from Malda city (Old Malda) for 300 rupees and established a new factory in August 1681 AD.⁴¹ It is now known as Old Collectorate. This new area was known by the British as ‘Englejabad’ which later came to be known as Engrejebazar. After gaining of Diwali in 1765, East India Company permanently built a fortified factory building in present day ‘Engrejebazar’ in 1771 AD under George Henschman.⁴²

No clear information is available about when Malda district was established. However, it is known from the description W. W. Hunter that, ” Till 1813 AD the thanas of present Malda district were included in Purnea, Dinajpur and Rajshahi districts. In these Police stations thefts and robberies increased at a great rate. The distance from Purnea to Kaliachak was more than 100 miles. In February 1813 submitted a report to the Government of the superintendent of Police of Lower Province highlighting these unfavourable. Pursuant to this recommendation, the Government appointed a Magistrate, a Deputy Collector and a Registrar for the Police Stations of the undivided Malda district.⁴³ As a result, Malda started it’s journey as a district.

The headquarter of the newly formed district was set up at Englishbazar. From this time the importance of Maldah (Old Malda) began to decline rapidly. But Malda gained independence and equal status with other districts when a Magistrate and collector were appointed in 1859 AD.⁴⁴ That is why G. E. Lambourn mentioned that, “The district was formed of outlying portion of the Purnea and Rangpur district in 1813, though it did not formally become an independent administrative unit till 1859 AD.⁴⁵ Malda district was part of Rajshahi division 1875 AD, Bhagalpur division from 1876 AD to 1905 AD and again Malda district was part of Rajshahi division from 1905 AD to 1947 AD.⁴⁶

During the partition in 1947 CE, the dominant Bengali Hindus were trying to keep the predominantly Hindu districts of East Bengal and West Bengal in West Bengal. Historian Sir Jadunath Sarkar submitted a memorandum to the Boundary Commission requesting the inclusion of Malda and Rajshahi in West Bengal.⁴⁷ But as Malda district is Muslim dominated, Lord Mountbatten On June 3 showed Malda district as part of Pakistan in his plan. Jawaharlal Nehru, Mohammad Ali Jinnah and Sardar Baldev Singh gave radio speeches in support of this plan.⁴⁸ For this reason, the Pakistani flag was flying in Malda On 15th August 1947 AD.

On the night of August 17th, 1947 under the Sir Cyril Redcliffe Award, the five police stations of Sibganj, Bholahat, Nachol, Gomastapur and Nababganj went to East Pakistan (Now Bangladesh) and remaining ten police stations of Englishbazar, Kaliachak, Old Malda, Gazole, Habibpur, Bamangola, Manikchak, Ratua, Khurba and Harishchandrapur came to India.⁴⁹ And the present Malda district was recognized as a district of West Bengal with these ten police stations merged to India.

CONCLUSION

Finally the people of Malda broke into celebrations with the Indian flag on 18th August as Independence Day. Malda district currently has eleven police stations and 15th blocks.⁵⁰ In 2001 AD a new sub-division called Chanchal sub-division was formed, the number of sub-division in this district is now two namely ‘Maldah

Sadar' and Chanchal.⁵¹ Moreover, at present there are two municipalities in this district namely English Bazar and Malda (Old Malda).⁵² Main town in the district is Englishbazar.

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