Excavation at Rajpat Mound
1998 – 2000

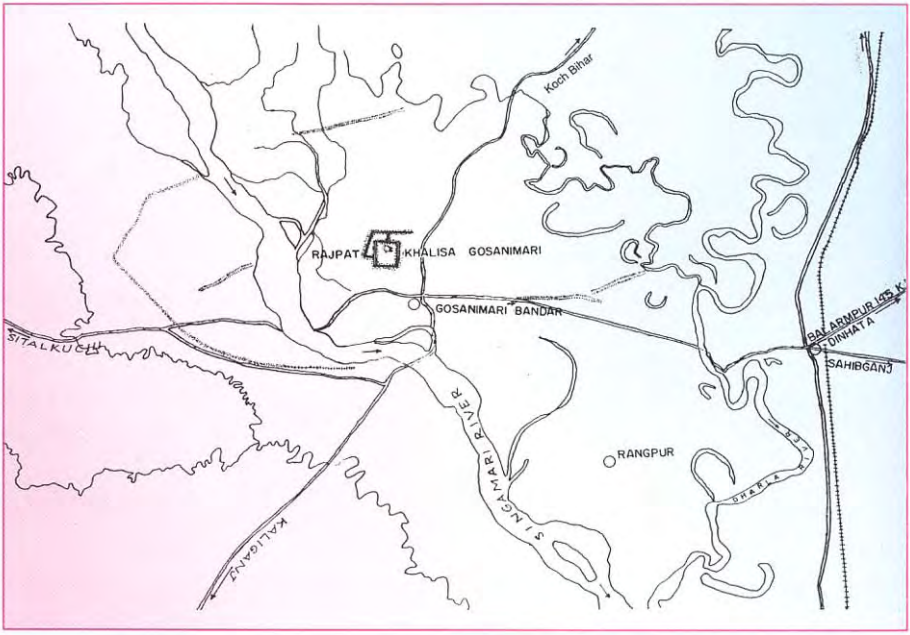
Excavation in progress

प्रत्नकीर्तिमपावृणु

Archaeological Survey of India
Kolkata Circle

LOCATION MAP OF
KHALISA GOSANIMARI (RAJPAT)
DIST. : KOCH BIHAR

SCALE – 0 1 K.M.



Site Location & Approach :

Rajpat mound (Lat. 26°09′ N; Long. 89°21′12″ E) at Khalisa Gosanimari village of Dinhata Police Station of Koch Bihar district lies about 22km to the south-west of present Koch Bihar town and approachable directly from Koch Bihar by four or two wheelers. It is 12.8km to the west of Dinhata. The mound presently measures 185m from east to west and 150m from north to south with an average height of 12m from the surrounding ground level.

Historical Background :

The mound, possibly deriving its name from the word Rajaprasada forms the central citadel of the fortified city of Kamtapur, the capital of the Kamata kingdom occupying a large territory of ancient Kamarupa and Vanga.

The area of Koch Bihar formed a part of ancient Kamarupa kingdom as mentioned in the Puranas and Tantrasastras and in many other accounts. From various accounts it is to be presumed that this area played a vital role between Kamarupa kingdom and other parts of India. It is generally believed that this area came into prominence when an independent kingdom named Kamata arose comprising western part of Kamarupa under the 'Khen' rulers, the fore runners of Koch kings in 14th-15th century AD and later on the Koch kingdom started its humble beginning from

this place. According to Dr. N. N. Acharyya, from 13th-15th centuries this area was ruled by several powerful rulers and repeatedly invaded by the Muhammedan invaders and rulers. Of the ruling kings of Khen dynasty the last one i.e., Nilambara (1460-1498 AD) also known as Kanteswar (Kamateswar) was historical figure whose kingdom and fort (Kamtapur) was beseized and overrun by Alauddin Husain Shah in 1498. On the ruins of the Khen rulers taking advantage of the weakness of the Kamarupa kings (Ahoms) king Visvasimha of Koch dynasty established again an independent kingdom in between 1510-1530 AD. The generic relationship between the Khen and Koch rulers is not definitely known but the Khen rulers and early Koch rulers assumed the title of 'Kamateswar' conclusively proves that Kamtapur was the centre of power for both these two dynasties.

Mention of the Kamtapur and the Kamata kingdom has been found in some literature of 16th-17th century AD and in the coin and inscription of Husain Shah of Gauda. In the map of Blave (17th century AD), account of Sir Ralph Fitch, Stephen Cecella, etc. Kamtapur has been described and mentioned.

Natural Setting :

Bounded on two sides, east and west by two rivers viz., Dharla to the east and Singimari to the west both of which played a vital role to the emergence, climax and decline of the civilization in this part of the country the site of Rajpat as already mentioned formed the central citadel of Kamtapur, the fortified capital of 'Kamata' kingdom, a hinterland between Gauda and Kamarupa. The soil of this area is alluvial and very recent formation, and is mostly sandy and loose. The surface soil is loamy to a depth of about 1 metre and even less than that and below it all bare sand.

However, the fertile land of silt and sand combined with abundant rain-fall paved the way for a rich agricultural return and commercial relation through land and rivers made the area prosperous to be developed into a capital town by itself of a powerful kingdom comprising both ancient Vanga and Kamarupa.

General view of Rajpat Mound

Objectives of Excavation :

The excavation at Rajpat mound was carried out with following objectives :

1) To establish scientifically the cultural sequence of this area hitherto unknown ;
2) To ascertain the nature of settlement in and around ;
3) To get an idea of the beginning of Kamta-Koch kingdom ;
4) To get a fairly good idea about the structure and antiquities of the place.

Previous Work :

In 1808, Dr. Buchanan Hamilton after visiting the ruins of Kamtapur and rajpat mound has left a vivid description along with a sketch map of the mound and site which hold still good in authenticity with some exceptions regarding the structures which he could not unearth in his small scale digging. He could not realise the importance and antiquity of the site. The overall

description of the fortified city tallies with the pesent remains with some variations and changes that took place in the last 200 years. R.D. Banerjee, also paid visit to the ancient city of Kamtapur of the Kamta-Koch kingdom. According to him the Kamtapur kingdom under the Khens whose whereabouts are not known, stood as the buffer kingdom between Ahoms of Assam and Muslim kingdom of Bengal in the 15th century AD. He opined that the Khens might built Gosanimari, but it is also possible that these Mongoloid people only utilised the ruins of fortification which had been built several centuries before. The idol of Vishnu, kept in present Kamateswari temple at Gosanimari, a superb work of Pala-Sena period, originally found from the mound. Two seasons' excavation at Rajpat mound has revealed that Banerjee was absolutely correct in his observation.

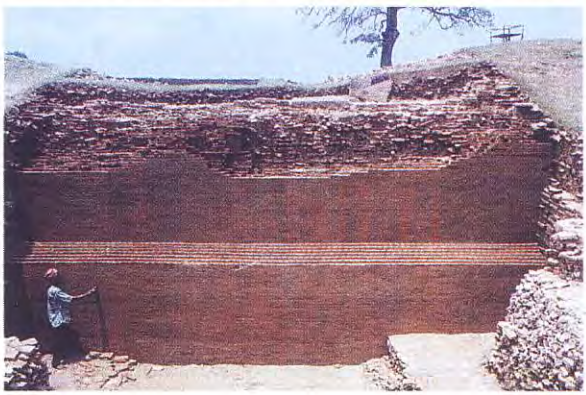
Excavation Planning :

Excavation was conducted in grid pattern with a view to extending the trenches in all directions of the mound which was divided in five segments viz. PRT-1 i.e. the north western corner of the mound, RPT-2 i.e. the top of the mound where few damaged sculptures and architectural members were kept, RPT-3 i.e. the comparatively lower eastern portion of the mound, RPT-4 i.e. the tank area on the north-western side of the mound. Excavation was also conducted at site-2 area, 1km west of the mound beyond the earthen rampart wall to have an idea of the life style of the common people and to compare it with the inner settlement pattern.

Structures :

Excavation at RPT-1 area has revealed just below the surface humus an extremely damaged enclosure wall made of mud packed with brickbats but encased by bricks at its top. Below this structural phase on the foot of the mound portion of a massive

brick built wall was found which is the first enclosure cum fortification wall on the nortern side of the mound. 93 courses of bricks on the inner side of the wall with thick flood deposition against it was found. The wall was renovated at times and to protect it from flood water one buttress wall of mud packed with brickbats was constructed at later times. Its available height was 4.5m and length was 20m. Carbon sample found from the top of this structure has been dated 910 ± 80 AD. Trenches were laid out to establish the stratigraphic co-relation of this wall with the brick rampart wall situated 40m north of this wall. It has been observed that both these walls were constructed at the same time. In RPT-2, excavation has exposed the remains of an incomplete stone structure (possibly of Khen period), two brick-lined huge circular wells with platforms, long



Inner fortification on the eastern side with damaged platform in RPT-3

East-west wall connecting inner and outer fortification on eastern side in RPT-3

foundation wall (32.80m long and 0.90m to 1.00m broad) of re-used bricks (Khen period), remains of a mud wall of a house, one guard room attached to the fortification wall on eastern side. Above the long foundation wall posibly there was wooden superstructure lost in the course of time. Traces of large scale conflagration have been noticed along with the findings of quite a good number of iron nails, possibly indicating bamboo or wooden construction.

Well on mound towards south-western corner

In RPT-3 the inner eastern fortification wall of brick has been exposed to a length of 21.10m with a very fine facing. It was 7m wide and available height is 4.80m. A subsidiary connecting wall which joins the fortification wall of both period I (co-eval with Pala period) and period II (Khen period) has also been exposed. It is 12.90m long. These walls were originally built in earlier period and later on repaired, renovated and re-used raising the height in Khen and Koch periods. The brick joints are very fine and mud mortar was used for bonding. The bricks on the faces were chiselled to bring the smoothness of the surface. Mason marks have also been noticed on some bricks. The alignment of the walls was also excellent in the earlier phases.

In RPT-4 excavation has revealed a tank with its two bathing ghats on eastern and western side. It measures 44.80m x 34.20m. The vertical inner side of the banks were studded with stone

blocks. On the edge of the banks brick walls were constructed and the top on all sides of them rammed with brick jelly and sloping outwards. The tank according to tradition was essentially meant for the king and his ladies. On the eastern bank of the pond from the accumulated debris have been found quite a good number of sculptural fragments. The outer facing of the western enclosure cum fortification wall has been partially found in extremely damaged condition. Traces of repairing of the wall has also been noticed.

In RPT-5 frontal facade of fortification cum enclosure wall on southern periphery of the mound has been exposed in extremely damaged condition revealing the features of inner eastern fortification wall. Two adjoining parallel brick built walls with a gap of 27m have also been found. The exposed length of southern enclosure wall is 18 m with an average exposed height of 7 m. Circumstantial evidences indicate that the eastern parallel wall was built later than western, breadth being 1.32m and exposed height is 3.47m. The exposed length of eastern parallel wall is 13.80m.

Well on mound towards northern side

Due to arrival of monsoon none of the walls have been exposed to the foundation. Moreover, subsequent renovation and repairing and construction of supporting buttress wall of mud packed

broken bricks made the excavation difficult. In each case this construction of buttress wall was done in subsequent period. Likewise the raising of height of the wall was made with broken and reused bricks.

Pottery :

Pottery assemblage of Rajpat mound is not rich in comparison to other historical sites of Bengal. They comprise mainly red wares in various shades, grey wares and black wares. Few hand made and moulded pottery have been noticed including some produced in combined process. Types of pottery include vases, bowls, basins, dish, miniature pots, beakers etc. In the pottery of period I solar symbol with different variations, lozenges etc. bear some affinity with pottery found at Ambari site in Assam. Moreover few buff coloured sherds, possibly made of kaolin have also been found which bear distant relationship with 'Ambari ware' of 7th-12th century AD.

Stone sculpture (bust of a lady)

Other Finds :

Though the site is not rich in antiquities quite a good number of sculptural fragments have been found from the top of occupational level of Period I which bespeak a rich sculptural heritage of the area. However, facial and physiognomical delineation indicate them to be the product of c. 11th-12th century AD being influenced by Pala-Sena school of art with some extraneous influence.

Mention may be made of half bust of a female figurine, male and female heads. etc.

Stone sculpture (female hand fragment)

The antiquities in teracotta include animal figurines, mother goddess figurines of ageless variety, heavy terracotta balls (possibly used as weapons) beads, etc. Mostly the terracotta objects are ritualistic in nature and not of good craftsmanship. Interesting find is a terracotta plaque depicting a milching cow and its sucking calf which reminds us of Paharpur style. Mention may be made of two figurines of snake goddess Manasa found in the excavation.

Stone sculpture (male head ?)

So far coins are concerned they range in date from 15th to 19th century AD. Mention may be made of a silver coin of Ghiasuddin Azam Shah who attacked Kamarupa towards the end of 15th century AD. The other is that of Queen Victoria. Other coins are mostly of copper and belong to East India Company and found from period III occupational level.

Apart from coins other metal objects include iron nails, chisels, clamps, dowel pins, rods,

anchors, hooks, arrow heads, spear heads, sickle, rings, chain, etc. Copper objects include nails, bangle, rods, ghungru, etc.

One bone point has been found from a considerable depth having a triangular cross section. Two damaged crystal bars have also been found.

Terracotta plaque showing milching cow

Chronology & Periodisation :

So far periodisation of the site is concerned it has been mainly done on the basis of nature of structural and antiquarian remains and literary data.

Top of Period I is dated to 910 ± 80 AD (calibrated 1023-1219 AD) which is ce-eval with Pala-Sena period of Bengal. The initial phase of this period may be dated back to still earlier period on the basis of

Silver Sultanate coins

similarity of potsherds bearing affinity with Ambari wares. Mother goddess of archaic variety has been found from the level along with stone sculptures.

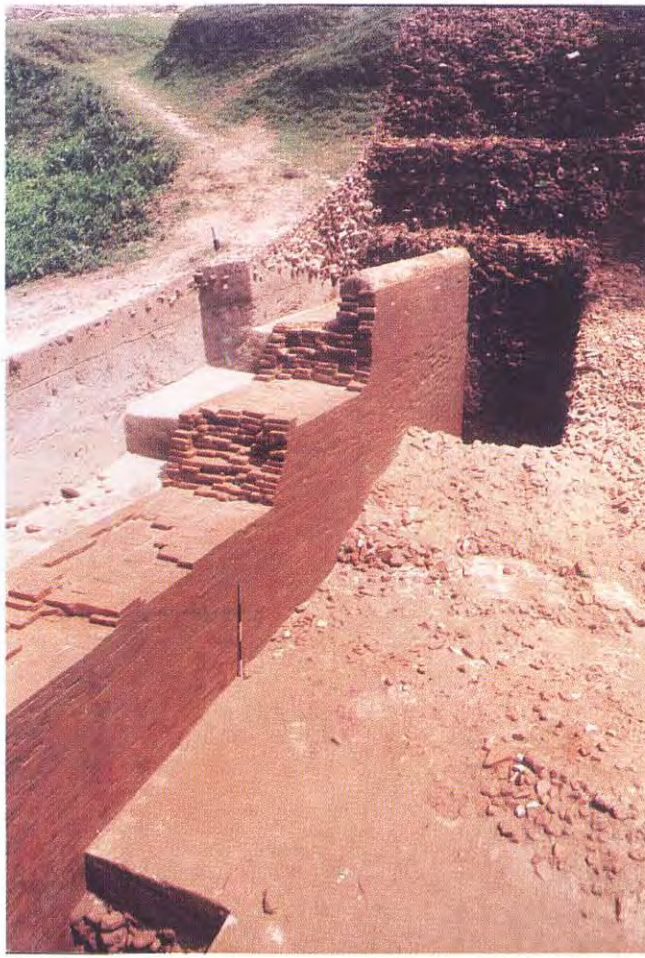
Period II is possibly co-eval with Khen period c. 14th-15th century AD. Coin of Ghiyasuddin Azam Shah has been found from this occupational level in which the occupiers of the site repaired and renovated the earlier structures with some additions and alterations and mostly reused bricks have been noticed in the structure of this period. Majority of the iron objects have also been found from this level along with remnants of stone structures.

Period III (c. 16th to 19th century AD) is possibly co-eval with Koch period being characterised by wooden constructions, still poorer brick structures of reused bricks. Though no Koch coin has been found, coins of East India Company which played a vital role in state policy and economy of Koch Bihar from last quarter of 18th century onwards have been found from the top most layers of the mound.

Summary Results :

Two seasons' excavation at Rajpat mound has pushed back the antiquity of the site to about 500 years which goes to the contrary of hitherto known history and tradition of the area. Nature of the structures of the mound exposed so far specially of Period I bespeaks a high technological feat of the builders with profound knowledge in architectural science. It has also been observed that

there was constant fear of flood in this area and at least a temporary desertion of the site took place in about 10th-11th century AD. This area had its cultural relationship with the south-east Asian countries. Moreover, it has also been proved that the 'Khens' were not the builders of the city of Kamtapur rather they were the usurpers.



Fortification wall on Southern side

Stone sculpture (female head)

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF INDIA
KOLKATA CIRCLE

CGO COMPLEX, (4TH FLOOR)
BLOCK-DF, SECTOR-I, SALT LAKE, KOLKATA - 700 064

TEL. : (033)2334 4389/3775, FAX : (033) 2334 4389
E-MAIL : asical@vsnl.net