

THE
DISTRICT OF BAKARGANJ

ITS HISTORY AND STATISTICS

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BY

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Decca (Dacca), where they were impressed, and made to serve under Mir Jamla in the war against Assam. Eventually they got their release and made their way to Hijli, but Glanius did not return to Europe for several years. Unfortunately, he does not clearly mention the site of his shipwreck, but it was apparently somewhere on the sea-coast of the Sundarbans. The people whom he met, or at least some of them, were Mahomedans, for they used the expression *salam*.¹

I do not wish, however, to lay too much stress on Glanius's description, for his shipwreck took place in 1661, and it may be that "the depopulation by Mugs" noted in Rennel's map occurred at an earlier date. Indeed, we know from Du Jarric that the King of Arracan conquered Bákla in the beginning of the seventeenth century, and it may be that the desolation of the country dates from this time.

I may also notice here that the copperplate inscription found at Idilpúr in Bákarganj, and described by Babu Pratáp Chandra Ghose in the Asiatic Society's Journal (1838), seems to indicate that the inhabitants of that part of the country belonged to a degraded tribe called the Chandabhandas,² a fact which is not favourable to the supposition of the Sundarbans having been at an early period inhabited by a high-caste population.

By far the most interesting account of the Sundarbans is contained in the letters of the Jesuit priests who visited Bákarganj and Jessore in 1599 and 1600. They were addressed to Nicholas Pimenta, a visitor of the order stationed at Goa, and were forwarded by him,

¹ In Professor Blochmann's "Contributions to the Geography, &c., of Bengal," p. 18, reference is made to Van den Broucke's map in Valentyn's work, as showing the place where the "Ter Schelling" was wrecked.

² Babu P. C. Ghose compares the Chandabhandas to the Molunghies.

along with some remarks of his own, to Claude Aquaviva, who was then general of the order. The letters seem to have been originally written in Italian, and were first published at Venice in 1602 or 1603, and were afterwards translated into Latin and French. I was indebted for my introduction to them to my friend Dr Wise, who told me that they were quoted in "Purchas's Pilgrimage." Extracts from the letters and the subsequent history of the mission will be found in Pierre du Jarric's "Histoire des Choses plus memorables advenues aux Indes Orientales," &c., Bordenaux, 1608-14.

It appears from Pimenta's account that he sent the priests Fernandez and Sosa to Bengal in 1598, and two others—namely, Melchior da Fonseca and Andrew Bowes—in the following year. Fernandez and Sosa sailed from Cochin on 3d May 1598, and arrived in eighteen days at the Little Port (Porto Pequino). From thence they sailed up the river to Gullo or Goli, where they arrived in eight days after leaving Porto Pequino. From here they seem to have gone on to Chittagong. While at Gullo they received an invitation from the King of a place called Chandecan (in Italian, Ciandecan) to pay him a visit. They did not go then, but as Fernandez afterwards heard that the King was angry at their not coming to him, he sent Sosa to Chandecan sometime in 1599, and he met with a very favourable reception. Afterwards Fernandez himself went to Chandecan in October 1599, and got letters-patent from the King authorising him to carry on the mission. In December 1599 Fernandez was at Sripúr, and on the 22d of that month he wrote a letter to Pimenta giving an account of the mission; and on 20th January 1600 Fonseca wrote a similar letter from Chandecan. Fonseca's letter is most interesting, and has been quoted at p. 31.

For my present purpose it is only necessary that I quote the following passage: "The King [of Bákla], after compliments, asked me where I was bound for, and I replied, 'I am going to the King of Chandecan, who is to be your Highness's father-in-law.'" These words are extremely important, because they help us to identify both the King of Bákla and the King of Chandecan. Chandecan, as I hereafter will show, is identical with Dhumghát or Jessore, and the boy-king of Bákla (Fonseca says he was only eight years old) can be no other than Ram Chandra Rai, who, we know, married a daughter of the famous Pratápáditya. Before, however, going into this matter, I wish to draw attention to Fonseca's description of the journey from Bákla to Chandecan (see p. 31). Now, though the good father evidently had an eye for natural scenery, and was delighted with the woods and rivers, it is evident that what he admired so much must have appeared to many to be "horrid jungle," and indeed was very like what the Sundarbans now are. In fact, Fonseca's description of the route from Bákla to Chandecan might almost be used at the present day to describe the route from Barisál to Kaliganj, near which Pratápáditya's capital was situated. The chief difference is that the progress of civilisation has driven away the herds of deer and the monkeys from the ordinary routes, though they are still to be found in the woods, and the herds of deer have given their name to one of the largest rivers in the Sundarbans (Haringhátá). The faithfulness of Fonseca's description seems indicated by his modestly admitting that he had never seen a rhinoceros, while stating (quite truly) that there were such animals in the woods. Had Fonseca come upon any town on his journey, it is reasonable to suppose that he would have mentioned

it; and my point is, that his description shows that the Sundarbans were in much the same condition in 1599 as they are in now.

I may add that the missionaries speak of dacoits as infesting the rivers, which certainly was a marked feature of the Sundarbans up to the last fifty or sixty years. Fonseca arrived at Chandecan on the 20th November 1599, and there he found Fernandez' companion, Dominic de Sosa. The King received Fonseca with great kindness, so much so that he says a Christian prince could not have behaved better to him. A church was built at Chandecan, and was formally opened on 1st January 1600. It was the first church in Bengal, and was on this account dedicated to Jesus Christ. Chittagong was the second, and Bandel the third. The last was built about this time by a Portuguese named Villalobos.

In reply to the questions, Where was Chandecan, and who was its King? I answer, that as I believe Chandecan to have been identical with Dhumghát, or at least in the same neighbourhood, it must have lain in the Twenty-four Parganas, and near the modern bazar of Kaliganj, and that its king was no other than Pratápáditya.

My reasons for this view are, firstly, that Chandecan¹ or Ciandecan is evidently the same as Chand Khan, which, as we know from the life of Rajah Pratápáditya, by Ram Ram Bosu (modernised by Haris Chandra Tarkalankar), was the name of the former proprietor of the estate in the Sundarbans which Pratápáditya's father

¹ Chandecan does not appear to be marked on any of the old maps, and as far as I am aware Bernouilli is the only other person besides the priests who refers to it. In the article on the Feringhies of Chittagong, in "Calcutta Review," Bernouilli is quoted as speaking of *Kandecan*, an old name for the province of Satigan, which included Hughli, &c.