

History of Burdwan

Origin of Name

The history of Burdwan is known from about 5000 BC and belonging to the Mesolithic or Late Stone Age. The name Burdwan is an anglicized form of the Sanskrit word *Vardhamana*. The first epigraphic reference to the name occurs in a 6th. century AD copper -plate found in the village of *Mallasarul* in Galsi Police Station.

There are two views about the origin of the name *Barddhamana*. One, it might have been named after the 24th. *Jaina Tirthankar* or *barddhamanasvami*. According to the *Kalpasastra* of the Jains, Mahavira spent sometime in *Astikgrama* which was formerly known as *Barddhamana*.

According to the other view, *Barddhamana* means prosperous growth centre. In the progress of Aryanisation from the upper Ganges valley, the frontier colony was called *Barddhamana* as a landmark of growth and prosperity.

Early History

The excavations of 1954 and 1957 revealed that the Mesolithic Age has been traced at *Birbhanpur* in Durgapur Thana. These discoveries are results of excavations carried on during 1962-65 at *Pandu Rajar Dhibi* in the valley of the river Ajay (near Bhedia) and in several other sites on the Ajay, Kunur and Kopai rivers. This Dhibi has revealed that the people of those days were capable of building well-planned towns with pavements and streets. They lived in citadels and houses built of unfired clay reinforced with reeds and having plastered walls and floors of beaten peletty laterite. They knew the use of copper. Agriculture and trade was the mainstay of their economy.

Vardhamana continued to be a well-known division of the ancient Bengal. In the 6th century epigraphic evidence points to the existence of *Vardhamana* as a famous *Bhukti* and in that age it was also mentioned as *Radhadesa* or *Radha*. *Radha-Varddhamana* area become a part of the *Maurya* empire and remained so throughout. But following the dissolution of the *Gupta* empire, one or more independent Kingdoms were established in Bengal.

Pre-Medieval Period

Towards the close of the 3rd. century AD a *Varman dynasty* rose to power in West Bengal. *Chandra Varman* may be regarded as the king of Radha. After that *Gupta dynasty* came in to power and *Vinay Gupta* was in charge of this area. And then, *Sasanka*, the first independent paramount sovereign of Bengal and then *Jayanaga* was in charge of this area.

The history of the district is blank from the middle of the 7th century till the rise of the *Palas* in the later part of the 8th century. The *Khalimpur* copper plate of *Dharmapala*, the son of *Gopala-I*, states that *Gopala-I* was elected king by the people to save the country from *Matsyanayaya*. After the *Pala dynasty* *Sena Dynasty* took over the charge of Bengal at about AD 1130. *Vijayasena* was the first king of *Senas* according to *Deopara* inscription. Before the beginning of Muslim invasion *Sadgop dynasty* of *Gopbhum* which was in *Bardhaman* district ruled for a short time..

Medieval Period

The first Muslim invasion of Bengal took place during the reign of *Lakshmanasena* by *Baktiyar Khilji*. After ten years, during the reign of *Hasmuddin Iwaz* a portion of the northern Radha was occupied by the Muslim ruler of *Lakhnauti* or *Goudha*. Then the battle to capture this region was continuing between the Muslim ruler and the Kings of Orissa.

The political condition of the entire *Bardhaman* district as at present constituted was not clearly known at that time. But the Gangetic part certainly continued to remain under the rule of *Lakhnauti* (*Goudha*). An inscription of *Nasiruddin Mahmud Shah* found at *Saptagram* proves his holds over Gangetic area of *Bardhaman* District. The next king, his son, *Ruknuddin Barbak Shah* extended his patronage to literal activist *Maladhar Basu*, the poet of *Srikrishnavijaya*. *Maladhar Basu* was a resident of *Kulingram* in *Bardhaman* district and he received the title of *Gunaraj Khan* from the king of *Lakhnauti*. Another celebrated poet, who flourished in *Bardhaman* at this time, was *Ruparam* who composed *Dharmamangala*.

In 1606, *Qutbuddin Khan Koka*, a foster-brother of *Jehangir*, was appointed the Governor of Bengal. *Sher Afgan Istajhi*, a Turkish nobleman, was at that time the jagirdar or fozdar of *Bardhaman*. His wife *Meherunnessa* was a lady famous for her beauty. *Qutbuddin Khan Koka* paid a visit to *Bardhaman*, shortly after his arrival in Bengal. There was a fight between *Sher Afgan* and *Qutbuddin* in the course of which both were killed. *Meherunnessa* became the consort of *Jehangir* who conferred on her the title of *Noor Jahan*. The tomb of *Sher Afgan* and *Qutbuddin* lie side by side within the town of *Bardhaman*.

Shah Jahan (Prince Khurram) rebelled against his father Emperor Jehangir in 1622. he was then in Deccan. He left Burhanpur in the Deccan, crossed Tapti river and proceeded to Bengal through Orissa. Then Barddhaman was occupied by the rebel prince who gave it as a fief to *Bairam Beg*. Shah Jahan ascended the throne of Delhi in 1628 and appointed *Qasim Khan Juyini* as the Subedar of Bengal.

Barddhaman Raj (1st. Part)

In 1657, one *Abu Rai*, a merchant and banker of Barddhaman, was appointed the kotwal and chowdhury of Rekabi Bazar and Mughultuli in Barddhaman. He owed this appointment to his ability in supplying the army, passing through Barddhaman with provisions, at short notice. His grand-father *Sangam Rai* a resident of Kotlimahalla of Lahore, settled at Baikunthapur near Barddhaman while on his way back from a pilgrimage to Puri. *Banku Bihari*, son of Sangam Rai, was the father of Abu Rai. Abu Rai's son *Babu Rai* acquired the paragona of Barddhaman and three other estates from Ram Rai, a zaminder of Barddhaman. He was succeeded by his son *Ghanashyam Rai* who caused the large tank known as *Shyam Sagar (Shyamsayar)* to be dug. His son *Krishnaram Rai* obtained a firman from Aurangzeb in AD 1689 by which he was made the zaminder and chowdhury of Barddhaman and some other parganas. He was ordered not to realize any new tax and to encourage cultivation and maintain law and order in the area. The nazarana for the land was Rs. Two lakhs. Krishnaram Rai excavated the tank which is known as *Krishna Sagar (Krishnasayar)*.

Ibrahim Khan became the Subadhar of Bengal in 1689. His weak administration encouraged lawlessness. In 1695, *Shova Singh*, a zaminder of Chetua-Barda in the present Ghatal Subdivision of East Midnapore, in alliance with *Rahim Khan*, an Afgan chief of Orissa, attacked Krishnaram Rai. Rai was defeated and slain in 1696. Krishnaram's son *Jagatram Rai* managed to escape but all the other members of Krishnaram's family were made captive by Shova Singh. A number of ladies of his family committed suicide by taking poison.

Jagatram Rai had gone to Dhaka to seek help of the Subadhar Ibrahim Khan and with the help of fouzdar of Hooghly and Dutch of Chinsura he regained Barddhaman. Krishnaram's daughter *Satyabati* killed Shova Singh with a dagger when he tried to take her by force and then killed herself. Aurangzeb dismissed Ibrahim Khan and appointed his own grandson *Azim-us-shan*. Azim-us-shan built a mosque in Barddhaman which bears his name. Jagatram Rai was treacherously murdered in 1702 and left two sons *Kirti Chandra Rai* and *Mitra Sen Rai*. Mitra Sen Rai was granted a fixed monthly amount from the exchequer. The elder brother, Kirti Chandra Rai, inherited the ancestral zamindari.

Kirti Chandra Rai fought with the Rajas of Chandrakona and Barda and added the parganas of Chitua, Bhursut, Barda and Manoharshahi to his zamindari. But the boldest achievement was his attacking and defeating the powerful Raja of Bishnupur. He founded the town *Kanchannagar* and excavated the tank known as *Yadeswardih*. The tank *Ranisagar (Ranisayar)* was excavated under the order of Kirti Chandra's mother. In 1736, a firman was granted to Kirti Chandra by emperor *Mahammed Shah* of Delhi, conferring on him the zamindari of Chandrakona. He died in 1740 and was succeeded by Chitra Sen.

Marathas' Attack

Maratha army from Nagpur under *Bhaskar Pandit* had entered into Bengal in 1740. At that time, *Alivardi Khan* was the Nawab (Governor) of Bengal-Bihar-Orissa. He set out for Orrissa to subdue *Shuja-ud-din*, deputy governor of Orrissa and on his return journey from Cuttack, he retreated to Barddhaman in April 1742 where the Marathas surrounded him. They cut off his supplies and driven by hunger, he had to attempt a retreat to Murshidabad via Katwa. At Nigum Sarai, fourteen miles from Katwa, a desperate rear-guard action was fought and he managed to reach Katwa. From June 1742 Katwa became the head quarter of the Maratha Army. The west of the Bhagirathi under this district thus temporarily passed into the hands of the Marathas.

The Marathas committed unspeakable atrocities on the helpless population of this district. An eye-witness, *Vaneshwar Vidhyalankar*, the court pandit of the Maharaja of Barddhaman wrote - '*Shahu Rajah's troops are niggard of pity, slayers of pregnant women and infants, of Brahmins and the poor, fierce in spirit, expert in robbing the property of every one and committing every kind of sinful act. ...*'. In 1742, while Bhaskar Pandit was celebrating Durga Puja at Katwa, Nawab Alivardi Khan fell upon him suddenly, after crossing the Ganga at Uddharanpur, a mile north of Katwa and drove him out of Bengal.

On March 1743, *Raghuji Bhonsle*, the Raja of Nagpur accompanied by Bhaskar Pandit, arrived at Katwa to realize the *chauth* or 1/4th of revenue which had been promised by the Mughal Emperor and in the presence of *Peswa Balaji Rao* Alivardi promised to pay the *chauth* of Bengal. But in the next year, in order to get rid of Marathas, Alivardi invited Bhaskar Pandit and his officers and got them assassinated. In December 1745, a battle was fought between Alivardi and Raghuji Bhonsle at Katwa and Raghuji was defeated and returned to Nagpur.

In November 1746, Alivardi came down to Barddhaman and in a severely contested battle, defeated *Janoji Bhonsle*, the son of Raghuji. An end to the Maratha troubles could not be effected before 1751, in which year a treaty of peace was signed between Raghuji and Alivardi. Alivardi agreed to pay 12 lakhs of rupees annually to Raghuji as the *chauth* of Bengal.

Barddhaman Raj (2nd. Part)

Chitra Sen Rai was conferred the title of Raja by the Mughal Emperor by a firman in 1740. He built the famous *Siddheswari Temple* in Kalna. He died childless in 1744 and was succeeded by his cousin's son *Tilakchand*.

Tilak Chand also received a firman from the Mughal Emperor conferring on him the title of Raja and some other estates were added to the zamindari. In 1755 he put an embargo on Company's business within his zamindari but Alivardi Khan had settled the dispute in favour of the Company. But after the *battle of Palashi*, revenue of the Barddhaman

district was mortgaged to Company by Nawab *Mir Jafar*. Finally the district was ceded to the Company by Nawab *Mir Kassim* in September 1760.

During the rule of Tilak Chand ,quite a number of temples were built at Kalna and Dainhat. *Lakshmikumari*, the mother of Tilakchand, erected a *Sri Krishna Temple* at Kalna, *Chhangakumari*, the wife of Chitrasen, erected a *Jagannath Temple* at Kalna, *Brajakishori*, the mother of Kirtichand, erected a *Baikunthanath Siva temple* at Kalna etc. Tilakchand was threatened by the Company to deprive of the zamindari as he was irregular in payment of revenue. Infact the amount of revenue was too huge to pay regularly. After that with the alliance with Birbhum zamindar he fought against British on 29 december, 1760 at a pass of the river *Banka* near Sangot-Gola and was defeated. Raja Tilakchand died at the age of 37 only leaving a minor son, *Tejchand*.

Rani Vishnukumari took over the charge and managed the affairs of the zamindari from 1776 to 1779 and handed over charge to her fourteen years old son Tejchand. Under the *Permanent Settltment* of 1793 Raja Tejchand entered into an agreement to pay a revenue of Rs.4015109 and in addition pulbandi charges of Rs.193721. But with other zamindari estates of West Bengal dismemberment of the Barddhaman estate started soon after the Permanent settlement and in 1797 the Board of Revenue ordered sale of portions of the zamindari for realization of arrears of revenue and thus resulted the near ruin of the most powerful and influential authority of Barddhaman.

In 1864, the Maharaja was appointed as an additional member of the Viceroy's Legislative Council. He was the first Bengali to have the honour.

Freedom Struggle

The British Crown assumed the Government of India by the proclamation of *Queen Victoria* in 1857. The Permanent Settlement with its concomitant huge revenue demands put all the zaminders under pressure and this pressure was gradually but inexorably transmitted down to the *ryots*. The *Barddhaman Sanjivani* in 1878, criticized the government for its failure to protect the *ryots*. *Jatin Banerjee* of Channa in Galsi thana area was the first to preach the adoption of revolutionary methods for attaining Independence. The *Sakti Samiti*, an athletic club, was established in Kalna town and the members of the club had to take a vow to abjure foreign goods, tobacco and liquor. A similar club, *Joydev Sevak Sampradhi* was established in Raniganj in 1908.

The people of Barddhaman reacted sharply to the proclamation of 1905 partitioning of Bengal. A number of meeting were held in the district, 60 boys had to leave school at Asansol, a number of students of Barddhaman Raj college were expelled for crying *Vandemataram*. A national school was opened at Kalna in 1908. The Khilafat movement also spread among the Muslim of the district. A hartal was observed throughout the district on 18 March 1923.

The *Swaraj Party*'s nominees were elected from six out of the ten seats at the Kalna municipality election, while at Katwa the leader of the local non-cooperators was elected chairman of the municipality in 1924. In 1930, when *Gandhiji* was arrested there was

complete hartal at Bardhaman. In September 1931, bombs were thrown into the thana compound at Kalna and in the quater of the SI of police, Memari. *Subhas Chandra Bose* paid a visit to Bardhaman in December 1931 and had addressed a meeting.

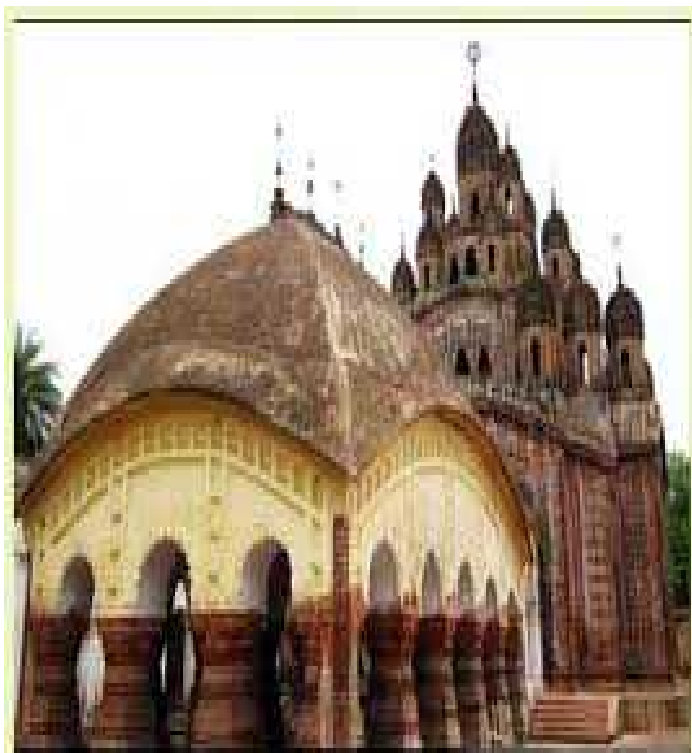
The conditions were such that *Bengal Public Security Act 1932* was promulgated in the Asansol subdivision. *Kazi Nazrul Islam*, the noted Bengali poet was born at Churulia in Raniganj. His poems provided inspiration to the people for attainment of Independence. The people of Burdwan responded to the call of the country during the Quit India Movement of 1942. The post office of Kashiara was burnt as also the railway station of Kalna. Political agitation in different forms continued till the eve of Independence.



108- Shiv Mandir. Burdwan



Curzon Gate. Burdwan



Laljit Temple, Ambika Kalna



Mata SarbaMangala, Burdwan