

# Origin and Formation of West Dinajpur District: A Brief Historical Study

## Abstract

Dinajpur is an ancient 'Janapadas' in north-eastern India. Since ancient times, this Janapadas has much changed due to administrative conveniences. Dinajpur has divided into three parts and located in India and Bangladesh but the name, 'Dinajpur' has remained unchanged till now. There are many historical interpretations of the same name and the resulting increases in the district's geographical area and sometimes has decreased. The British had occupied the territory of the land in 1765 and the old royal dynasty of four hundred years became collapsed. After the occupation of the British Empire, the historical and geographical importance of Dinajpur will grow. Ghorghat territory had occupied by the British and formed it's headquarter at Dinajpur town. Thus, the modern Dinajpur has been starting as modern head-quarter of the area from that time.

**Keywords:** Origin and Development, Fragmentation of the land, Formation of West Dinajpur.

## Introduction

There were so many problems for urbanization during the ancient times. So, the sign of cities has not found nearly a thousand years after the urbanization the Indus valley civilization in the country. And from the second to the sixth century BC was the beginning of urbanization. In the fourth century BC to the fourth century AD, was the final stage of urbanization. Once upon a time, many of the cities were built under the patronage of the ruler in different parts of present Dinajpur area. Most of those cities were destroyed by any reason and the area has changed in geographically, but historical names of those cities remains today. The Northern part of the region known as 'Kirat-bhumi' during the age of Mahabharata. Subsequently, the north-eastern part of this region was known as Pragjyotishpur and Pundravardhana, during the age of the Gupta Empire.<sup>1</sup> Dinajpur area was known as Barind during the Pala period and northern part of the region was known as Kamrupa-Kamta. Some of the moving cities were originated during the Pala period and those were destroyed. The region came to be known as the names of the cities instead of the vast land. This sequence continues until the era of the Sultanate.

## Aims of The Study

This paper is attempted to search the historical background of West Dinajpur. As well as the process towards the origin and formation of Modern Dinajpur is also focused. Fragmentation of the land and formed two districts by the names of Dinajpur and West Dinajpur and located in two countries, i.e. India and Bangladesh. There mentioned in this paper how the district of West Dinajpur became created by the partition of India in 1947 and aftermath.

## Historical Background of the Land

Mythological states were known as Pragjyotishpur consists of Nagrajya (Naga Hills), Hairambadesh (Kachhar), Shonitpur (Dinajpur, Tezpur), Matsyadesh (Gaud-Pandua), Bidarbha or Koundilya (Sadia of Assam) and Manipur etc. In the Vedic era, during the Aryanization in East India the Mongols and Bodo kings ruled the Northeast India. As a result of the Aryanization in East India, mixed culture was developing among the Bodo, Mongolia, Kirat, Asur dynasty etc. In ancient times, this region of northeast India was divided into small kingdoms, but the whole region was known as Pragjyotishpur together in different ancient texts. However, in ancient Sanskrit literature, Pragjyotishpur is known as the ancient name of Assam. 'Kalikapuren' is mentioned, Brahma first counted the stars of Pragjyotishpur. According to E.A.Gait, the word 'Prague' means the eastern country, and the word 'Jyotish' means the 'star'. In other words, the word Pragyoytishpur means "country of astrology of the East." This region was also reputation as a center of magic. According to the information given in



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the Mahabharata, it is known that the Pragjyotispur area was located north or east of the Indian peninsula. Mahavira had longed expedition towards Louhitya province or Brahmaputradesh in eastern India and fought with Bhagdutta, the king of Kamrup that was mentioned in the part of 'Sabha' and 'Ashwamedh' in the Mahabharata. In ancient times, Pragjyotispura used to understand the whole of Bharucha from the west bank of the Brahmaputra River and to the east side of the Ganges and to the north from the foot of the Himalayas to the Padma. Therefore, this region of Dinajpur was known as Pragjyotishpur or Shonitpur during the Purana era. Bangarh was one of the famous centres of that region and the name of the ruler was Ban. At different times in the history, the area had increased and decreased. As a result, the entire region did not have the same name and different regions were known by different names. During the long rule of Pundra, this region was known as Pundradesh.<sup>2</sup>

In ancient mythology there are many stories about the land of ancient Dinajpur. Biliraj was one of the Pundra kings mentioned in 'Harivansh'. The names of Pundrajaj Bali are found in Srimadbhagvat, Brahmapuraan, and Bishnupuran. In ancient mythology, the king of Pundras were sometimes called 'Asura Raj' and was once again called 'Kshatriya Raja'. Once upon a time, the empire of Asuras was established in the region of Shonitpur and Pragjyotishpur situated on the northern part of modern Bengal. According to Srimad Bhagavad Gita that, Lord Srikrishna himself was fought with Ban, the ruler of Sonitapur and with Narakasur, the king of Pragajyatisapur. In 1000 BCE, Narkasur ruled in the state of Pragjyotispur. He built a huge empire at the same time. The main parts of his empire are Kampith, Ratnapitha, Swarnapitha and Samarpith etc. Sri Krishna defeated both the rulers in the war. In this way many stories of the war of gods with the Asuras are described in ancient scriptures. The king of Asura like Brittasura Sambharasura, Ratnasura, Ghatakasura, Narakasura, Banasura, Bhallukasura all of were devotee of Shiva. Only Prahlad, the grandson of Banasura, was a devotee of Vishnu or Hari, who is well known as Bhakta Prahlad.

However, once, the king of Pundra named Bali, father Banraj was very powerful king. One day, he saw a man of huge body with banded his hands and legs and flowing beside the Palace. Then he saw that the man was a blind sage. It should be noted that this blind sage was abandoned by the Arya women and threw him into the river. The king of Pundra immediately retrieved that huge body-sage from the water and brought him to his palace. The king of Pundra was childless for a long time; it was mentioned in the Mahabharata, Purana, Harivansh, Brahmic texts etc. He desired for a child and became unstable. But the fate of fate, during his staying to the palace, the evil sage was closely related with Sudeshna, wife of Pundra king. It is said that Sudeshna, queen of Pundra king is associated with the long sage, and in her womb, five children were born. They were vanga, kalinga, subhum and pundra etc. The king of Pundra gave five kingdoms to

his sons and the names of these five kingdoms were coincided with their names. Among these five states, Pundra is a strong kingdom. 'Pundra' is used in the sense of a 'country' and 'caste'. Pundra was one of the oldest Janapadas in ancient India. According to the Bhagavati Sutra there are mentioned sixteen Janapadas among which one of the Janapadas named "Pundra". In the part of Digvijay of the Mahabharata, Arjun himself conquered the land of Pundra. Therefore, many memorable incidents of Pandavas on various parts of the land of Pundra are noticed. There are mentioned about the land of Pundra in the scriptures of Bishanupurban (9/1), Bhagavat Purana (10/66-23), Biratshanhita (80/7), Garur Purana (68 / 17-18), Bishnupuran (8-34) etc. those were written in the 12th century. Even in the book of 'Rajatarangini', there are also mentioned about the glorious story of Pundradesh of the land of Pundra and the Pundra caste.

Pundranagara is one of the oldest city located in present Bangladesh, its ancientity is assumed to be about four centuries BC. First mentioned of this town (as Pudnagal) has been found in Brahmi scripts of Mahasthan and the ancient antiquity has proved through archaeological excavation. The ruins of Pundranagara (referred to as 'Pundravardhanpur' in the Gupta and Later-Gupta periods) have been identified with the ruins discovered at Mahasthan in Bogra district. This identity is based on the above-mentioned Brahmi script, the description of the 7th century Chinese traveler and pilgrim Hiuen Tsang, and the early medieval literature of Karatoya-Mahatmya.

It is said that during the era of the Mahabharata, Kshatriya king Vasudeva was ruled the entire region of Pundra. He was the anthem of Srikrishna and the beloved to Narakasura, the king of Pragjyotishpur. He fought with Sri Krishna more than once. However, King Basudev was defeated to Srikrishna and killed in battle field. Despite being hero; Dronacharya did not accept him as a disciple because Basudev was non-aryan person. Basudeva the king of Pundra was the main enemy of the Panchapandavas in the Mahabharata. So when Mahavira conspired to kill Basudev, but he went to know about that conspiracy and used to put dust annotations on each soldier's forehead to mark his soldiers. This sign of soft soil is called Pundra. Subsequently, the people of Pundradesh used to maintain the pattern of tilak on the forehead, which is still seen in the Vaishnava community. From then on, the name of the state is Pundra and the inhabitants became Pundra. That is why the king Basudev was called Basudev Pundra. However, Mahabir Bhim conquered the entire Pandunda by defeating and killing King Basudev of Pundra. The lyrics mention that, on the eve of War of Kurukshetra, Hrishikesh blowed a conch likes 'Arjun', 'Bhim', 'Devadatta' and 'Pundra'. Actually, Bhim of the Mahabharat was imported the name of Pundra from the land of ancient Dinajpur. Pundra was the powerful king of this land of Pundra. All of the inhabitants of this land were known as Pundra Kshatriya. Although Dinajpur is not very old, the land is very old. Throughout the rise and fall of various dynasties in

## *Remarking An Analisation*

different periods of history, this land has been divided into several parts. But it wonderful that the name of the land has remained as Dinajpur. Even after the partition of India, the name of Dinajpur is remained unchanged. The history, literature and culture of Dinajpur are very old and rich. According to scholars, the nature of the land of Dinajpur is same as the Chhotonagpur plateau and the ancient territories of the Bindhya mountainous region of Madhya Pradesh. The sediments were carried out from ancient Gondana and Angara land and formed the plains of the entire district of Dinajpur. So the land of Dinajpur known as Alluvial Plain. Once the region was lakes, the entire Dinajpur area was formed by the alluvial deposit of Lakes and the land also known as the lake plain. In ancient times, the land of Varendra was formed as a sister of the Himalayas and Dinajpur was the heart of Varendra.

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### **Dinajpur: in Search of The Name**

In ancient and early medieval period, there was a province named Pundravardhana in the largest area of North Bengal. The main center of this province was Pundranagar or Mahasthangarh located on the banks of the Karatoya River in Bogra district. The districts of Greater Dinajpur, Bogra, Pabna, Malda, Rajshahi, were included in the land of Pundravardhana. The ancient state of Kamrup or Pragjyotishpur was located on the eastern side of Pundravardhana. The state of Kampur was formed by various districts like Rangpur, Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, some parts of Assam. In other words, the Karatoya River was the border between Pundra Bardhanbhukti and the kingdom of Kamarupa. The explanation was found in the copper plate about Pundravardhanbhukti and its two major Bishaya or districts which discovered from Pundravardhana. One is the name of Kotivarsha and the other is Panchanagari. Most of the areas of West Dinajpur were included in the Bishaya or district of Kotivarsha. The main administrative center of Kotivarsha was Bangarh or present Gangarampur. Balabarma, the King of Kamarupa crossed the river Karatoya and continued to drive in this region of Dinajpur. There was a Bishyaya or district named 'Dijina' mentioned in

the Copper Inscription of Balabarma. He gave land to the two Brahmins on Dijina. 'Dijina' the Bishaya or district of Balabarma, it may be the location of this region in greater Dinajpur. Scholars believe that the name of this dijina or dijina can become Dinajpur after evolution. According to scholars, this Dijina or Dijina region was composed by some parts of Dinajpur and Rangpur districts.

According to the statement of the European and Chinese Travelers an advanced civilization was developed from an unknown time on the bank of the river Karotoya. The civilization built on the bank of Karatoya, that's why the civilization can be called as Karotoya civilization. Mahasthangarh and Bangarh during the medieval age and Ghorghat during the Mughal era were major urban centers of Dinajpur. At the commencement of the East India Company's rule in Ghorgha, Dinajpur was turned as one of the important towns in the territory. Eight years after the Battle of Plessey in 1765 AD, this territory conquered by the army of the East-India Company. The Nawab's regime as well as the former capital city of Ghorghat became collapsed. Then Dinajpur begins to develop as modern city.

During the colonial period between 1861 to mid 1757, reducing the size of Dinajpur for the benefit of revenue survey. The area of Dinajpur became 4,543 square miles. In 1872 AD, it comes down to the square mile in 4142. At the end of British rule came to 3,946 square miles. From 1800 to 1801 AD, the large estate of Purnia, Rangpur and Rajshahi districts are associated with Dinajpur. In 1833 AD Dinajpur was associated with a far-flung part of Bogra and Malda. In 1864 to 1865 AD, a vast paraganas named, khatta is associated with Bogra district from Dinajpur. During the period from 1897 to 1998 AD, Mahadevpur P.S., located in the southern part of Dinajpur was transferred to Rajshahi. Dinajpur was no longer altered until the time of East-Pakistan.

Mahesh Chandra Tarkochuramani was a court scholar and priest of the Dinajpur raj, wrote a book in Sanskrit language, "Dinajpur Rajbanshyam" where he did not mentioned for a one time about the origin of the name of Dinajpur. Mr.E.V. West Mekat is one of the British officers, who were interested to search the source of the name of Dinajpur. He has come to Dinajpur as district magistrate during the period of 1868 to 1877. He wrote, "About the time of Akbar's settlement there was at dinajpur, at the place from which Ganesh, less than two countries before, derived his title, a man, possibly of the blood of Gonesh, in possession of a consideration part os what are now the districts of Dinajpur and Maldaha. Buchanan calls him Kasi, but whether he is correct or not, the name is now utterly forgotten. His grave is shown at the door of the Mandir in the Rajbari." Traditionally believed Modern Dinajpur have been founded by Dinaj or Dinaraj, otherwise unknown, from whome the place derived its name.

On the other hand Jatindranath Sengupta has written in the Gazetteer of West Dinajpur in 1965 that "There is no local tradition regarding the origin of the name, and it is also rather difficult to advance any satisfactory theory about the origin of the name. It is,

however, not unreasonable to conjecture that the name Dinajpur is derived from the name of some local chieftains or king of the name of Dinaj or Dauj. It is well-known the Raja Ganesh, the Hindu chieftain of North Bengal, became the king of Gour in the early part of the fifteenth century A.D. He assumed the title of Danujamardana-deva, and it is not unlikely that the name Dinajpur is derived from the title of Raja Ganesh."

Francis Hamilton Buchanan, who came to India during the year of 1807-1808 and the East India Company had given charge to search archaeological, geographical and administrations report for impose better government by the British. In the context, Buchanan wrote that "Gonesh, a Hindu and Hakim of Dynwaj (perhaps a petty Hindu chief of Dinajpur), seized the government". He recovered a book from Pandua of Malda in Farsi Language, where wrote a name 'Hakim of Dinwaj', a local ruler. Scholars are considered that the name of Dinajpur has come from the name of 'Hakim of Dinwaj and the name of Dinajpur were originated from the said name. He could not express that the name was a ruler of the land; he just mentioned the name in his report.

F.W.Strong has expressed his views as like to Buchanan in Dinajpur Gazetteers in 1912. He said that "Dinajpur is said to signify the abode of beggars and is identical with Dynwaj, a Raja of which, Gonesh, usurped the government of Gour. The name appears originally to have applied more particularly to the locality in which the present Rajbari is situated a possible explanation of it may be that some forgotten prince, Dinaj or Dinawaj, was the original founder of the Dinajpur family and gave his name to the site." However, Dinajpur had turned as Modern Dinajpur from the period of Dinajpur Zamindary.

The early phase of historiography is dominated by a tendency to view history and change in terms of dynasties. By the logic of having a clear dynastic base or being a part of an empire in the form of an administrative division some regions also became subjects of independent study. Sometimes, a geographical block having distinct cultural background and rich ancient remains also prompted study of its history. This attitude was ubiquitous in all branches of history at national and regional levels till 1947. After independence the history of Dinajpur became shaped in regional perspectives due to geographical boundaries. The developed as urban centre during the advent of Islam's of Bengal.

In the subsequent, the region came to be known as Dinajpur by the name of Dinaraj. The British commander, named Mr.Kottril defeated to Karam Ali, the last Muslim Fauzdar and established British rule in 1965 after took the Grand of Dewani by the Mughal Emperor. The British Government had formed a new district to facilitate their administration. The head-quarter of the new district was established at Dinajpur in 1793. From that time Dinajpur became flourished as an independent city in Eastern Bengal. Later period, Dinajpur more fragmented, during the period of different rulers.

The continuous process of history making is running in different Geographical positions. Man and

his and his activities are the theme of history. Geography creates the content of History. The geographical location influenced to the components of human geography, i.e. livelihood, food-dress, socio-economic and political affairs. The condition of a land or region would not underdeveloped or will be developed that are depends on geographical conditions. Dinajpur region has been fragmented from several historical periods, due to political and administrative convenience, which has affected on the human life. So, the regional or local history became changed than earlier. As a result, history of Dinajpur flows in different directions under the regimes of various rulers. The geographical division influenced to make the history of Dinajpur.<sup>3</sup> Thus, regional history of Dinajpur has made by the activities of several rulers in same land and same name, i.e. Dinajpur. The history of Dinajpur has divided in three parts after independence of India. Modern history of Dinajpur became changed in geographical perspectives.

According to historical Akshay Kumar Moitra, Dinajpur is a famous place in greater North Bengal. Once Dinajpur was a district under Rajshahi Division. Than Rajshahi Division was formed by eight districts, those are Rajshahi, Rangpur, Dinajpur, Bogra, Pabna, Malda, Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling, Native State Cooch Behar, Goyalpara of Assam, kamrup and some parts of Purnia district in Bihar.<sup>4</sup> Modern Dinajpur is well decorated town in present Bangladesh. According to the topography the region is old and its history is ancient. This region is formed by ancient alluvium. The soil is mixed with rocks. The area is a valley formed by lake. The region is located in the foothills of the Himalayas. The entire region consists of plains. Dinajpur is located of eighty-four feet high from the surface of the sea.

Dinajpur region was surrounded by several rivers like, Mahanada, Korotoya, Punarbha, Nagar etc. Its greatest length from its southern extremity, at the junction of the Punarbhaba' with the Mahananda, 'to its northern extremity, on the Nagar, is 105 B. miles. Its greatest breadth, near its southern, and between the Korotoyas and Nagar, is 82 B. miles. It is somewhat of a triangular form, with its most acute angle to the north; its longest side to the N. E., and its shortest to the south. It extends from 24° 48' to 26° 18- N. Latitude., and its southern extremity is exactly in the meridian of Calcutta. The western boundary of this district is very well defined. It is separated from that of the Purnia by the rivers Nagar and Mahananda, to the junction of the latter with the Punarbhaba.

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#### **Islamization and Changing Scenarios of the Land**

Bakhtyar Khilji captured the area in 1206 and established his capital at Devkot. From that time Devkote was the first ancient capital of Muslim state in eastern India. Riyazuddin Giyash had transferred the Muslim capital from Devkot to Pandua. The physical changes have occurred in the region, with the historical changes. Sometimes the geographical importance had increased and sometimes reduced, as well as the culture and society of the region has changed. The land of Bengal became divided into 24 governments after the conquest of Bengal by the Mughals. A person named Dinaraj, known as a descendents of the king, Ganesh, took shelter near Ghorghat area during the reign of Akbar. Before his death, he willed all his properties in favour of Srimanta Dutta Choudhury. After death of Srimanta Dutta Choudhury, all properties handed over to his grandson, named Sukhdev, who captured a vast area of Rangpur, Bagra, Malda, Dinajpur and Thakurgaon Parganas. Aurangzeb, the Mughal Emperor had given to him the title, 'king' as the vastness of his Zamindary Estate in 1677. His youngest son, named Prannath had established big zamindary in wide area of Eastern Bengal.

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#### **Conversion from Dinajpur to West Dinajpur**

The contours of a separate 'Bengal' started taking shape when Lord Curzon partitioned the erstwhile Bengal Presidency in 1905. However, due to tremendous popular resentment, the British annulled the partition of Bengal in 1911. The concept of a separate state of Pakistan with some parts from eastern India really began to take shape after the Muslim League adopted the Resolution at its Lahore Session on March 23, 1940. The partition plan was actually translated on the ground by a duly constituted Bengal Boundary Commission chaired by Sir Cyril Radcliffe and assisted by Mr. Justice Bijan Kumar Mukherjea, Mr. Justice C.C. Biswas, Mr. Justice Abu Saleh Mohamed Akram, and Mr. Justice S. A. Rahman (two Hindus and two Muslims). The Commission was constituted on June 30, 1947 under Section 3 of the Indian Independence Act, 1947. The Commission was required to prepare a report and submit it to the Governor-General of India before August 15, 1947.<sup>6</sup> In 1947, the political poker game between the leaders of the Indian nationalist movement and the British authorities ended in the decision to partition India. "British India," the directly

ruled territory that covered three-fifths of the subcontinent, was the territory actually partitioned. The rest of the subcontinent, subdivided into 565 Princely States (also called Native or Indian States), was neither partitioned nor given independence in 1947. The only options the rulers of these states had were to join Pakistan or to join India.<sup>7</sup>

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#### **Conclusion**

The name of ancient Dinajpur had been changing in several times in different rulers. Once the name of the land was Pragjyotishpur during the age of Mahabharata. During the period of imperial Guptas, the land was mentioned as Pundravardhana. After the advent of the Islam Rulers, the scenario of the land had been changing day by day by their activities. In course of time, the importance of the land became changed during the reign of the Mughal Emperor. At the advent of the British power in Bengal, some places of this region had turned as commercial centre and gradually developed those places as town or urban centres. Thus, Ghorghat region had turned as urban centre of the area. However, the culture and society of the land had changed by the influence of Islamization on the land. Now, Dinajpur has divided in three parts in the same name but the scenarios of historical geography are different. So, the histo-geographic impact on the land is essential terms in any historical period.

On 14 August in 1947, Pakistan and India have emerged as the two separate states during the rule of the British. At the time of the award of Radcliff; ten police stations were included with West Bengal, the Indian province. On the other hand, five P.S. i.e. Tentulia, Panchgarh, Boda, Debiganj and Patgram from Jalpaiguri district of West Bengal became associated with Former Dinajpur. In 1984, Takurgaon and Panchgarh two district of Dinajpur had separated from Dinajpur and became independent districts. West Dinajpur District has divided on 1<sup>st</sup> April, 1992 for the administrative convenience. The name of southern part of West Dinajpur is Dakshin Dinajpur and northern part of the district is Uttar Dinajpur. Thus the ancient Dinajpur Janapadas had repeatedly been divided and has changed its history and geography as well as the culture and society.

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