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## History of Gosanimari Rajpat in Kamatapur Kingdom:A Study on Archaeological Findings

Sujan Das<sup>1</sup>

Assistant Professor

Department in History

Banarhat Kartik Oraon Hindi Government College

Banarhat, Jalpaiguri, West Benga

Email:[Sujan.das1505@gmail.com](mailto:Sujan.das1505@gmail.com)

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**Abstract:** Earthen history of human past comes out through excavations, diggings, and findings of archaeological remains that could unveil historical antiquity back to the past in the reconstruction of history. The Gosanimari Rajpat, an archaeological Wonder of north Bengal which was the capital city of Khen dynasty of Kamata Kingdom is located at Gosanimari village of Dinhata Police station in Koch Bihar District. The site contains ruins of the ancient city of Kamatapur, the capital of Kamata kingdom. The ruins site was excavated in between 1998-1999 and 1999-2000 under the directives of Archaeological Survey of India having traces of earthen citadel, Rampart walls and fortifications evidences. Archaeologists believe that findings of stone sculptures, terracotta plaque, some iron objects like nails, chisel can be dated to the 11<sup>th</sup> -12<sup>th</sup> century settlement at this site. Gosanimari site is now under the surveillance of ASI, Eastern circle and it continues digging and remnant remains are being discovered from it and its adjacent areas. Archaeologists and historians have firm believe that further excavation will reveal earthen history of the Khen Kings of Kamata Kingdom. The present paper aims to discuss archaeological discoveries and investigate cultural pattern of Gosanimari Rajpat to explore its untold history.

**Keywords:** Khen dynasty, Rajpat, Excavation, Pottery Wares, Sculptures, etc.

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### Introduction

The Gosanimari Rajpat is the archaeological wonder of north Bengal possibly derived its names from the 'Rajaprasada' of fortified city of ancient Kamatapur , the capital city of Kamata Kingdom covering vast tracts of ancient Kampur and Vanga kingdom<sup>1</sup>.The Rajpat mound lies between latitude 26<sup>0</sup>09'N; longitude 89<sup>0</sup>21'12'' at Khalisa Gosanimari village of Dinhata police station of Koch Bihar district and it measures 185m from east to west and

# History of Gosanimari Rajpat in Kamatapur Kingdom: A Study on Archaeological Findings

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150m from north to south with an average height of 12 m from the surrounding ground level. It is 22km to the south west of present Koch Bihar Town and 12.8 km to the west of Dinhat town .The Rajpat contains the ruins of ancient capital of Kamata kingdom of which the remnant of massive earthen fortification wall is still in presence measuring about 22km long surrounding the north, south and western side of the Rajpat mound and about 9km in the eastern side left unbanked as bounded by Dharla river .There were seven entrance gateway to the fort of Kamatapur as mentioned in '*Gosanimangal Kavya*' namely *Shilduar* ,*Baghduar* ,*Sannyasiduar* ,*Joyduar* , *Nimaiduar* ,and *Hokduar* .The existence of entrance gateway can still be visible in the pathway around existing fortified embankment wall . The Rajprasada or Royal palace was constructed at central citadel area of the Kamatapur city and etymological the remnants of royal palace is known Rajpat.

## Historical background

The ancient history of Kamatapur is a pleasing amalgamation of proven history with the mythological stories and hyperbolic account of historical events. Kamatapur has been remained a part of the ancient kingdom *Pragjyotish* (ancient name of Kamrupa). As mentioned in the great epic *Mahabharata*, almost entire area of present-day northern Bengal and Assam was included in Pragjyotish and Kamatapur was situated in that territory, being ruled by jubilant king Bhagdatta, son of Narakasura<sup>2</sup>. During the great war of Kurukshetra, Bhagdatta fought valiantly the Kauravas leading an army of Kiratas but he was killed in the hands of Arjun. Bhagadatta's descendant Vanamal ruled around 1<sup>st</sup> century C. E. from the historical evidences retrieved so far, it has ascertained that during the 1<sup>st</sup> century C. E. Kamrupa including Kamatapur area was ruled by the king Deveswar who was worshiper of Devi Kamakhya<sup>3</sup>. Another notable king in that dynasty was king Nagasankara who ruled around 378 C.E engaged in conflict with Gupta king Samudra Gupta being referred in Allahabad inscription. During the six century C.E Shasanka, king of Goura of Bengal occupied the western portion of the Kamrupa dynasty. Subsequently following the death of Shasanka, Bhaskar Barman, the successor of Bhagadatta's dynasty of Pragjyotish won back the lost domain up to the interior territory of north Bengal. During rule of Deva Pala ,the king of Pala dynasty of Bengal ,Kamrupa came under the dominion of the Palas around nine century CE but fall of Palas, kingdom of Kamrupa including Kamatapur followed the ruled of Barobhuiya , local chieftains from the Koch and Mech tribes who were hindu by religion

## History of Gosanimari Rajpat in Kamatapur Kingdom: A Study on Archaeological Findings

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.later on another clan of hindu kings emerged in Kamrupa domain who used the suffix 'Pala' to their names (Pala dynasty of Kamrupa ) and were worshiper of shiva being share lineage of Bhagadatta and Narakasura .Still date no direct linkage has been established between the Palas of Bengal to that hindu Palas of Kamrupa .The sena dynasty of Gaud regained some portion of western Kamrupa and ruled for several times .

Subsequently after the fall of the senas of Gauda and the Palas kings of Kamrupa, Kamatapur region ruled by the many tribal chieftains from the Koch, Mech and Bhot tribes who were Indo-Tibetan origin. The exact chronology of the rulers has yet not been established. During the advent of medieval period an independent monarchy emerged under the kingship of Niladhawaja who is said to have established independent Kamata kingdom taking advantages of weakness of the tribal chieftains in this region .He belonged to the Khen tribe and his dynasty came to be known as Khen dynasty <sup>4</sup>.His capital was at Kamatapur and his successor Chakradhwaja and Nilambar extended their kingdom and their territory included whole of modern day Koch Bihar ,great part of Goalpara and western kamrupa of modern day Assam ,rangpur district of present day Bangladesh and portion of Jalpaiguri and Dinajpur of Bengal. The Khen rulers adorned the title 'Kamateswar' (lord of Kamatapur) and they were worshiper of devi Kamateswari <sup>5</sup>. The Khen dynasty ruled the kingdom till 1498 A.D. The chronology of first two Khen kings can be ascribed and first Khen king Niladhawaj is said to have ruled from 1440-1460 A.D and succeeded by Chakradhwaja who ruled from 1460-1480 and Nilambar who ruled from 1480-1498. Nilambar was the greatest ruler of Khen lineage who extended his kingdom by capturing whole areas of modern-day Koch Bihar, Goalpara and Kamrup of Modern-day Assam, Rangpur district of present-day Bangladesh, portion of Jalpaiguri district and Uttar Dinajpur of West Bengal and built fortified cities and citadel across his kingdom to protect from Muslim rulers from Gauda of Bengal<sup>6</sup>. Unfortunately Later on the Muslim Ruler Alauddin Hussian Sah of Gauda of Bengal attacked over Kamatapur having treacherous invitation of Shashipatra , the minister of Kamata kingdom whose son named Monohar is said to have been killed by King Nilambar accusing for illicit love with his youngest queen and in the treacherous war, Nilambar was defeated in 1498 A.D and the whole fortified city of Kamatapur was seized and demolished <sup>7</sup>.But Hossain Sah could not maintain political control over Kamatapur , soon after that Baro Bhuiyan Chieftains arose to the power and Mech leader Haridas seized the territory from one of the Bhuiyas of Baro Bhuiyas and his son named Biswa Singh initiated independent Koch

# History of Gosanimari Rajpat in Kamatapur Kingdom: A Study on Archaeological Findings

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kingdom centring at modern day Koch Bihar city adoring the royal title of Kamateswa in 1510 A.D. Thus, political domain of Kamatapur shifted to the Koch kingdom.

This is, however, evident that within few decades the Kamata kingdom under the Khen kings reached the highest peak of political control and cultural prosperity. The Khen kings built fortified city of Kamatapur and many citadels, Brick made Royal Roads, ponds across their kingdom and erected many temples that symbolises the welfare measures of Khen dynasty. The construction of fortified Royal palace ( Rajprasada) in the central citadel area is attributed to the king Nilambar who was the last ruler of Khen dynasty. The Gosanimangol kavy refers that king Nilambar took vow of four days feasting to his adorable goddess Gosanidevi to build a fort at Gosanimari<sup>8</sup>. The area was named after the name of goddess Gosanidevi, tutelary goddess of the Khen dynasty.

## Excavation on Gosanimari Rajpat

The earliest account on Rajpat that is available to us is by Dr. Buchanan Hamilton who visited the ruin site in 1809 and left vivid descriptions along sketched map of the Rajpat mound which still hold good in authenticity with some exception regarding the structure which he could not unearth in his small scale digging. The subsequent account on Rajpat is by H. N Choudhury who drawn a map of Rajpat including outer fortification of the capital, probably following detailed left by Hamilton. He placed the time period of Khen dynasty in 14<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> century. The observation of R.D. Banerjee is quite significance as regards the antiquity of the site is concerned. He observed that “it is also possible that the Khyens built Gosanimari, but it is possible that these Mongoloid people only utilised the ruins of fortification which had been built several centuries before”<sup>9</sup>. The Archaeological survey of India has carried out two successive excavation on the Gosanimari Rajpat mound in spanning over two seasons in 1998-1999 and 1999-2000 keeping in view its strategic location of historical importance and to establish scientifically cultural sequence of this area, hitherto unknown; to ascertain the settlement in and around; to get a fairly good idea about the structure and antiquity of this area. The excavation was conducted in grid pattern with a view to extending the trenches in all direction of the mound. However, digging process could not be completed in the whole area and archaeological survey of India did not complete whole excavation works due to arrival of monsoon and after then remaining part of Rajput mound remain earthen.

# History of Gosanimari Rajpat in Kamatapur Kingdom: A Study on Archaeological Findings

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## Archaeological Probing and Discussion

The excavation work on the Gosanimari Rajput mound under the Archaeological Survey of India has unearthed fortification structure of Rajput mound comprising Massive brick built enclosure wall, subsidiary connecting wall and room structure, two brick built tank wells, sculptural stone column and a good number of pottery ware and stone sculptures has been discovered that exposed the history of ancient Kamatapur and pushed back antiquity of this area to 500 years back. The present study is aimed to discuss archaeological discoveries to construct the cultural sequences, settlement pattern and antiquity of this area.

### Periodization

After successive excavation works on Rajpat mound, the team of Archaeological survey of India has made periodization using scientific C14 based on the structure and antiquarian remains. The initial phase of period I is dated to  $910 \pm 80$  (calibrated 1023-1219 AD) which is contemporaneous with the Pala-Sena period<sup>10</sup>. Period II is probably co-eval with the Khen period c.14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> century AD which has exposed the repaired and renovation at the site with some additions and reused bricks have been noticed in the structure of this period. Majority of iron objects have been found from this level along remnants of stone structure. The Period III (C.16<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> AD) is probably co-eval with the Koch period being characterized by the wooden construction, continuation of poorer bricks structure of reused bricks.

### Structural Plan of the Central fort on Rajpat Mound

The central citadel of Gosanimari Rajpat was constructed over elevated mound forming rectangular shape which measures 185 metres east-west and 150 north-south with an average height of 12 metres, abruptly rises from surrounding ground level<sup>11</sup>. Following absence of plateau land and texture of this area my observation is that the elevated mound was most probably built by filling soils from surrounding trenches. On the top of the surface of the Rajpat Mound Two brick built bath cum well have been unearthed and the recovery of a large number of broken stone column with iron nails and clamps suggests that the superstructures of wood with stone platform were probably there on structural level during the period-II (Khen period) and period -III. As excavation works revealed damaged debris of surface fortification cum enclosure wall of mud packed with brickbats on all four sides of the mound, it is difficult to trace the exact plan and structure of palace on the citadel area but

# History of Gosanimari Rajpat in Kamatapur Kingdom: A Study on Archaeological Findings

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revealing of massive brick built walls in north west side at bottom level of surface fortification wall of the mound and fortification wall connecting with Rampart wall by two paralleled side walls at eastern side of the mound has clearly exposed the layout of entrenches attached at ground level of the mound. The width of this fortification cum enclosure wall is 7 metres, exposed to a height of 8.4 metres and 4.5 metres on eastern and northern sides which exposed in different trenches depending on the degree of excavation. Remains of a mud wall house and one guard room attached to the inner side of eastern fortification wall have also been exposed that could have been used as room for troops or royal security guard, suggests high defence system around the central fort of Khen Kings. The construction of fortification walls was made of burned bricks and mud mortar<sup>12</sup>. The bricks joints are very fine and the bricks on the surface were chiselled to bring smoothness. However it is to be noted that these basement fortification walls were originally built in Earlier period and later on repaired, renovated and reused raising the height in the Khen and Koch periods. The existence of high ditch in the outer side of the Rampart wall on the north western part and partly silted condition in the southern outer periphery of the mound wall, it can be assumed that there must have been water reservoir ditch around the citadel fort and water follow was to be collected through the tunnel from near Singimari and Dharla river. Recently a brick made tunnel has been found nearby village.

## Marvellous Brick Built Well cum Baths

The discovery of two brick lined circular wells with bathing platform on the top of the surface of Rajpat Mound, one on the north western side to the south face and another on southern side, has exposed marvellous workmanship by the masons and the structural level of these wells belonged to the period –II (Khen period). Both these wells were in fact noticed by Hamilton during his visit to the site<sup>13</sup>. The brick built circular well on the southern side has an elaborated platform all around, with the provision for drainage of water. These well measures 3.27 metres whereas the well on the northern side measures 4.0 metres. The southern has stairway (bathing Ghats) on the eastern and western vertical inner side. The vertical inner sides of the bank of well were studded with brick lines bonded with mortar and the top of all vertical inner sides is slopping outwards. The edge alignments of slopping wall are nicely finished and lower ground platform was constructed with brickbats. Both these wells were probably in use till the occupation of period III.

# History of Gosanimari Rajpat in Kamatapur Kingdom: A Study on Archaeological Findings

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## Pottery Wares

Since the excavation was mostly confined to the upper level and fortification at the site, the collection of pottery assemblage is very limited. The excavation on the northern side of the mound has yielded a good number of potsherds collection. The pottery wares comprise mainly red ware in various shades, grey ware, and black ware. Few handmade and moulded pottery have also been noticed including some produced in combined process. Types of pottery includes vases, bowls, basins, dish, miniature pots, beakers etc. The only noteworthy feature visible here is stamped pottery with solar symbol with different variants and a few buff-coloured potsherds possibly made of kaolin that bears some affinity with the pottery found at Ambari site in Assam<sup>14</sup>. It may be mentioned here that Rajpat and Ambari were two of the major cultural hubs in this part of the subcontinent at least during 10<sup>th</sup> -14<sup>th</sup> century.

## Sculptural Evidences

The discovery of stone sculptures from the Rajpat mound is surprising and masterpieces. A good number of sculptural fragments has been found from the top of occupational level of period-I which bespeak a rich heritage of this area. Mention may be made of half bust of a female figure, male and female heads. This is to say that the facial and physiognomical delineation indicate them to be the products of c.11<sup>th</sup> -12<sup>th</sup> Century AD being influenced by the Pala-Sena School of art with some extraneous influences<sup>15</sup>. A large number of panel carvings on stone has been found on the top of the mound, belonged to the period II ( Khen period ) comprising depictions of male and female deities with long facial appearance which bears affinity of Ahoms and extraneous influences. These are total 9 in number including one carving of Shivalinga and the surface of all panel carvings of stone are in broken condition. Mention may be given of devotional carvings of a king with Queen, *Bamana* (door keeper of king) with King, depiction of king with queen on throne with crown, depiction of armed guards, depiction of Krishna with Gopies etc, all were engraved on granite stone block. The linear appearance is not clear on all stone carving and partly damaged. Besides, a good number of terracotta figurines has been found at the excavation which was carried out on the occupational area to the western outer side of the Rajpat Mound comprising horse figurine, male figurines, animal figurines, balls, beads etc. The terracotta objects are ritualistic in nature. Mention may be made of two figurines of snake goddess found at this site. Regarding coins discovery, mention may be given of a silver coin of Giyas Uddin Azam Sah who

# History of Gosanimari Rajpat in Kamatapur Kingdom: A Study on Archaeological Findings

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attacked Kamatapur towards the end of 15<sup>th</sup> century and that of coin of east India company. No coins of Khen kings have yet been found from this site.

## Settlement pattern

Since the excavation has been carried out on the occupational level and at the fortification area and was confined to the upper level of Rajpat Mound it is difficult to have a sound settlement pattern at the site of Gosanimari Rajpat. Based on limited structural remains and associated findings corroborating certain literary data available to us it is possible to trace the settlement pattern of the Rajpat and to some extent settlement of Kamatapur city. The survey team of Archaeological survey of India based on Radiocarbon date of a charcoal sample found from the top of the main fortification cum first massive enclosure wall to the central citadel of Rajpat mound, has suggested that the beginning of first settlement and antiquity can be pushed back logically prior to the 11<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Of course there is no sufficient evidence to suggest that remains on Rajpat mound belonging to this period at the site could be ascribed to the Pala dynasty. Since excavation has yet not been carried whole area of the Gosanimari Rajpat, it is ascribable that further excavation in future would reveal to which dynastic history this large fortified settlement is to ascribe and its political affiliation in this area. However, based on archaeological probing and structural remains it is evident here that this area was prone to flood as the area was bounded the river Dharla and Singimari in east and west side. That is to say that there is enough evidence at the site that repeated flood affected the settlement badly, and possibly the site observed temporary desertion during the 10<sup>th</sup> -12<sup>th</sup> century AD. The remains of buttress wall attached to enclosure wall at ground level of the Rajpat prove that the repaired and renovation had been taken due to the flood. However, it is to be noted here that the fertile land of silt and sand combined the abundant rainfall paved the way for a rich agricultural return and commercial relation through land and the river course of Dharla and Singimari made this area prosperous again to be developed into a capital town by itself of a power kingdom which is ascribed to the Khen dynasty.

The settlement pattern of Khen period is ascribed to 15<sup>th</sup> -16<sup>th</sup> century A.D that throw light of extensive use of reused bricks and massive use of stone which is evident by the discovery of large number of stone wares, shades pots, pottery, and unfinished stone carvings on panel. The extensive use of stone in making stone utensils, shades it is probable that there was factory of lithic craftsmanship. The existence of gigantic earthen rampart wall which is



# History of Gosanimari Rajpat in Kamatapur Kingdom: A Study on Archaeological Findings

still mostly visible surrounding the vast areas of Gosanimari Rajpat suggests the defence system of the Khen kings. This is noteworthy that citadel fort was bounded by massive earthen embankment wall covering vast areas in the inner side of which earthen rampant wall was 40 feet's height and 200 feet's width from north, west and southern side and eastern side was left open. The reason is not clear why they could not build up fortification wall in the eastern side, it might be due to the river flow of Dharla or it might have been the attacked of Hossain Sah before completing the fortification wall. However there were seven gateway entrance around the main outer fortification wall and out of them six entrance ways are still in existence namely *Shilduar*, *Baghduar*, *Sonnyasiduar*, *Joyduar*, *Nimaiduar*, and *Hokduar*<sup>16</sup>. Each entrance gateway symbolises special significance of their construction. The *Shilduar* was named after its construction with stone and *Baghduar* might have been named after the tiger emblem on the arch. The name of *Sonnyasiduar* indicates that the vaishnavite saint Sri Chaitanya Deva could have visited Kamatapur for religious preaching and this gateway served purpose of entering monks to the capital. The reason for naming of *Joyduar* is that the King and royal kinsmen used to enter into the capital through this gateway. The *Hokduar* was named probably after the name of a Koch chieftain. The *Gosanimongal Kavy* describes the location of *Shilduar*, *Baghduar* in south, *Akshayduar* in north, *Dharmaduar* in the east and *Joyduar* in west. The Kamatapur kingdom reached its zenith during the reign of Nilambar but during his reign Muslim invasion took place under leadership of Allaudin Hossian Shah who defeated king Nilambar and took possession of Kamatapur and due to massive destructions by the Muslim invaders, Kamatapur city was destroyed completely. Since excavation has been confined only to the fortification areas of Rajpat mound, there are many remnants of historical evidences found at adjacent areas of Gosanimari Rajpat that need to be explored by further excavation. There are many local legends regarding the history of remnants found nearby the Rajpat area. Following local legends and others sources few historical remnants adjacent to the Rajpat area have been traced to throw light on the cultural sequences of this historic site.

## The Royal Takshal (Mint)

Although the coins of Khen kings have yet been found at the Rajpat site, the place named Takshal mentioned in *Gosanimangal Kavy* suggests that there must have been mint for royal coins. This Takshal is said to have situated nearly to the central fort consisting of 18 rooms as

# History of Gosanimari Rajpat in Kamatapur Kingdom: A Study on Archaeological Findings

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the term '*Atharokotha*' referred in Gosanimangal Kavy<sup>17</sup>. However, this place is no longer exist but further excavation may reveal coins of Khen kings if coins earthen.

## Royal Roads

Dr. Buchanan Hamilton in his short visit at the Gosanimari site in 1808 saw the existence of wide Royal roads and remnants of bridges and he had left vivid descriptions about them in his report. King Nilambar is said to have built many royal roads and bridges to connect the capital in all extremities and other parts of the kingdom. He constructed a magnificent road from the capital to Jalpesh with good tanks by its side at every second or miles<sup>18</sup>. The present Dinhata-Mekhliganj road closely follows the alignment, and takes up the embankment, of this road. The Nilambai Road (made by the Khen king Nilambar) stretched out up to Ghoraghat (Nowdays Bangladesh)<sup>19</sup>. Hamilton during his visit saw the remnants of small and larger brick made houses besides the roadsides.

## Conclusion

After archaeological probing on the structural remains of fortified city of Kamatapur and evidences of Royal Takshal, wide royal roads and various ponds, discovery of good number of pottery ware, stone sculptures, it is evident that a prosperous cultural pattern flourished in Kamatapur during the Khen period. The nature of the structures of the mound has exposed a high technological feat of the builder with profound knowledge in architecture science. It is also evident that this area has had cultural relation with the Kamrupa region as facial treatment and physiognomical delineation of stone carvings and pottery wares bear affinity with Ambari culture. However, the archaeological probing that has come to us suggests beyond doubt that The Khens were not the builder of Kamatapur city rather they were usurpers. Since whole site of Gosanimari Rajpat and adjoining areas have yet not been dig out, it can be suggested that further excavation and future investigation would reveal the nature of earliest settlement activity at the site and identify the community who were responsible for setting up earliest settlement.

# History of Gosanimari Rajpat in Kamatapur Kingdom:A Study on Archaeological Findings

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