

## A FRESH ASSESSMENT OF GOPACANDRA IN THE LIGHT OF NUMISMATIC EVIDENCE

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### Abstract

This paper reviews the dynasty of Gopacandra on the basis of his two unpublished gold coins which are preserved in the reserve collection at the Bangladesh National Museum. The authors suggest that the coins' legend 'Gopa' may clearly be attributed to Gopacandra, a post-Gupta king of ancient Vanga sub-region (janapada), whose identity has already been determined by the epigraphic records. The paper concludes with an observation that Gopacandra probably ruled over some parts of Gauda, Rada and Orissa and was the most powerful king among the post-Gupta rulers.

The post-Gupta history of ancient Bengal is shrouded with mystery due to the paucity of historical source materials. Only a number of epigraphic records have hitherto been discovered and published which reveal the name of four post-Gupta kings named Dharmāditya, Gopacandra, Dvādaśāditya and Samāchāradeva. They established an independent kingdom in ancient Vanga sub-region (janapada) after the downfall of the imperial Guptas and Varakamandala (Kotalipada in Gopalganj District) was their capital. But these epigraphic records bear very scanty historical facts about them. Genealogical description of these kings is not attached to these records. So, their dynastic history is still unknown. Even their chronological order has not yet been determined. So, newly discovered source materials give us further impetus to review their history. The present paper is an attempt to review the history of Gopacandra on the basis of his two unpublished gold coins.

First, we would like to draw the attention of scholars about two unpublished gold coins which are now preserved in the reserve collection of the Bangladesh National Museum. One gold coin was collected in 1983 from a local coin dealer of Comilla District but its exact find place is not known. Another gold coin was collected in 1987 from a coin collector of Dhaka named Fazlul Haque who sold

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it to the museum along with other 5 post-Gupta gold coins. This coin was collected from a jewelry shop of Dhaka but its exact find place is also not known. The weights of these coins are around 5.7 gram. The museum accession numbers of these coins are respectively 83.1552 and 87.77. The typological and symbolical characteristics of these gold coins are given below.

**Obverse:** Within a border of large dots a king stands to front with the face turned to left; his left hand holds a bow, while the right hand clasps an arrow; in the right field there is a legend 'Gopa' written in Brāhmī character under the elbow of the king.

**Reverse:** On the reverse there is an image of a standing female deity holding something in her left hand and behind her is what looks like a billowing cloak, but is often interpreted as several arms.



Obverse



Reverse



Obverse



Reverse

The alphabets of the coins are very distinct and clear to identify the name of the king who issued these. The coin's legend 'Gopa' may clearly be attributed to Gopacandra, a Post-Gupta king of ancient Vanga sub-division (janapada), whose identity has already been determined by the epigraphic records. But it is interesting to note that these gold coins are clearly Samatata type. The weights of these coins are around 5.7 gram which are similar and common weight standard to the other gold coins of Samatata. Large dotted border clearly appear in these coins like the other gold coins of Samatata, such as the gold coins of the Ratas, the Khadgas, the Early Devas, Sri Chakra and Viracandra etc. It is more interesting to mention that the goddess of the coin is holding an uncertain thing in her left hand that is very similar to the object in the hand of the deity represented on the normal gold coins of Samatata. The obverses of all the gold coins of Samatata are clearly Gupta prototype depicting a standing king with arrow and bow. But the reverses of the Samatata gold coins are not like that of the Gupta tradition. Joe Cribb<sup>1</sup> and N.G. Rhodes<sup>2</sup> has clearly shown that the deity image of Samatata gold coin is derived from the Nana and Ardokso image of Kushana coins. This characteristic makes the Samatata coins different from the other ancient coins of India. However, the gold coins, which are the subject matter of our discussion, are clearly Samatata designed. Certainly these coins were locally minted from Samatata. However, the numismatic evidence provided by these two coins seems to necessitate a fresh assessment of the history of Gopacandra.

Three copper plates of similar nature were discovered in 1891 and 1892 from Kotālipāḍā in Faridpur District (now in Gopalganj). F.E. Pargiter deciphered and published them in the *Indian Antiquary*.<sup>3</sup> One of these plates revealed a post-Gupta king named Gopacandra, while the other two inscriptions disclosed another post-Gupta king named Dharmaditya. The Faridpur copper plate of Gopacandra was issued by one of his administrative officers (*Viṣayādhiparāṇa*) from Vārakamaṇḍala (present Kotalipada area of Gopalganj district) during the 18th regnal year of the king. In this inscription, he is titled as *Mahārājādhirāja*. He is compared with the traditional kings Yayāti, Ambariṣ and he is also stated

<sup>1</sup> Joe Cribb, *The Indian Coinage Tradition, Origins, Continuity and Change*, IIRNS Publications, A Division of Indian Institute of Research in Numismatic Studies, p. 27

<sup>2</sup> N. G. Majumdar, 'Mallasarūl Copper plate of Vijayasena', *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XXIII (1935-36), pp. 155-61

<sup>3</sup> F. A. Pargiter, 'The Faridpur Copper Plates', *Indian Antiquary*, Vol. XXXIX, 1910, pp. 193-216.

to be without a rival in this earth. These facts apparently suggest that he formed a sovereign kingdom in Vanga sub-region during the post-Gupta period.

When the Faridpur copper plates were published, R. D. Banerjee suggested that these records are forgery. But subsequently the authenticity of the Faridpur copper plate of Gopacandra is proved by the two other epigraphic records and now the scholars are unanimous that these records are very much original. One copper plate was discovered in 1929 from the village Mallasārul situated on the north bank of the Damodar River, within the jurisdiction of Galsi Police Station of the Burdwan district in West Bengal. The plate is published by N.G. Majumdar in 1936 in the *Epigraphia Indica*.<sup>4</sup> The record was issued by Maharaja Vijayasena, a vassal chief of Gopacandra, who acknowledged his supremacy. His overlord is designated here as *Mahārājādhirāja* Gopacandra, certainly the same name mentioned in the Faridpur copper plates. Maharaja Vijayasena, is the donor, whose name appears on the seal and also in lines 8 and 1. He is identified with *Mahāsāmanta* Vijayasena, the Dutaka of the Gunaighar plate of Vainyagupta (A.D. 507).<sup>5</sup> But in the present state of our knowledge, it is difficult to determine that the two Vijayasenas are identical person mentioned in the two separate epigraphic records. However, this record clearly indicates that the extent of Gopacandra's kingdom was not limited only in the Vanga sub-region. Some parts of Gauḍa sub-region were also included within this kingdom.

Another copper plate inscription was discovered in 1960 from the village Jayarampur in Balasore district of Orissa.<sup>6</sup> The record reveals that during the first regnal year of *Mahārājādhirāja* Gopacandra, the area called *Daṇḍabhūkti* was ruled by a *Mahārājā* Acyuta and his title is mentioned as Mahāsāmanta. The land was donated by this plate in favour of *Ārya-bhikṣu-sangha* as well as for supplying materials for the worship of the Buddhist deity Avolokiteśvara. This record also reveals the fact that the father's name of Gopacandra was Dhanacandra and his mother's name was Giridevi. This record for the first time

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4 N. G. Majumdar, 'Mallasarul Copper plate of Vijayasena', *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XXIII, 1935-36, pp. 155-61

5 D. C. Bhattacharyya, 'A Newly Discovered Copper plate from Tippera', *Indian Historical Quarterly*, Vol. VI, 1930, pp. 45-60.

6 S. N. Rajaguru, 'Jayarampur Copper plate Inscription of the Time of Gopacandra, Regnal Year I, *Orissa Historical Journal*, Vol. XI, No. 4, pp. 206-209.) P. R. Srinivasan, 'Jayarāmpur Copper plate of Gopacandra', *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XXXIX, pp. 142-148.

bears his father's name and it has clearly appeared from the record that his father was not a king and Gopacandra had no royal origin. Mahāsāmanta Acyuta was a great feudal lord who acknowledged his supremacy. It also indicates that some portion of Orissa and Rāḍa was included within his kingdom and he was an overlord of many feudal kings like the great feudal king Mahārājā Acyuta.

Gopacandra assumed the sovereign title *Mahārājādhirāja*, which is known from three separate epigraphic records discovered in the different parts of ancient Bengal. It is probable that at the beginning of his career, he was a feudal king under the Gupta emperor but he formed an independent kingdom after the downfall of the Imperial Guptas. But these epigraphic records do not bear any genealogy or any political activity of the king. So, it is very difficult to determine his chronological order as well as his relationship with other post-Gupta kings. All these records would show that Gopacandra had an extensive kingdom under his rule, which included the south-east and west part of Bengal up to a part of northern Balasore in Orissa. The reference Dinara in the Faridpur copper plate apparently suggests that gold coin was introduced in the kingdom. On the basis of our new findings, it appears that certainly he issued gold coin. The Faridpur copper plate suggests that the center of his administration was at Vārakamaṇḍala near Kotalipāḍā and he was mainly a ruler of Vanga but he extended his kingdom towards Gauda, Rada and Orissa. It is likely that North Bengal was included within his kingdom. On the basis of our new findings, it appears that Samatata probably had been included within the kingdom of Gopacandra from where he issued gold coins. Or these gold coins might have been issued by the local merchant class of Samatata for their business interest imitating the original gold coin of Gopacandra as Devaparvata, the capital of Samatata, was a flourishing international trade center during the 6th century onward. However, these gold coins are very significant as no coin of Gopacandra excepting these two has yet come to light. So far we know, no gold coin of this king has yet been published. His gold coin was known as Dinara mentioned in the Faridpur copper plate. These gold coins also bear the evidence of his sovereign position. However, these gold coins need to be incorporated as a source of writing the history of ancient Bengal during the post-Gupta period.

The Faridpur copper plates disclose the names of two post-Gupta kings- Dharmaditya and Gopacandra. The Ghugrahati copper plate reveals another

Post-Gupta king named Samacharadeva.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, the Ramashil copper plate has recently disclosed another forgotten post-Gupta king named Dvādaśāditya.<sup>8</sup> Some gold coins found from Kotalipādā, Mahasthan and Sabhar bear the legend Sudhanya or Sudhanyaditya, who is supposed to be another post-Gupta king<sup>9</sup> probably of the same line. Now we have five post-Gupta kings: Dharmāditya, Gopacandra, Dvādaśāditya, Samāchāradeva and Sudhanyāditya. But their epigraphic records do not bear any genealogy or throw light on their political activity. So, it is very difficult to determine their chronological order or their relationship with each other. As a result, the chronological order of Gopacandra or his political history is a matter of uncertainty among the scholars.

On the basis of palaeographic analysis, Pargiter suggests that Dharmāditya was the first king, and Gopacandra succeeded him with none intervening, unless it was for a very short interval.<sup>10</sup> He refers to two types of 'ya' (bipartite and tripartite), and indicates that the earlier form of 'ya' (tripartite) has been detected in the plates of Dharmāditya, while the later form of 'ya' (bipartite) has been incised in the plate of Gopacandra. Secondly, the surveyor of land has been referred to in the plate of Dharmāditya as Śivacandra, while he has been referred to in the copper plate of Gopacandra with an additional epithet as 'Pratita-dharmaśila-Śivacandra'. These two reasons might have prompted Pargiter to make the suggestion that Dharmāditya was the predecessor of Gopacandra. But R.C. Majumdar put forward an opposite view. He comments that palaeography cannot settle chronology of kings who ruled for a short period of time. He has argued that the earliest form of 'ya' has also been used in the Mallasarul copper plate. He added that rather later form of 'śa' has been found in the copper plate of Dharmāditya. He notes that the identity of Vijayasena both in the Gunāighar and the Mallasarul plate can give priority to Gopacandra over Dharmāditya. On the basis of the Jayārāmpur copper plate, he has suggested, "For, if we accept the statement that the father of Gopacandra had no royal title and he was raised to the supremacy by the people, there can be hardly

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7 N. K. Bhattasali, 'Ghugrahāti Copper plate of Samāchāradeva', *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XVIII, pp. 77-86; *Dacca Review*, Vol. 10, No. 2 & 3, (1920), p. 55; R. D. Banerji, *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. VII, pp. 289-308; F. E. Pargiter, *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. VII, pp. 475-502.

8 Shariful Islam, 'Kotalipādā Copper plate of Dvādaśāditya', *Journal of the Asiatic Society*, Vol. LIII, No. 4, 2011, pp. 71-82.

9 Firoz Mahmud, 'Fresh Assessment of the Post-Gupta Gold Coins', *Jadughar Samachara*, News Letter of the Bangladesh National Museum, December 1906, p. 3.

10 R. C. Majumdar, *History of Bengal*, Vol. I, University of Dacca, 1943, p. 53.

any doubt that Gopacandra was the founder of this royal family and Dharmāditya came to the throne after him”<sup>11</sup>

S. C. Mukherji,<sup>12</sup> who has recently added an important work on this subject, supports Pargiter on paleographic ground. He follows Pargiter and goes into details of the paleographic explanation of the different forms of the test letter ‘ya’. Both Pargiter and S. C. Mukherji have pointed out the variations of alphabets and shown the later development of the test letter ‘ya’. But the scholars believe that there was not much gap between the dates of issue of the two Faridpur copper plates of Dharmāditya and the plate of Gopacandra. On the other hand, all these post-Gupta copper plates were written in the eastern variety of the Gupta script. These types of scripts were used in the 4th, 5th and in the early part of the 6th century A.D. and now it is actually very difficult to detect their variations. Hence, this paleographic analysis should not be taken as a sure ground unless it is not supported by other facts. R.C. Majumdar has propounded the case of Vijayasena, a feudal king mentioned in the Gunāighar plate, to settle the comparative chronology. At the same time, the Mallasarul copper plate, which was issued during the 3rd regnal year of Gopacandra, bears the name of another Vijayasena, and whose title is also Mahārājā (great king). R.C. Majumdar thinks that these two Vijayasenas are one and the same person. On the basis of this information, he comes to the conclusion that Gopacandra came to power after Vainyagupta and hence, Gopacandra was the first king of this line.

Dharmaditya, Dvadasaditya and Sudhanyaditya may be of the same line of kings as their names end in ‘āditya’. It is probable that they came to power one after another. But it is difficult to say who the first king of this line was. Gopacandra may be considered as first king of this line. On the other hand, scholars are unanimous that Samacharadeva was the last of the five post-Gupta kings. But in the present state of our knowledge, it is very difficult to determine the exact chronological order of these post-Gupta kings who seem to have ruled in Vanga and Samatata. Gopacandra also probably ruled over some parts of

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11 R. C. Majumdar, ‘A Note on King Gopacandra of Bengal’, *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. XIII, No. 1-4, 1971, pp. 189-91.

12 S. C. Mukherji, ‘Some Glimpses of Independent States in Bengal in the Gupta Period and After’, *Journal of Bengal Art*, Vol. 8, 2003, pp. 83-94.

Gauda, Rada and Orissa and was the most powerful king among the rulers whose history we have tired to trace in the text of this paper.