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# **JAGAT SETH OF MURSHIDABAD**

**Dr. Lata Bothra**

Jagat Seth is a renowned person in the history of Bengal. He also emerged as an important figure in the politics of Bengal during the shifting of its capital to Murshidabad. His advice was sought for all political, social and economic activities in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Even the British were far from capable of handling their commerce/businesses without his grace & favour. He was bestowed with splendid opulence and blessings from Goddess Lakshmi & provided financial aid to the King of Delhi, the Nawab of Bengal and many others. According to contemporary Muslim historians, Seth Manik Chand (Jagat Seth) had immeasurable wealth worth in billions. In his treasury there were huge stocks of gold, silver & emeralds. Proverbially it was said that he could have stopped the flow of river Ganga by constructing a wall of gold and silver across its stream. The extent of his wealth can also be apprehended by the fact that he continued to be the richest person in spite of his wealth being looted several times. The members of his lineage were considered as fortune-makers of Bengal by the local people. He had commercial establishments in various parts of India. In fact, there was no other trader in India of the status of Jagat Seth in those days.

Jagat Seth hailed from Nagore in Jodhpur district in Rajasthan. His forefather, Girdhar Singh Marwad, lived in a village called Khajwada. In spite of being an affluent person once upon a time, due to lack of regular source of income, he gradually landed up in financial crisis. In V. Samvat 1552 after coming in contact with Acharya Jinhans Suri, he adopted Jainism. This was the turning point in his life & after that he gradually regained his lost wealth. His family lineage came to be known as Gelda after the name of his son Gelaji. Later on, the family settled in Nagore. Again due to the economic turmoil during the time of Hiranandji Gelda, they planned to venture out for business. They requested the then Yatiji for an auspicious date of departure. Yatiji advised them to travel eastward. Hiranandji started his journey on the scheduled date but returned after seeing a hooded snake, which he considered inauspicious. However, when briefed, Yatiji said it was instead a sign of good omen. Had he continued with his journey at that time, he would have become the king of kings. However, Yatiji told Hiranandji that even now, if you go, you will definitely prosper and one day become the greatest Seth (banker/merchant) of India. Hiranandji resumed his journey towards the east and with great hardship reached Agra in fifteen days. At that time, Agra was ruled by Shah Jahan and was considered to be the world's most prosperous and splendid city. There he got a job at a grocery shop for three rupees a month. He was well-behaved, hardworking and competent in mathematics. Among the customers of his shop were some government officials who were happy with Hiranand's behaviour. An officer named Meerjumla, who was a Commander in Aurangzeb's army, became very close to Hiranand. When Meerjumla was transferred to Patna, he took Hiranand along with him and got him a shop there. As Mirjumla progressed in his career, (later on became the Nazim of Bengal) Hiranand's shop also started flourishing. Patna was an important trading centre at that time. Saltpeter, sugar, lacquer, musk, opium and coloured splatter were exported to other countries and many things were imported from other countries too. During those days, The East India Company, an ordinary trading firm at that time, opened its branch in Patna. Hiranand used to lend money to the East India Company at high interest rates. By 1685, in thirty-three years, Hiranand became a millionaire by his

hard work and honesty. His credibility increased amongst all. Apart from Bihar, his business had expanded to Rajmahal and Dahka of Bengal.

After Mirjumla, Shahista Khan and then Aurangzeb's grandson Mohammad Azam became the Nizam. Hiranand continued to be their confidant too. Britishers also took his help & advice whenever they got stuck & needed recommendation from the Nizam. In the next twenty-six years, his wealth continued to increase leaps and bounds. Sixty years back, at the age of twenty, he who had come to Agra on foot from Nagore as a labour, was now a billionaire.

In 1668 AD, the Afghans of Orissa, in association with Shobha Singh, the Zamindar of Medinipur, rose in revolt against Azimushan, Aurangzeb was involved in the South for fifteen years, and at such time of crisis, Seth Hiranand helped Azimushan. Although Hiranand was not honoured with the title of Jagat Seth till then, yet people considered him as Jagat Seth. He had built many religious places in Bihar, Bengal and Rajasthan. In Patna, Hiranand had built a Jain temple and a Dadabari of Shri Jindutt Suri. He also built a Ghat & house on the banks of Ganges, which was engulfed by the Ganges over a period of time. A lane, in the northern part of Patna City Chowk, was named as 'Hiranand Haas ki Gali' after him. Therefore, it can be said that the foundation of the growth of Jagat Seth's dynasty was laid in Patna. Hiranandji died in 1711 AD at the age of eighty-seven leaving behind seven sons and one daughter.

Documentary evidences reveal that Hiranandji was a benevolent and special jeweller of the prince. In the city of Delhi, "Hiranand ki Gali" is famous.

A mythological work named Manakyadevi Raas, obtained from the collection of Purnachandraji Nahar, gives details of the dynasty of Jagat Seth.

Manickchand, the fifth son of Hiranand, had a very cordial & warm relationship with Murshid Quili Khan, the then Diwan under Azimushan, the Nizam of Bengal. Under his influence Manickchandji shifted to Dakha, the then capital of Bengal. Later, difference of opinions cropped up between Azimushan & Murshid Quili Khan, when later decided to shift his office to Makshudabad. Manickchandji joined him & with his advise Murshid Quili Khan established the city of Murshidabad & started discharging his royal duties. Manickchandji was the advisor to Murshid Quili Khan for all the administrative & economic affairs. Due to these economic reforms, people of Bengal & Bihar were largely benefited & they greatly respected both from their heart. Manickchandji built a huge and magnificent palace in Mahimapur in Murshidabad. He also established a mint of his own, with the permission of the Nawab & the coins produced from here were honoured throughout Bengal, Bihar & Orissa.

" When Seth Manik Chand had built his bungalow in Dacca, there was a political shake up in the country, as the Mogul emperor, Aurangzeb, was losing his influence. The chiefs at distant places were increasing their personal influence and power to establish independent states. Aurangzeb appointed Murshidkuli Khan as Diwan of Azimushan, the Nawab of Dacca. Being Intelligent, courageous and bold, both Murshidkuli Khan and Seth Manik Chand, who had brotherly affection for each other, wielded great influence and power in Dacca. Seth Manik Chand had a significant influence in establishing him as the Nawab of Bengal. Consequently, the town of Murshidabad, along river Ganga, was set up with their joint efforts.

Seth Manik Chand invested heavily to make it a prosperous town. They sent an annual revenue of rupees two crores to Aurangzeb in place of the existing revenue of rupees one crore and thirty lakhs. Pleased with this, Aurangzeb shifted the capital from Dacca to Murshidabad. Azimsushan had been only a titular chief, and the people of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa regarded Murshidkuli Khan and Seth Manik Chand as their uncrowned prince. Seth Manik Chand always generously helped the poor, redeemed the miseries of the oppressed and the peasants. He improved their condition, both financially and socially. Bengal became peaceful and prosperous because of his wise fiscal policies along with the development of trade and commerce.”  
Jagat Seths of Murshidabad, Progressive Jains of India.

After the execution of Jahandar Shah, FarrukhShyar became emperor of Delhi. Being a Muslim, he wanted to marry a Rajput girl & hence no hakim or Vaidya attended him during his illness. Coincidentally, there was a doctor named Hamilton in the group of British merchants, which came to Delhi to meet the Emperor. Hamilton treated & cured the emperor.

The emperor was pleased with him & wanted to reward him. The British asked for a few districts of Bengal as reward. This incident led to the foundation of the British state in Bengal. When Murshid Quli Khan got this order of the emperor, he sent it back without serving. The emperor, in anger, dismissed Murshidkuli Khan and made Seth Manik Chandra the Diwan of Bengal,

“On receiving the decree for his appointment as Diwan, Seth Manik Chand met Murshidkuli Khan to clear the misunderstanding. With his consultation he requested the emperor that even though he would accept the post, he would still hand it over to the deserving Murshidkuli Khan. This showed his noble character. He handled the order of releasing the land to the English very intelligently. Instead of transferring the land to the English, he allowed them to do business in the area without payment of custom-tax. The entire revenue of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa was collected by Jagat Seth and the currency minted by him was used in these three States.”

Progressive Jains of India

Seth Manickchand constructed a grand temple of Tirthankar Parshvanath out of Kasauti stoned on the banks of river Bhagirathi. He purchased these valuable stones from Murshid Quli Khan, who had looted these from temples of ancient Mauryan period.

In the year 1758, when Lord Curzon visited Murshidabad to see the ruins of Jagat Seth's palace and temple, he was so impressed by the beauty of these stones that he expressed his desire to use these stones as the seat of Queen Victoria's statue in the Victoria Memorial of Calcutta. But Jagat Seth's family did not consider it appropriate and refused. Later In 1176 AD, a new Jain temple was again built by Seth Fatehchand (2), son of Seth Gulabchand, and the temple was then decorated with those same beautiful (Kasauti) stones.

Manik Devi, wife of Jagat Seth Manikchand was a great philanthropist, ascetic and had unwavering faith in Jain religion. She was born in Shajadpur in 1673 AD. Shajadpur, situated on the banks of Ganga in Allahabad district, used to be a prosperous city in those days. Many references of this city are available in the works of poet Pt. Banarasidas & Tapagachacharya Saubhagya Vijayji etc. Her father, Pooranmal belonged to Oswal Veerana Gotra. He was very rich & also a devoted person. His wife, Gulabdevi gave birth to a extremely beautiful & delicate daughter in Vikram samvat 1730, Shraavan

badi 11, named Kishorekumari. She was possessed with promising characteristics of a great personality from the childhood only. Slowly she grew up from childhood to teenage like a full-moon & with it Pooranmal became concerned about her marriage. In search of a suitable groom, messengers were sent across the country. In the end, Kishorekumari's engagement was organised with Manickchand, the son of Hiranandshah, a prominent businessman of Patna. On the auspicious date, fixed by astrologers for marriage, Hiranand Shah went to Shahjadpur with a grand procession, and were greeted with excellent food and unparalleled hospitality. Pooranmal sent away Kishore Kumari with Manickchand together with a huge dowry. She was named as Manik Devi after marriage. Being the daughter-in-law, she was considered as the Lakshmi of house and with her arrival, there was a gradual increase in wealth, fame and royalty of Hiranandshah.

Along with it the city also prospered. This was an indication of her virtuous nature. She was very generous and compassionate. Every day she would break her fast only after giving food & clothes to the hungry and poor with her own hands.

Taking clue from the scriptures, the family, and specially, Mainck Devi was engaged in all out service to the self-righteous brothers. It is with her support that many Jain families shifted to Murshidabad, They spent millions of rupees to help Jain families settle down. Inspired by the virtuous & idealistic life of Manick Devi, Emperor Farukh Siyar bestowed her with the title of "Shethani", gifted her valuable jewellery & permitted her to wear gold ornaments in her feet, otherwise restricted to the royal family only at that time.

She continued to live for 27 years after the death of Seth Manickchand. Apart from religious practices & service to mankind, she had interest in literature. Inspired by her, a contemporary poet composed "Bhupal Chaturvinsatika". Mentioned in the illustrated copy of this work, is the genealogy of the family. She spent her last 27 years in severe penance. During the last few years of her life she used to donate Gold Coins on regular basis. Inspired by her generous nature a poet has compared her with the greatest Donor (like Karna, Raja Bhoj & Vikram) of Satyug.

After returning from a pilgrimage of Samed Sikharjee, she built a temple in her house. Finally she left her mortal body by fasting (called Santhara).

Her religious guru, a Jain monk, named Anuj Nihalchand, was so impressed by her high ethics & spirituality that he composed 125 verses on her life titled " Shri Manick Devi Raas". This Raas was composed within twelve days of demise of Manick Devi & a sample of the Raas is as follows;

सतजुगमें सोलसती हुई, साधवी साधु अने कोरे।  
कलियुगमें मोटी सती, माणिक दे सुविवे कोरे ॥१॥  
शास्त्र मां हि सुणता हतारे लाल, साधु-साध्विनी बातरे।  
परतक्ष देखी आँख सुरे लाल, माणिक देवी मातरे

In the Bengal Gazetteer it is written that "The importance of Manickchand may be realised from the fact that in 1712 AD, during the fight for succession, when Azimushan declared himself emperor, Manickchand received a Siropa and an elephant. Also his nephew had received an elephant from the State, for their support. The same year, when Farrukh Siyar enthroned himself at Patna and proceeded to compete for the Delhi throne, he took loan from Manickchand to finance his endeavours. Soon after his

accession, Farukh Siyar honoured Manikchand with the title of Nagar Seth (the city banker)."

In the third year of his reign, Farukhsiyar honoured Manikchand with the title of Nagar Seth. After this he became famous in India by the name of Seth and was considered as the second citizen after Nawab.

Seth Manick Chand had two wives namely Manick Devi & Sohag devi, but he had no children, so he adopted the third son (named Fatehchand) of his sister Dhanbai, who was married to Rai Udaychandji Gokhru, a resident of Agra.

Manick chand died in 1714 & was cremated at Dayabagh (or Manikbagh) near the Mint on the banks of Bhagirathi. Before his death the banking house was firmly established in Murshidabad. He was succeeded by his nephew (adopted son) Fatehchand. He not only preserved the heritage of his ancestors but also enriched it further. During his time, the Seth family had reached the summit of upliftment. He was very efficient and ethical.

In 1723 AD, on the recommendation of Murshid Quli Khan, the Mughal emperor Farukhsiyar gave him the title of Jagat Seth. According to a British document, Murshidkuli Khan had taken five lakh rupees to approve the title of Jagat Seth. Jagat Seth became the most influential private person in Murshidabad."

After, Farukhsiyar, Mohammad Shah became the emperor of Delhi. At that time the economic condition of the Mughal Sultanate was topsy turvy and there was political instability. Under the advice of Seth Fatehchand, the emperor made some economic reforms, which greatly helped in improving the economic condition. Pleased with this, he was honored with the title of Jagat Seth also by Mohammad Shah and his son Anandchand was given the title of Seth.

After Murshid Quli Khan, his son-in-law Shujauddin became the Nawab of Bengal and Orissa. He built many buildings and he used to spend heavily on his luxuries, for which he was completely dependent on Jagat Seth, Haji Ahmed and Alamchand. So, he had to maintain good relations with Jagat Seth. During his time, there arose a serious dispute between Jagat Seth and the East India Company regarding monetary transactions. The Britishers wanted to usurp his money. But Jagat Seth Fatehchand, with his skill and understanding, got his money back from the company. Jagat Seth Fatehchand was so much influential that it became difficult for the company to carry out business without his support and they were forced to make a compromise and had to return his money.

After the death of Shujauddin in 1731, his son Sarfaraz became the ruler of Bengal. He was a luxurious, sensual and weak man by character. Around this time Nadir Shah of Iran invaded India and plundered Delhi. Seeing the prosperity of Bengal, Nadir Shah was attracted. Sarfaraz Khan, being a weak person, could not have defended himself. In this hour of crisis, all the zamindars, kings and nawabs of Bengal depended on Jagat Seth for advice. Jagat Seth's home in Mahimapur had become the centre of consultation. Wise Jagat Seth offered one lakh gold coins minted in his Taxal to Nadir Shah, due to which he returned pleased and Bengal was saved from the terror of Nadir Shah.

Jagat Seth fixed the marriage of his youngest grandson with a very beautiful girl from Mahimapur. Sarfaraz Khan got to know about this & became infatuated on her. He asked Jagat Seth to send the girl to his palace, which he fiercely objected. Even after that Sarfaraz forcibly got the girl to his palace. This incident strained their relationship.

A British historian mentioned thus



“ He (Fateh Chand) had about this time married his youngest grandson named Seet Mohtab Rai to a young creature of exquisite beauty, aged about eleven years. The fame of her beauty coming to the ears of Sarfaraz Khan, he turned with curiosity and lust for her possession & sending for Jagat Seth, demanded a sight of her.”

*Holwells Interesting Historical Events pt.I chapter II, pg 70*

Whereas, the Muslim historians, trying to conceal this event, have mentioned thus:-

“At the time of death, Murshid Quili Khan’s one lakh rupees (as per some historians it was seven lakhs) was kept with Jagat Seth & Sarfaraz Khan used to pester him for this money. So, Jagat Seth made this conspiracy to defame him.”

At that time Jagat Seth’s daily business was said to be in crores & an amount of rupees one lakh or even seven lakhs was of no importance to him. Fatehchand was a far-sighted, intelligent and religious person, leave aside keeping other’s money, he was always ready to help others.

In spite of what the Muslim historians say, this incident, at that time, was a dreadful crime, committed by a Nawab. He lost the support of Jagat Seth after this incident & due to his opulent lifestyle, the treasury got completely exhausted. The emperor of Delhi was unhappy with Sarfaraz. With their consent, the ruler of Bihar, Alivardi Khan, attacked, defeated and killed Sarfaraz in the ensuing battle of Giria and became the Nawab of Bengal.

Alivardi Khan was an efficient and peace loving person. During his rule, in 1741-42 AD, the Marathas attacked Bengal. In fact, Alivardi Khan had to fight many times with the Marathas. He had great respect for Jagat Seth, who gave him the financial assistance to fight against the Marathas. That is why, during the invasion of Marathas, Alivardi Khan sent Jagat Seth to a safe place and sent his general Mirhabib to protect Murshidabad and Jagat Seth’s kothi. However, Mirhabib was envious and allowed Jagat Seth’s house to be plundered by the Marathas. Sadly his bungalow was ruined and property worth two crore rupees was destroyed. However, in spite of so much loss and setback Jagat Seth’s prosperity continued to grow.

In fact, all the civil and financial transactions of Bengal were in the hands of Jagat Seth. The East India Company had taken huge loan from Jagat Seth, which they used to pay by selling silver. In a way, they were fully dependant on Jagat Seth for their business. In 1732 when the East India Company sent Rs. 1,50,000 to Patna, they borrowed it from Jagat Seth. At Kasim Bazar, the Company borrowed Rs. 2,00,000 from the House. The Company were not happy but had to admit that if they were to trade in Bengal, Fateh Chand must be kept in good humour and good relation must be maintained with the house.

Fateh Chand’s mutual trust and respect with the political authorities in Delhi and Murshidabad gradually increased & he became tremendously influential. The European companies courted him because his word carried great weight with the Nawab and the Mughal Emperor. Whenever they needed some favour from the Nawab or the Emperor, they routed their request through the House of Jagat Seth.

One author, assessing the reasons for Jagat Seth being so influential, has written “The major sources of the huge income, tremendous power and great prestige of the house of Jagat Seth were derived from their farms of Murshidabad and Dacca, mints, two-thirds partnership in the province’s revenue collection, their control over rates of exchange, interest rates, bill-broking and the provision of credit”.

The economic importance of the House received impetus when it was called upon to remit the annual tribute of the Subah to Delhi.

The existence of different branches of the House in all the important trade centres of eastern, northern and western parts of India, enabled it to carry out the transmission of money through Hundis, which was a very important segment of their commercial activities. A contemporary author noted that a "Darshani Hundi" worth fifty lakhs to one crore (by which is meant a draft, which the acceptor has to pay at sight, without any excuse) could be drawn from the House in the time of Seth Fateh Chand.

In 1747 the Chief of the Dacca Factory of the English East India Company received Rs. one lakh by means of hundi sent from Kasimbazar and discounted by the House of Jagat Seth.

Fatehchand's eldest son's Anandchand died early, so his grandson Mahtab Chand sat on the throne. At that time the emperor of Delhi was Ahmad Shah. He gave the title of Jagat Seth to Mahtab Chand and the title of Maharaja to his brother Swaroop Chand. The ownership of Jain Tirtha Sammed Shikhar was also given to these two brothers.

Parasnath Singh, an author, has written in his book titled "Jagat Seth" that the name of Jagat Seth is particularly connected to the political turbulence of the eighteenth century, which led to the transfer of lordship of Bengal to the Britishers.

The influence of the House of Jagat Seth from Murshidabad to Delhi was mainly due to their support to all the seats of power.

The honour and importance that the first Jagat Seth Fatehchand attained was on the strength of his services along with his resourcefulness. The main reason was, his integrity and the service provided in the form of large amounts of monetary transactions, through Hundis, from Murshidabad across to the Red Fort in Delhi, during the difficult times of the Sultanate. Jagat Seth's family had become an integral part of the government and the profits or losses were considered to be of mutual interest.

It is mentioned in Seir Mutaqherin Trans Vol II, pg.226-227 as below

"Their riches were so great, that no such bankers were ever seen in Hindustan or Deccan, nor was there any banker or merchant that could stand a comparison with them, all over India. It is even certain that all bankers of their time in Bengal, were either factors, or some of their family. In short, their wealth was such that there is no mentioning it without seeming to exaggerate and to deal in extravagant fables. Thousands of their agents & factors have acquired such fortunes in their service, as have enabled them to purchase large tracts of land, and other astonishing possessions."

Alivardi Khan died in 1756 at the age of eighty, after which Sirajuddaula, son of his daughter Amina Begum, became the Nawab of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. Regarding the relation between Siraj-ud-daula and Alivardi Khan, Robert Ormery wrote in 1778-

"Mirza Mahmud Siraj, a youth of seventeen years, had discovered the most vicious propensities, at an age when only follies were expected from princes. But the great affection which Allaverdy [Ali Vardi] had borne to the father was transferred to this son, whom he had for some years bred in his own palace; where instead of correcting the evil dispositions of his nature, he suffered them to increase by overweening indulgence: born without compassion, it was one of the amusements of Mirza Mahmud's childhood to torture birds and animals, and taught by his minions to regard himself as of a superior order of being, his natural cruelty, hardened by habit, rendered him as insensible to the sufferings of his own species as of the brute creation [animals]: in

conception he was not slow, but absurd; obstinate, sullen, and impatient of contradiction; but notwithstanding this insolent contempt of mankind, innate cowardice, the confusion of his ideas rendered him suspicious of all those who approached him, excepting his favourites, who were buffoons and profligate men, raised from menial servants to be his companions: with these he lived in every kind of intemperance and debauchery, and more especially in drinking spiritous liquors to an excess, which inflamed his passions and impaired the little understanding with which he was born. He was, however, cunning enough to carry himself with much demureness in the presence of Allaverdy, whom no one ventured to inform of his real character; for in despotic states the sovereign is always the last to hear what it concerns him most to know”

It is clearly written in the book of 'Jagat Seth' by Kanishk that during the time of Alivardi Khan, when the Nawabi army refused to fight due to non-payment of salary, Jagat Seth helped the Nawab with money, which was then given to the army. He could have kept a large army of his own for protection, but he never did so because of his loyalty to the Nawab. Alivardi Khan also had great respect for Jagat Seth and he also performed the responsibility of his safety very well.

Alivardi Khan declared Siraj as his successor before his death and advised him to follow the advice of Jagat Seth. But Siraj-ud-Daulah was of very unstable intellect and fickle nature. He had no knowledge of how to behave with whom. All the courtiers were dissatisfied with his conduct.

“Making no distinction between wise and virtue, he carried defilement wherever he went, and, like a man alienated in his mind, he made the house of men and women of distinction the scenes of his depravity, without minding either rank or station. He was hated as the Pharaoh, and people on meeting him by chance, used to say, ‘God save us from him!’”

Alivardi Khan's elder daughter Ghasiti, did not want to make Siraj the Nawab. She was a childless widow. She had immense wealth from which she had built for herself a palace of black marble pillars brought from the ancient remains of Gaur. Moti Jheel was built around this palace. Siraj had two major problems as soon as he ascended the throne. First to stop the growing ambition of the British and secondly to take revenge on his rival relatives, who were allied with the bureaucrats. After sitting on the throne, he sent the army and captured the property of Ghasiti Begum and behaved indecently with her. He also curtailed the powers of Mir Jafar, the Commander-in-Chief (Bakshi) of the royal army.

According to Mutakhreen, Nawab Siraj used to behave indecently with Seth Mahtabchand and disregarded his advice as insignificant. He also used to frighten him with forced conversion to a Muslim.

Muslim historian Ghulam Hussain Salim has written about his character-

“Owing to Siraj-ud-Daulah’s harshness of temper and indulgence, fear and terror had settled in the hearts of everyone to such an extent that no one among his generals of the army or the noblemen of the city was free from anxiety. Amongst his officers, whoever went to wait on Siraj ud Daula despaired of life and honour, and whoever returned without being disgraced and ill-treated offered thanks to God. Siraj-ud-Daula treated all the noblemen and generals of Mahabat Jang (Ali Vardi Khan) with ridicule and drollery, and bestowed on each some contemptuous nickname that ill-suited many of them. And whatever harsh expressions and abusive epithet came to his lips, Siraj ud Daula uttered

them unhesitatingly in the face of everyone, and no one had the boldness to breathe freely in his presence.” According to the historical accounts, Siraj-ud-Daulah was self-centered and extremely luxurious. He was the cause of many bloodsheds.

The emperor at Delhi used to acknowledge the appointment of a new Nawab in Bengal in the form of warrant, which used to be served by Jagat Seth. However, due to political instability, there was delay in serving the warrant & taking this opportunity, the Nawab of Purnia, Saukat Jung and Sayyid Ahmed, taking the Prime Minister of the Badshah of Delhi in confidence, revolted to become the Nawab of Bengal. Siraj sent Mohanlal and Mir Jafar to suppress their rebellion.

Jagat Seth was ordered to collect three crore rupees from the merchants for this war. He considered the order to forcibly tax the merchants as incompatible & protested. As a result, the Nawab punched Jagat Seth on the face and ordered him to be imprisoned. This was an indirect insult to the king of Delhi, as they both respected each other. Jagat Seth was later rescued by Mir Jafar. (Though Indian historians do not mention this event, it is mentioned in Nikhilnath Rai's story of Murshidabad.)

According to historical description, Siraj-u-Daulah was vagrant & most luxurious person. He got lot of people murdered. The sister of a virtuous family man, Mohanlal, was considered the most beautiful woman in Bengal at that time. He forcibly kept her. He was also conspired to marry the widowed daughter of Rani Bhawani named Tara, but she committed suicide by burning herself. Some historians have mentioned that he even tried to break into the modesty of Jagat Seth's family. Siraj's indecency has been depicted in the book 'Palassi Yudh'. Discontent among the people and enmity with the British, both were on the rise. Jagat Seth was not in favour of having enmity with the British. He knew that the Nawab's army was unorganized and the courtiers were also unhappy, but Siraj-ud-daula did not listen to his advice. By then the British had set foot in Calcutta and had fortified at Fort William.

All the councilors, who were loyal to the Nawab during Khan's time, turned against Siraj. On 24 May 1756 AD Siraj occupied the Cossimbazar factory of the British. He went on to conquer Calcutta in June 1756 AD. Next he turned towards Purnea, Bihar to quell the rebellion of his cousin, Shaukat Jang, another contestant of the throne. Taking advantage of this turbulent situation, the British re-conquered Calcutta in February 1757 AD and struck a secret deal with Mir-Jafar, the chief of army of Siraj.

When the British captured the French factory at Chandan nagar, the French sought help from Siraj. The final showdown between Siraj-u-Daula and the British army, commanded by Robert Clive, took place at the fields of Plassey, a tiny village, located midway between Calcutta and Murshidabad. Owing to an act of gross betrayal by Mir Jafar, Siraj was defeated on 23rd June 1757 AD, and subsequently killed. The British wanted to make Mir Jafar the Nawab. Jagat Seth did not agree to this but he did not oppose because Mir Jafar had freed him from the captivity under Siraj-ud-Daulah. Despite being repeatedly humiliated by Siraj-ud-Daulah, in all these developments Jagat Seth did not directly oppose the Nawab nor supported the British. Even between Siraj-ud-daula and the British, he remained a bridge of treaty, because he knew that supporting either of the two was like a ditch on one side and a well on the other.

Some historians blame Jagat Seth for the establishment of the British state in India, while the reality was that the Mughal Sultanate of Delhi was completely weakened.

Till then the most prosperous province under the authority of the Mughal Sultanate, was that of Bengal, because the economic and financial administration was under the jurisdiction of Jagat Seth. But in the year 1765, Shah Alam handed over the Diwani of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa to the British, after which Bengal started declining.

The main reason for the establishment of the English kingdom in India was the weakening of the Mughal Sultanate and the short-sighted policies of Siraj-ud-Daula, which led to the decline of Bengal and the foundation of the British Empire.

In the first war with the British, Siraj had made a treaty with the company while retreating, under which they were permitted to open a mint in Calcutta. Siraj also granted them the right to buy 80 villages near Calcutta, which Murshidkuli Khan had not allowed. According to the third condition of the treaty, the enemies of the British should be Nawab's enemies, and the friends of the British would be his friends. This treaty proved to be very harmful for Jagat Seth.

When the French were defeated by the British, they turned to the Nawab. By sheltering them, the Nawab broke the terms of the treaty and did not listen even after repeated warnings from Lord Clive, which resulted in his defeat and death.

After Siraj-ud-Daula, Mir Jafar became the Nawab, who was a puppet in the hands of the British. The British started collecting taxes due to which the Royal fund became empty.

Mir Jafar proved to be unfit for the role and was replaced by Mirkasim who then waged a war against the British. Being afraid of Jagat Seth's influence and his good relations with the British, he imprisoned Mahtab Rai and his brother, Swaroopchand. Unfortunately after losing the battle against the British, Mirkasim had them killed by immersing them in the Ganges. Thus Jagat Seth Mahtab Rai and his brother Swaroopchand had a sad end.

Jagat Seth's son, Khushalchand, became the next successor and Shah Alam, the emperor of Delhi, honoured him with the title of Jagat Seth.

After the defeat of Mirkasim, Mir Jafar again became the Nawab of Bengal and the British took lakhs of rupees from him as compensation. After his death, his son Najibuddaula, became the Nawab. During his time there was an agreement between the Company and the Nawab that the British would get the right to keep army and collect taxes & revenue. The British obtained the right of state civil administration in lieu of paying thirty-six lakh rupees annually to the emperor of Delhi. The lakhs of rupees which the company had taken as a loan from Jagat Seth, were never repaid. The company had the monopoly over the trade of the state and all the profits started going to England. The non-payment of loans by the British, created friction between Jagat Seth and the British, as a result the old mint of Murshidabad was closed. Now the British also had monopoly on the currency.

Despite all this, Jagat Seth Khushalchand continued to carry out the tradition of charitable traditions of his family with a free hand. At that time the monthly expenditure of Jagat Seth's family was one lakh rupees. There were about four thousand people in his family. In which there were twelve-hundred women. Seth Khushalchand was very calm and religious by nature. He built 108 lakes and many Jain temples. When he died at the young age of forty, the condition of the family deteriorated as it is believed that due to his sudden death, he could not tell anyone about the secret wealth which was buried under ground.

Gokulchand, son of Seth Khushalchand, had died four years before his father's death. So Kushalchand had adopted his nephew Harakhchand to become his successor. On the recommendation of the British, Nawab Mubarak-ud-daula gave the title of Jagat Seth to Seth Harakhchand. He was very worried about not having a son. He built a temple of Vaishnav religion under the influence of a Vaishnava mystic. But other members of the family and women remained faithful to Jainism. Jagat Seth gave an application to the British to open the mint before the departure of Warren Hastings, but permission was not granted.

Later, again permission was sought to open the mint in Murshidabad but the company did not approve, as it would end the company's supremacy.

The English translator of Mukhtarin, while comparing the present with past, wrote that at the time of Fatehchand, it was normal for Jagat Seth to pay on-sight bills of fifty lakhs to one crore to government even after being robbed of two crores. Today's Jagat Seth was not able to pay even a hundi of Rs.140,000, but in instalments in 1787. Most of House's wealth was either spent by Khushal Chand himself or the loans were irrecoverable after his death. Legend in his family is that he could not tell the location of the buried funds due to his sudden death. Harakhchand somehow managed to keep the repute of the family by the inherited wealth from his uncle, Gulabchand.

"Jagat Seth" by Parasnath Singh

Jagat Seth Harakhchand had two sons. Indrachand and Vishnuchand. After Harkhchand, Indrachand became Jagat Seth. who also died at the young age of 27 so his son, Govindchand, took over the legacy. However, the company did not accept Govindchand as Jagat Seth. Though, some writers believe that the company recognized him as Jagat Seth.

Govindchand started fulfilling his needs by selling the old jewellery of his house. In 1843, the company agreed to pay him a monthly stipend of Rs 1200. As Govindchand did not have any son, he adopted Gopalchand. Both Gopalchand and Vishnuchand's son, Kishanchand applied to the company for monthly stipend after the death of Govindchand. During the time of Gopalchand, this monthly stipend on behalf of the company was fixed at Rs.700 and it was decided to give Rs.500 to Kishanchand. When Kishanchand again appealed to the company, the company agreed to give 800 rupees to Kishanchand and 300 rupees to Gopalchand, which Gopalchand rejected.

After the death of Kishanchand, Gopalchand's wife Sethani Prankumari Bibi was given a monthly stipend of Rs 300 on behalf of the company. Gulabchand was adopted by Sethani Prankumari Bibi. The original temple of Kasauti stones, which got engulfed in river Bhagirathi due to erosion of its banks, was re-constructed by Gulabchand's sons, Fatehchand and Udaychand.

Because of an intense earthquake in 1816 AD, the palace of Mahimapur built by Seth Manikchand was destroyed. A new house was constructed at some distance from the ruins, in which Fatehchand and Udaychand lived.

Around this time the Governor General, Lord Curzon, went to Murshidabad. There he saw the ruins of Mahimapur and had the opportunity to see the decrees and jewellery received by Jagat Seth from the Mughal emperors, as well as some rare coins dated after fifteenth century.

The decree by which Farrukhsiyar had given Fatehchand the title of 'Jagat Seth' was handed over by Gulabchand to an institution called 'Victoria Memorial' in Calcutta. Seth Fatehchand died in 1958. His son was Saubhagchand who was murdered by dacoits in his house. He had two sons, Seth Gyanchand and Seth Vijaychand, who are still alive.

## **Kasauti temple of Mahimapur**

The Mahimapur Kasauti Patthar Jinalaya (temple) built by the famous Jagat Seth family had become a place of pilgrimage.

Seth Hiranand Shah, who came for trade from Nagor (to Agra, Patna, and finally settled in Murshidabad) and his descendants remained dominant in the Mughal court, the Nawabs of Murshidabad and with the British. His pride and glory was no less than that of a king/emperor. He had many bungalows all over the country. He also had varied activities in the religious field.

When the Jains had to migrate from Bengal, they took ancient idols etc. with them and installed them at different places in Rajasthan. Similarly, when the Jagat Seth's family became incapable of taking care of the temple, in the present times, Shri Mukesh Bhai Shah of Ahmedabad, with the inspiration of the most revered Acharya pravara Shri Padmasagar Surishwar Maharaj, shifted this temple to Baurij in Gandhinagar and got it restored under his auspicious guidance. Today, this Kasuati stone temple of Jagat Seth, reminding of the glorious past of Mahimapur, is inviting all to Vishwamaitri Dham, Baurij in Gandhinagar, Gujarat.

In the Commendation of Kasauti Mandir by Lt. Shri Bhanwarlalji Nahata, it is mentioned such - दानेयेनतिरस्कृतः सुरतरुधैये.....

The one, who defeated even the Kalpavriksha (heavenly tree) in charity, and ocean in patience, the jewel of Galda dynasty, virtuous Seth Hiranand Seth was staunch follower of Jainism & pleaser of people. His son Seth Manikchand was also respected by the virtuous people of his time and his son, Seth Fatehchand got the title of Jagat Seth. His son was Anandchand and his son was Mahtab Rai. His son was Khushalchandra & he was succeeded by his nephew Harshachandra, and then his son Indrachandra, who was religious & virtuous by nature. His son was Govindchand & was then succeeded by his nephew Jagat Seth Gulapchand, a religious personality beloved by the public. His wife, Phoolkumari was instrumental for the happiness of the family. His son Jagat Seth Fatechand and junior brother Udaychandra were famous amongst the people. He and his virtuous wife Shilavati, seeing the Kasauti stone-temple ruined by the erosion of Bhagirathi, brought the auspicious idols to their home in Nava Niketan.

In the year Vikram samvad 1975, in auspicious Uttaraphalguni Nakshatra, the idol of Lord Parshvanath was consecrated in the new temple, built by them in Mahimapur, by an elegant Acharya.

After the partition of 1947 AD, there were significant changes in the boundaries of the Banga region. East Bengal went to Pakistan and West Bengal remained in Hindustan, in which some areas of Bihar were also included. Sammed Shikhar, a very ancient pilgrimage site, which has the privilege of being the land of Nirvana (omniscience) of twenty Tirthankaras, is considered a very holy area. The rivers Damodar, Kansavati, Shilavati, Barakar and Ajay, which flow in its lateral regions, have the earliest evidence of Jain culture in the region, indicating the influence of Jainism in the region. It is known from the Acharanga Sutra that 2600 years ago, Lord Mahavira had wandered in different places in Anga, Banga and Rad Bhoomi. The impact of his teachings is still visible in these areas today.

According to Dr. Prabodhchand Bagchi, Jainism was well established in Banga Desh in the third century BC, which continued till the middle of the seventh century. From the 7th century onwards, the Shravakas had to gradually migrate from Bangadesh.

References to the construction of temple in Kasimbazar by Pujya Muni Bhadragani, on Magh Vadi 3 in the year 1780 AD and consecration by Upadhyay Kapoor Priyagani, are found in the collection of Jain articles.

In Samvat 1781, Gulabchand Sethia had established the sacred feets (Paduka) of Yati Hiragiriji.

On the 15th of Samvat 1821, Seth Shovachandji Motichandji established Dadasaheb's feet (Charan) at Kiratbagh, Jiyaganj in Maqsoodabad under the instruction of Pt. Hazarinandji (in the lineage of Mahopadhyay Samaysundarji) & later consecrated by Acharya Mahendrasuriji.

On the insistence of Sugalchand, resident of Maqsoodabad, Alamchandji, a disciple of Pt. Askaranji (in the lineage of Mahopadhyay Samaysundarji) had composed the Jeev Vichar eulogy saga 115 on Samvat 1815 Baishakh Sudi 5. After that Maun Ekadashi Chaupai, Trailok Pratima eulogy and Samyaktva Kaumudi Chaupai were composed. In Samvat 1847, Upadhyay Kshmakalyan Maharaj's autobiography gives the synopsis of Maqsoodabad. He also created 41 verses of Jaitihuvan Bhashya.

Thus, we see that even during the period of anarchy in the country, Jain monks and Yatis continued to wander in the areas of Azimganj and Jiaganj in Murshidabad. Even after the death of Jagat Seth, Jain society played an important role in the field of art, literature and culture in Bengal



# The development and extinction of Jainism in Ancient North Bengal

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## Abstract:

Different religions have been living in India since ancient times. From the sixth century BC onwards, Buddhism, Jainism, Vaisnavism, and Saivism were the dominant religions. All these religions were established as a protest movement against the Brahmanical religion. These religions spread to different parts of India. Among these Buddhism and Jainism also spread in the then Bengal. However, in this article, I will discuss the impact of Jainism on the northern part of Bengal. Jainism had spread deeply in Bengal till the seventh century, i.e. the reign of Pala and Sen. Later, as a result of Muslim invasions in North Bengal, the religion gradually became extinct. So my discussion will continue until the seventh century.

**Keywords:** Jainism, North Bengal

At the beginning of the article, I will define the boundaries of the discussion. We will first discuss what is meant by 'North Bengal' in ancient times. We know that in ancient times there was no state or district or pargana called 'North Bengal'. Generally, in the late nineteenth century, we get the name 'North Bengal'. However, the region of North Bengal was known by a few names in ancient times. We generally know the northern part of the Ganga-Padma River in undivided Bengal, commonly known as 'North Bengal'. Dinajpur, Rajshahi, Pabna, Bogra, Malda, Rangpur, Jalpaiguri, and Darjeeling - these eight districts made up North Bengal. Most of the first six districts covered most of the ancient *Pundravardhana bhukti*, and some parts of north-eastern India, Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling districts, consisting of Kamrup kingdom or *Pragjyotishbhukti*.<sup>1</sup>

Jainism in general is a doctrine of protest against Vedic philosophy. Jainism was propagated when the people were looking for a way out of the Vedic age due to the pressure of rituals and caste. According to Historian Ram Sharan Sharma says that "*Jainism made first serious attempt to mitigate the evils of the varna order and the ritualistic Vedic religion. The early Jainas discarded Sanskrit language mainly patronized by the brahmanas. They adopted Prakrit language of the common people to preach their doctrines.*"<sup>2</sup> According to the Jain tradition, 24<sup>th</sup> Tirthankars have developed Jainism. According to the *Bhagwat Purana* and *Vishnu Purana*, Rishabh Nath was the first Tirthankara of this religion in ancient times. The names of three Tirthankaras are found in the *Jajurveda*, namely Rishabh, Ajit, and Aristhanemi. According to the Jains text, the 22nd Tirthankara Neminath was a contemporary of Lord Krishna and a member of the *Jadu* dynasty. The Jains are believed to have been strong during the 23<sup>rd</sup> Tirthankara **Parsvanath** in the sixth century BC. Mahavira was the last Tirthankara. The qualitative change of Jainism was achieved mainly by **Parsvanath** and Mahavira. However, they never claimed that they had established any new religion.<sup>3</sup>

Mahavira has also shed more light on the sorrows of human life. It is said in the *Acharanga Sutra* that the world of this living being is involved, miserable where teaching is difficult and irrational. In this miserable world, ignorant people have suffered and caused misery by various deeds. The Jain Agamas enumerate five *vratas* (vows) which ascetics and householders must observe. These ethical principles were preached by Mahavira:- (1)

**Ahimsa** (Non-violence or non-injury): Mahavira taught that every living being has sanctity and dignity which should be respected as one expects one's own sanctity and dignity to be respected. **Ahimsa**, Jainism's first and most important vow, applies to actions, speech, and thought. **(2) Satya** (truthfulness): Applies to oneself and others. **(3) Asteya** (non-stealing): Not taking anything that has not been given. **(4) Brahmacharya** (chastity): Abstinence from sex and sensual pleasures for monks, and faithfulness to one's partner for householders. **(5) Aparigraha** (non-attachment): For lay people, an attitude of non-attachment to property or worldly possessions; for mendicants, not owning anything.<sup>4</sup>

Jainism is atheistic. This belief has nothing to do with the existence of God. According to this doctrine, the activities of the universe are being regulated by an eternal law and the cosmic waves of endless rise and fall are coming and going. There is a soul in everything in the world. The purpose of life is to sanctify the soul. Jains believe that the soul will become pure in a harmonious way of life. Mahavira thought that only a monk could lead such a life. He also thinks that a person's rebirth depends on the deeds of his pre-birth. That is, if a person has done good deeds in the previous birth, then he will be born in a higher caste. According to Ram Sharan Sharma says that “*Jainism mainly aims at the attainment of freedom from worldly bonds. It is not necessary to use any ritual for acquiring such liberation. It can be obtained through full knowledge and action. Full knowledge, action and liberation are considered to be the three gems or ratnas of Jainism.*”<sup>5</sup> Nine basic theories are accepted in this religion. They are *Jiva, Ajib, Punya, Paap, Ashrab, Sambar, Bandhu, Nirjara and Moksha*.

Jains worship different types of deities as symbols of different qualities. They worshiped the idols of 24<sup>th</sup> Tirthankaras. Not only did they worship them, but they also worshiped Hindu gods and goddesses like *Lakshmi, Ganesha, Kubera*, etc. Each Tirthankara had a symbol. For example, Adinath's symbol was bull and Mahabir's symbol was lion. Besides, each of them had a god of worship and rule. They are mentioned in Jain scriptures as *Jaksha* and *Jakshini*. The Jains valued education very much. According to their tradition, the number of these goddesses was twelve and *Saraswati* was at the top of them. To the Jains, he was a deity. He used to conduct the work of propagating the religion of Tirthankaras.<sup>6</sup>

I have already mentioned that the promoters of Jainism were twenty-four Tirthankaras. Most of these 24<sup>th</sup> Tirthankaras appeared and settled in present-day Bihar. The last and foremost Jain Tirthankara Mahavira was born in the *Kshatriya Jnatrika* clan of *Kundagrama (Kundalpur)* near *Vaisali* in northern Bihar. This *Kundagrama* or *Kundalpur* belongs to Mazaffarpur district, the present name is *Basukunda*. His *Nirvana* period was in the sixth century BC. It is only natural that the influence of these missionaries from Bihar should spread to neighboring Bengal. In ancient times the political, social, and cultural relations of North Bengal with North Bihar were very close.<sup>7</sup>

According to the Jain scripture *Acharanga Sutra*, Mahavira himself came in the sixth century BC to preach Jainism in *Rarh, Bajaj Bhumij, Subang Bhumij*. Prior to Mahavira, the main pilgrimage site of Jain Tirthankaras like Neminath and Parsvanath was *Pareshnath* hill in Bengal. According to Jain mythology, Mahavira was also associated with *Manbhum, Singbhum*, and *Burdwan*. According to the Jain scripture *Acharanga Sutra*, when he went to those countries, the people of that country attacked Mahavira and threw dogs at him with a snarl. The most important thing is that according to the *Acharanga Sutra*, when such practices were prevalent in South Bengal (Rarh Region) in the sixth century BC, Jainism had a considerable influence in North Bengal. *Pundravardhana* was then the heart of religion, education, culture. It is known from the *Kalpa Sutra* that at that time *Pundravardhana* i.e. North Bengal was inhabited by a large number of Jains. According to that scripture, there were four special branches of Jains in East India, namely - *Pandvardhanika (Pundravardhana), Khadiya (Khalimpur), Kotivarshiya (Kotivarsha), Tamraliptiya (Tamralipta)*. All but four of these four branches were in the heart of North Bengal. It is known from an inscription found in *Paharpur* village of East Dinajpur district (478-469 AD) that there was a huge Jain monastery of *Acharya Guhanandi* in one of the *Vata Gohali*. Later, Maharaja Dharmapala built another *Vihara* at *Somepur* in *Paharpur*. From that

inscription, it is known that a Hindu **Nath Sharma** and his wife **Rami**, donated land for **Jain Vihara** in 478-469 AD. At that time **Padmarath** was the king of **Kotivarsha**.<sup>8</sup>

Jain text **Bhagawati Sutra** has the name of the country. Bengal is mentioned among these sixteen countries. Bengal is the region to the west of the Ganga-Bhagirathi. **Pundra** is the present Rajshahi, Bogra, Dinajpur, Rangpur i.e. the whole northern region. The Jain **Acharanga Sutra** mentions the region of **Rarh**. **Rarh** is divided into northern and southern parts. The boundary of North **Rarh** is marked by natural boundaries by the rivers Ganga Bhagirathi and Ajay. However, it can be generally said that the west bank of Bhagirathi extends to the South Sea, including parts of Murshidabad-Burdwan-Birbhum-Bankura-Hughli-Medinipur. The names and boundaries of these towns were later changed. The first mention of the **Pundra** people is found in **Aitareya Brahman**. In this text, Bishwamitra mentions **Pundras** along with various other tribes living on the border of **Aryavarta**, viz., **Anga, Shabar, Pulinda, and Mutib**. Here **Pundrakom** is called **Dasyukom**.<sup>9</sup>

As I mentioned earlier, there was a king named **Padmarath** in the **Kotivarsha** of many years ago. His queen's name was **Padmashri**. There was a Brahmin named **Some Sharma** under the protection of this king. **Some Sharma's** only son was born in the city of **Kotivarsha**. The son's name is **Bhadrabahu**. The present Gangarampur was the birthplace of **Bhadrabahu**. **Bhadrabahu's** inclination towards education was immense from his childhood. His only job was to do good to the people. Jain acharya **Forth Śruta Kevalīs** Sri **Govardhanacharya** came to the **Kotivarsha** on the occasion of pilgrimage. Seeing the talent of **Bhadrabahu**, **Sri Govardhanacharya** was pleased and initiated him into Jainism. Later, when Sri **Govardhanacharya** died, **Bhadrabahu** was appointed as the leader of Jainism. At this time Chandragupta Maurya, the founder of the Maurya Empire, became a recluse. In this state, Chandragupta took initiation from **Bhadrabahu**. **Bhadrabahu**, the **guru** of the Mauryan emperor Chandragupta, was the **Fifth Śruta Kevalīs**. After the death of Tirthankara Mahavira, his three disciples and a disciple were the only three. **Kevalīs** means knower. They were followed by other **Fifth Śruta Kevalīs**. North Bengal occupies a prominent place in the history of Jainism in India.

It is said that in the Eight century BC, the 23<sup>rd</sup> **Tirthankara Parsvanath** came to the **Pundranagara** to preach. Then in the sixth century BC, Mahavira came to **Pundravardhana** to preach his religion. But no acceptable evidence of the arrival of these two **Tirthankaras** at **Pundravardhana** has been discovered. It is also said that **Sudharma**, a close disciple of Mahavira, and **Jambusvami**, a disciple of **Sudharma**, came to **Pundravardhana** and preached the scriptures. Both of them were **Kevalīs**. Due to the **tomb of Jambusvami** at **Kotipur**, the city became a Jain pilgrimage site.<sup>10</sup>

Towards the end of the reign of Chandragupta, the founder of the Mauryan Empire, there was a severe famine in northern India for 12 years. At this time, when Emperor Chandragupta felt asceticism in his mind, he took initiation in Jainism from **Bhadrabahu**. Grants will not be easy for all Jain monks during the famine. Considering that **Bhadrabahu** went to South India with half of the Jain **Sangha**, that is, 12,000 monks, the other half remained in North India under the leadership of **Acharya Sthulabhadra**. During the famine, these monks in northern India relaxed the rules of the association and were forced to go out to collect alms, so they started wearing white clothes. They are **Svetambaras**. And those who went to South India under the leadership of **Bhadrabahu** became known as **Digambaras**. Chandragupta Maurya went to South India with **Bhadrabahu** and spent his last life in the service of Guru. **Bhadrabahu** died in Mysore (now Karnataka) in the state of **Shravana Belagola**, probably in 297 BC, after propagating and establishing the scriptures in South India. That place has become a Jain pilgrimage site.<sup>11</sup>

From the stanzas of the **Kalpa Sutra**, we learn that **Bhadrabahu** had four **Thera** disciples - all belonging to the **Kashyapa** clan, **Bhadrabahu** himself being of the 'ancient' clan. These four disciples are **Godas, Agnidatta, Janadatta** and **Somadatta**. From this **Bhadrabahu**-disciple **Godas**, a separate and distinct community was formed within the **Nigrantha** community called **Godas**. Over time, these **Godasas** disciples were divided into four branches - **Pandvardhana (Pundravardhana), Khadiya (Khalimpur), Kotivarshiya (Kotivarsha), Tamralittiya (Tamralipta)**. One by one a branch was formed around a place.

Since it has two branches centered on **Kotivarsha** and **Pundravardhana**, it is very clear that the **Nigrantha** religion was well established in North Bengal at that time. The death of **Bhadrabahu** took place in 297 BC when his disciple **Godas** and the establishment of God's branches took place in the second and first centuries BC. The mention of these branches in the inscriptions of the first century BC and the first century AD proves that the scriptural religion is still well established in the region.<sup>12</sup>

According to historians, towards the end of the Pala period, the Jains merged with the **Abdut community**. Evidence of the existence of Jains of **Kotivarshiya** during the Pala and Sen periods is found through idols. Various Jain idols of Rishabhath, Adinath, Neminath, Shantinath, Parsvanath made in the ninth to twelfth centuries are found in the Dinajpur region. Vaishnavism and Saivism and Vedic Brahmanism have been gaining ground since the Gupta age over **Kotivarsha**, and atheistic Jainism has been losing its popularity. Moreover, Jainism did not get the patronage of the kings and princes here.<sup>13</sup>

In the **Kalpa Sutra** of Bhadrabahu, a Jain writer, **Kotivarsha** has been used as **Kotivarshiya** in the sense of the East Indian Jain community. **Sonitpur** is also mentioned in **Vishnu Purana** and **Srimad Bhagwata**. Not only is there a description of **Kotivarshiya** in the **Vayu Purana** and the **Brihata Sanhita**, but in the **Vayu Purana** it is also called 'Nagar'. The copper plate found from **Damodarpur** in Dinajpur district shows that it has been identified as a district and capital of the district under the province of **Pundravardhana** for **Kotivarsha**. Even during the Pala period, the glory of **Kotivarsha** was intact. In the **Ramcharit** of Sandhyakar Nandi, there is a description of the great splendor of **Sonitpur**.<sup>14</sup>

According to the **Bhagwat Sutra**, one of Mahavira's disciple **Gosal**, was the founder of **Ajivik Dharma**, another religious division of the time. Along with Jainism, this non-existent religion gained considerable popularity in North Bengal. It is also known that **Punda King Mahapoum** of that time did a lot for the propagation of this religion. Evidence of the spread of Jainism in **Pundravardhana** in the forth and Third centuries BC is found in the Jain text **Divyavadana**. According to this book, Ashoka once killed 18,000 **Ajivikas** of **Patliputra** for the crime of **Pundravardhana's Nigranthas** (by mistake). Although it is not possible to determine the true nature of this incident, it can be said that there was a considerable spread of Jains here. Kshitimohan Sen, referring to the murder, commented, "**At that time, 18,000 Nigranthas or Jains were found in Pundravardhana for the purpose of this murder.**" Dr. Ramesh Chandra Majumdar in his book "**History of Ancient Bengal**" published from Calcutta in 1971 mentions the incident in that Ashoka killed 18,000 **Ajivikas** of **Pundravardhana** in one day. Nalini Nath Dasgupta, in his book "**Banglay Buddhadharma**", narrates the story. Dr. Prabodh Chandra Bagchi writes that Ashoka ordered the killing of all the **Nigranthas** in **Patliputra** Nagar (not **Pundravardhana**). Dr. Nihar Ranjan Roy wrote in his famous book "**Bangalir Itihas**" that Ashoka once killed 18,000 **Ajivikas** of **Patliputra** for the crime (mistakenly?) of **Pundravardhana's Nigrasthas** (Jains). So these 18,000 **Nigranthas** who were killed were residents of **Patliputra Nagara** or **Pandavardhana**? It is to be noted here that Dr. Ramesh Chandra Majumdar, Dr. Niharranjan Roy, and Nalini Nath Dasgupta have all referred to the "**Divyavadana**" edited by Cowell and Neil as sources. On the other hand, Dr. Asha Das quotes in his research book "**Bangla Sahitya Bouddhadharma O Sanskriti**" that 18,000 **Ajivikas** of **Pundravardhana** were killed. However, if the 18,000 **Nigranthas** who were killed were not residents of **Pundravardhana**, the incident reveals that there were not only **Nigrantha** monks in the **Pundravardhana**, but also **Nigrantha** worshipers who could dare to insult Buddha even during Ashoka's reign; that is, there was their majority and dominance. Dr. Ramesh Chandra Majumdar did not find the story of **Divyabadana** very believable, but acknowledged its value as proof of the predominance of Jainism in Bengal and especially in North Bengal during the time of Ashoka.<sup>15</sup>

Aryan religion first came to the land of Bangladesh through North Bengal in the second century BC on the basis of Jainism. It is known from a copper plate found on the **Paharpura** that there was a **Jain Vihara** in that place in the fourth century or earlier. According to **Hiuen Tsang**, the number of **Digambaras** Jains in this country was high at that time. But later, when the influence of Jainism diminished, the number of followers of Jainism also decreased.<sup>16</sup>

Jain image of the ninth to twelfth centuries are found in Dinajpur, Barind, etc. Jainism spread in the region during this century. In the present Barind region, Seven Jain image have been found as a symbol of the position of Jains, of which five are in the Barind Research Museum in Rajshahi and two in the Dinajpur Museum. All these idols belong to the Pala period. Among the Jain image preserved in the Barind Research Museum are the statues of Shantinath and Rishabhath. There are also rare *yaksha* duets. Jain image are rarely found in the Dinajpur region. Although Jainism had considerable influence in Bengal from the second century BC to the seventh century AD, I do not know of any Jain idol found here before the seventh century. Statues of Tirthankara Rishabhath and Parsvanath have been found in the Dinajpur district. These statues appear to have been made of black stone in the tenth-eleventh centuries. A magnificent image of Tirthankara Rishabhath has been found in *Subohara* village under the Dinajpur district. Another image was found from *Velo* village under *Kaharol* police station under Dinajpur district. The statue of Tirthankara Parsvanath was found in a village in *Khansama* of Dinajpur district.

From the beginning of the establishment of the empire most of North Bengal, or at least *Pundravardhanabhukti*, belonged to this empire. Due to the patronage of Brahmanical religion by the Gupta emperors, Brahmanical religion flourished during their reign. Therefore, the influence of Jainism which was observed in North Bengal in the pre-Gupta period came to a standstill in the Gupta period. Nevertheless, in this age, we can see some influence of Jainism in North Bengal.

Therefore, the religious activity was probably the first move towards Aryanisation in this remote area of India. Buddhism and Jainism in the beginning made the headway probably under the Maurya rulers. This was followed by a Brahmanical revival during the Gupta period. The Gupta kings also set up the tradition of land donations to Brahmanas and religious establishments which were followed by the Pala and Sena kings in later years to come. Whatever may be the royal religion, there usually remained a peaceful atmosphere in Pundravardhana in different periods.<sup>17</sup>

The influence of Jainism diminished during the reigns of the Buddhist Pala dynasty and the Brahmanical Sena dynasty. There is no written evidence or scriptural evidence about Jains in this age. However, some Jain images are announcing the existence of Jains. Nevertheless, the above Jain image also proves that Jainism had some influence in different parts of North Bengal during this period. It is thus seen that although Jainism did not gain royal patronage in North Bengal, it had its influence here from the time of its establishment. There is clear evidence of this effect until the Seventh century AD. This religion became extinct in North Bengal towards the end of the Pala period. Dr. Nihar Ranjan Roy estimates that all these *Digambaras Nigranthas* gradually became part of the *Siddha, Kapalik, Abadhuta* and other naked religions. Dr. Prabodh Chandra Bagchi also held a similar view.

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## Ancient Jain Art and Antiquities of Tamil Nadu

Vijay Kumar Jain (Babaji)

### 35.Aruthangudi.



**Ancient Jain Temple, Aruthangudi.Tiruvannamalai - Thiyagadurgam Rd, Sirupanaiyur, Tamil Nadu 605766 (11.959868, 79.082541)** It is located at a distance from Tiruvannamalai 31kms and Kallakkurichi 40kms. Aruthangudi village in Villupuram district of Tamilnadu was the centre of attraction recently as it turned into a spot for discovery of idol said to be from the days of Cholas. The idol, said to be that of a Jain monk is located close to Ayyanar temple situated on the route connecting Manalurpettai with Thiyagaduruvam. It is about five-and-half feet in height and has a width of two-and-half feet, the sculpture has indicated that the idol belongs to the times of Cholas; This statue could have been a part of a larger temple built out of blackstone or brick during that time. As the time moved ahead, the shrine could have perished and this idol alone appears to have survived. The sculpture shows Jainism has flourished in the village during the time of Cholas, jains would have resided here who would have worshipped this sculpture. Though Jainism seems to be not active currently, it was active in the past. Further research could throw more light on presence of Jainism in this village and areas nearby.

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