

THE SENA DYNASTY: FROM BENGAL TO NEPAL

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Abstract

The Sena dynasty ruled in Bengal up to 1205 AD. They were the patron of Hinduism. After the downfall of their rule in Bengal, their descendants proceeded towards westward. The neighboring area Mithila was also influenced by the Senas. So, a branch of the family proceeded towards this and established their settlement in the land of present day Nepal in about middle of the thirteenth century. The Senas appeared first in this land at Rupanagar, which is at present in Saptari district of Sagarmatha zone and afterwards they established Makawanpur kingdom, which is now a district of Narayani zone. From Makawanpur, they proceeded towards Palpa, Rajapur, Tanahu, Pyuthan, Risinga, Vinayakapur, Gulmi etc. The rule of the Senas ended in eighteenth century because of the new rising power of Gorkhalis.

Key words

Bengal; Mithila; Rupanagar; Makawanpur; Hindupati

Introduction

The very meaning of the term Sena is described in many dictionaries as having a lord, possessing a master or leader (Apte, 1963). In Sanskrit language this term is 'Shyena' and in Prakrit language 'Sena'. These both mean Hawk, a bird of prey which is called in Hindi language 'Baja'. One author writes about the origin of the term that this is derived from the word 'Shrenika'. The Shrenikas were nobles of the Cholas of South India (Koirala, 1968). There are many rulers of several states at different periods, found having the title of Sena. Towards fourth and fifth centuries, the

Vakataka dynasty of Madhya Pradesh (India) has an important place in the political and cultural life of India. The founder of this dynasty was Vindhya Shakti. After him, his son Pravarasena ascended the throne, who was the only king of this dynasty to hold the title of emperor (Nilakantha Shastri, 1972). In the line of Pravarasena, further names are Sarvasena, Rudrasena, Prithvisena, Divakarasena, Damodarasena, Narendrasena, Devasena, Harisena etc. Likewise towards Ceylon, there are found some names as Mahasena, Mitrasena, Dhatusena, Kirtisena etc (Majumdar, 1970).

The Shaka was an important tribe of Middle-Asia whose one branch used to live in Sistan, East Iran. From this place the Shaka arrived in southern Saurashtra, Gujarat and Ujjain through the Indus river valley. These Shakas were eminent in the area named Eran of Sagar district in Madhya Pradesh, India. The moulds of the coin of the Shaka rulers are found in ample number from an excavation in Eran. They discover the names of four rulers in which two are with Sena title (Dvivedi, 1984). An inscription from Aphasad, also called Jafarpur of Gaya district in Bihar, India mentions the name Adityasena of Gupta dynasty whose period was seventh century AD (Sircar, 1983). Other inscriptions of Adityasena are found from Mandargiri (Bhagalpur district, Bihar) and Deva Varnaka, Shahabad District (Upadhyaya, 1974). These inscriptions discover his conquests upon Magadha, Tirhuta (Vaishali, Mithila) and even upto Himalaya and crown him the epithet of 'Paramabhattacharaka Maharajadhiraj' (Thakur, 1955). An inscription of Anshuvarma from Deupatan in Kathmandu Valley, Nepal mentions Rajaputra Shurasena. Here Shurasena seems a relative of Vikramasena, whose status was 'Sarvadandanayaka' (Vajracharya, 2030 BS).

Towards the ninth to eleventh centuries, there were Jain teachers in Dharwar district of Mysore state. They belonged to the Sena family (Ganguli, 1966). It cannot be ascertained whether the Senas of Dharwar had any connection with those of Bengal. A family of kings with names ending in Sena is known to have ruled over the kingdom named Pithi. An inscription found at Janibigha, about six miles eastward from Bodh-Gaya, records the grant of village to the 'Vajrashana' i.e. Mahabodhi Temple by King Acharya Jayasena, son of Buddhasena. Buddhasena must be identified with Acharya Buddhasena, Lord of Pithi, who is mentioned in an inscription found at Bodh-Gaya. The date of the Janibigha inscription is in the year 83 of 'Lakshmanasenasatitarajye' e.g. from the end of Lakshmanasena's rule. This well-known era 'Lakshmana Samvat'

started in 119 AD was founded by king Lakshmanasena, to which Buddhasena and Jaysena belonged (Majumdar, 1943).

The Sena family, which ruled in Bengal after the Palas, originally belonged to Karnata in South India. According to the Deopada Stone Inscription of Vijayasena (c.1096-1159 AD) these are called 'Brahma-Kshatriya' (Sircar, 1983). The place Deopada is situated in Rajshahi district, Bangladesh. The term Brahma-Kshatriya, as one author describes, means Brahmana and Kshatriya. In ancient times the line of demarcation between the Brahmanas and the Kshatriyas, that is to say, between the learned and the warrior groups of castes, was not sharply defined. It was often crossed, sometimes by change of occupation and the other times by intermarriage. Ordinarily the position of leading Brahmana at court was that of minister, but sometimes the Brahmanas preferred to rule directly, and they seized the throne. Thus in early times, the Shunga and Kanva royal families were Brahmanas. Thus during the transitional stage, while a Brahmana family was passing into the Kshatriya group of castes, it was often known by the composite designation of Brahma-Kshatriya (Smith, 1981).

The Senas of Bengal

It has been suggested that in the confusion following the north-eastern expedition of Chalukya Vikramaditya of Dakshinaty Kalyani, the Senas came from the Deccan and settled in Bengal (Tripathi, 1942). But it is known from the records of the Palas that the kings of this dynasty, from Devapala downwards, appointed many foreigners as officers, among them were also the Karnatas. It may be that a remote predecessor of the Senas of Bengal accepted service under the Palas, and then his successors gradually rose to power and settled in Bengal (Ganguli, 1966). According to the Deopada Stone Inscription of Vijayasena, the Senas claim to belong to the lunar race. In this Sena family Samantasena, the head garland of the Brahma-Kshatriya

community, was born who slaughtered the wicked robbers of the wealth of Karnatas (Ray, 1973). By the endeavours of Samantasena, his son Hemantasena became able to enjoy the real royal authority (Pathak, 1990).

Hemantasena seemed to have consolidated his position in Rarha during the troublous times that followed the occupation of that country by the Kalachuri Karna. The epithet the skillful protector of kings given to Hemantasena in records of his son may have some reference to his giving shelters to Shurapala and Ramapala after their escape from the prison of Varendri. He was succeeded by his son Vijayasena in c.1095 AD (Ganguli, 1966).

Vijayasena (c.1095-1159AD) was the greatest king of the Sena dynasty in Bengal. It seems that when the disintegration of the Pala kingdom began after the death of Ramapala, Vijayasena made a bid for the conquest of the whole of Bengal. He strengthened his position by making an alliance with Anantavarmana Chodaganga, king of Kalinga, who extended the boundary of his kingdom upto the Hooghly district. He led a naval expedition in the west along the course of the Ganga, probably against Govindachandra of the Gahadavala dynasty of Kannauja. Most likely, it was this occasion that he invaded Mithila and inflicted defeat on its king Nanyadeva.

Vallalasesa (c.1159-1179 AD) ascended the throne after his father Vijayasena. The Madhainagar (Pabna district, Bangladesh) Copper-plate Inscription of Lakshmanasena reveals that Vallalasesa married with the Chalukya princess Ramadevi which is certainly a mark of his political honour (Sircar, 1983). In the book *Vallalacharita* by Anandabhatta, Vanga, Varendra, Rarha, Bagadi and Mithila are counted within his territory. It is said that Lakshmanasena worked for a long time in Mithila as Kumaramatya in the reign of his father. This is the cause that the Lakshmana Samvat era was prevailing in Mithila more than that in Bengal. Vallalasesa showed more interest towards the cultural matters than the

political activities. Traditionally his name is famous in the social history of Bengal as he introduced Kulinism and re-organized the caste system in Bengal (Tripathi, 1942).

Lakshmanasena (c.1179-1205AD) was enthroned in his father Vallalasesa's lifetime. But the scholars differ on the question of his reigning year (Ray, 1973). If the Muslim evidence is accepted, it will be acceptable that Lakshmanasena ascended the throne at his age of about sixty. It is obvious that he accepted Vaishnava religion in spite of Shaiva which his father and grandfather had accepted. His inscriptions begin with 'Om Namonarayana' while his predecessors' 'Om Namah Shivaya' (Sircar, 1983). Shridhara Das was a minister of Lakshmanasena and had the title Mahamandalika. He was a Kayastha of Balaina Mula and established a temple with the image of Lakshminarayana at the village Anharatharhi in Madhubani district, Bihar. In the south and eastward from this village, there are four villages like Jarisen, Sainikadih, Saini and Laksena, which is evident of the Sena rule over the area (Jha, 1981). Lakshmanasena, possessing several specialities, lastly failed to control over his whole empire ultimately. Actually, the most prominent problem of the age was the terror of Muslim invasion.

The successors of Lakshmanasena

With the attack on Nadia in 1202 AD by Muhammad ibn Bakhtyar Khilji, the rule of the Senas did not last in Bengal. After this, at least three or four years, Lakshmanasena himself ruled from Lakhanauti. After his death in 1205 AD, his two sons Vishvarupasena and Keshavasena ruled in southern and eastern Bengal about 20-25 years from where at least three inscriptions are found. The Madanpada Copper-plate Inscription of Suryasena (c.1210-1215 AD) and Vishvarupasena (c.1206-1222 AD), which is found from Madanpada (Faridpur district, Bangladesh) is a record of grant to Vishvarupadevasharmana. In this inscription, all the royal titles like Ashvapati, Gajapati, Narapati, the sun of the Sena family,

the lamp of the Soma lineage, Parameshvara Paramabhattacharaka Maharajadhiraja etc. are given to them (Sircar, 1983). According to the Muslim source the descendants of Lakshmanasena ruled over the land up to 1260 AD (Pathak, 1990).

Traditions have preserved the names of various kings who succeeded Lakshmanasena, but they possess very little historical value. This will be evident from the genealogy of the Sena kings preserved in *Rajavali*, one of the best texts of this kind (Majumdar, 1939). The names of the kings after Lakshmanasena as suzerains of Delhi are Keshavasena, Madhavasena, Shurasena, Bhimasena, Kartikasena, Harisena, Shatrughnasena, Narayanasena, Lakshmanasena II, Damodarasena, Sadasena, Jayasena etc. (Majumdar, 1943).

The Expansion of the Senas

The Senas of Bengal expanded their territories at different times and in different ways towards the regions of Kamarupa, Gaya, Magadha, Mithila, Prayaga, Kashi etc. These regions are now within the areas of Assam, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh in India and in Nepal. On the basis of the facts obtained from Bengal and western Himalaya, it is established that Suryasena, a son of Vishvarupasena and grandson of Lakshmanasena, went towards Prayaga or Allahabad. From there, his descendants proceeded towards western Himalaya and established the kingdoms in i) Suket, a sub-division in the Mandi district of Himachal Pradesh, at present it is called Sundarnagar; ii) Mandi, at present a district of Himachal Pradesh; iii) Keonthal, at present Junga sub-division of the Simla district of Himachal Pradesh and iv) Kishtwar or Kashtwar, at present a sub-division in the Doda district of Jammu division of Jammu and Kashmir. At the time of the Independence of India in 1947 AD, the name of the king of Suket was Lakshmanasena whose son Lalit Sena was elected as the Member of Lok Sabha of India. During the time of the Prime Ministership of Lal Bahadur Shastri, Lalit Sena was the

Political Secretary to the Prime Minister. Thus the descendants of the Senas of Bengal had long rule in the areas of western Himalaya. It is believed that Suryasena proceeded towards Prayaga in about 1220 AD and the rule of the Sena dynasty remained in those regions till the Independence of India (Mukhopadhyay, 1994).

The Senas in Nepal area

After the downfall of the Sena dynasty in Bengal, the descendants of the dynasty proceeded towards different provinces on which they and their ancestors had some influences. According to the Deopada Stone Inscription of Vijayasena, he defeated the kings of Gauda, Kamarupa and Kalinga and threatened Nanyadeva, the Karnata king of North Bihar i.e. Mithila (Sircar, 1983). Likewise, according to the *Vallalacharita*, the dominion of Vallalasena included Vanga, Varendra, Rarha, Bagdi and Mithila and so Mithila was one of the five provinces of Vallala-kingdom. Vallalasena was adorned with the title of Nihshankhasankara. Pargana Nishankhapur Kurha in Madhipura sub-division, Bihar is still reminiscent of that and it was the Sena administrative centre (Choudhary, 1958).

The descendant of Lakshmanasena, who proceeded towards Allahabad, was Suryasena. After his death, his son Rupasena marched towards the north-west and reached the area on the bank of Satadru River in Siwalik area of the foot-hills of Western Himalaya. The place was present-day Ropar which is at present a district head-quarter of Punjab near Chandigarh. He defeated there some Muslim Sardars and constructed a fort. He made his capital there and named the place Rupanagar after his own name. But he faced many battles with Muslims and at last he was killed. After his death, his three sons went towards westwards in Himalayan area and established their own dominions defeating the local chiefs. The first son of Rupasena was Virasena who established the kingdom of Suket in the valley of Satadru River, the second Girisena

captured Keonthal of Simla district and the third Hamirasena founded the kingdom of Kishtwar in the valley of Chandrabhaga River of Jammu region. After some generations, a branch of Suket ruler established a new kingdom in Mandi (Mukhopadhyay, 1994).

Though the historians differ in their opinion that the Senas ruled over Mithila, nevertheless, they showed the possibilities that some minor lines of Senas had something to do particularly with the province of Mithila (Mishra, 1979). The Sanokhar inscription of Vallalasena of 1166 AD establishes the fact that he extended his authority upto Sanokhar region of Bhagalpur on the south of the Ganga. Sanokhar might have been the eastern boundary of the Sena power in Bihar. Possibly the Senas controlled a little portion of the area known as Morang, that is, north-eastern Purnea extending upto the borders of Jalapaiguri in Bengal (Sinha, 1979). In other evidence, the Bengal province of Mithila, included the whole of the country, called Morang. Birbandh is said to be the dividing line between the Karnatas of Mithila and the Senas of Bengal (Choudhary, 1958). Morang is at present the name of a district in Koshi Zone of Nepal. This is situated on the east side of the River Koshi. In the west side of Koshi, there is Saptari district of Sagaramatha Zone of Nepal.

There are so many ruins found in the Terai region of Nepal. The Terai region is the northern side of the land on which so many dynasties in different times in history ruled. It can be supposed that an ancient route was passed through or near these regions of Terai from east to west. This is historically asserted that an attack on Simaraungarh, the capital of Karnata king Harisinghadeva, was made by Gyasuddin Tughalaque when he was returning from Bengal. There is a ruin in Morang, north-east side from Biratnagar, Nepal. It is called the fort of King Dhanapala or Dharmapala. It can be said that this is the fort of the Pala kings of Bengal who were before the Senas (Koirala, 1968). Likewise, another evidence of Hindu settlement in the

region of Janakpurdham, Nepal is the mound in the village Duhabi. A partial excavation of this mound by villagers in the late 1960's yielded a circular brick foundation, several vehicles of Tantrika symbols, an inscription 'MA' and a statue of god Ganesha. Their style suggests the possible cultural influence of the Sena dynasty which ruled over Bengal, Bihar and Orissa from the eleventh century. The 'MA' inscription which was found in the mound means mother, a common epithet of the goddess Durga (Burghart, 1978).

The Sena rulers of Suket and Mandi which are now in Himachal Pradesh, India claim that they are the descendants of the Sena dynasty of Bengal. After the death of king Mantarasena of early thirteenth century, there were two claimants of the 'Gaddi' (Randhawa, 1974). By this, we know that in the early thirteenth century, the seat of the Sena kings was called 'Gaddi'. There is a temple of Gadi-Ganesha in Vijayapur in Sunsari district, Nepal which is said to be the place of the enthronement of the Sena kings of Vijayapur. A stone which is worshipped as the god Ganesha is still there. Chatara is a place situated on the bank of Koshi River in Sunsari district, Nepal which is called also Chatara-Gaddi. These days, a monastery and Gaddi of Auliya Baba are present there. But that very monastery and the seat of Auliya Baba were granted by the Sena rulers of Makawanpur. On the other hand, the Chatara of present-day is not the ancient one. It is transferred from its previous place, which was south-westward across Koshi River. There is a hearsay that first of all the Sena rulers founded their seats at this place and by their seat or Gaddi, the name of this place became Chatara-Gaddi. This has much possibility because the ancient Chatara and the place named Rupanagar are situated together (Koirala, 1968). There is another hearsay that an issueless king of Sena dynasty came to the place where a saint used to live. The king met the saint and after some discussions, the saint blessed him with the blessings of four sons, among which the king had to present his first son to the saint. The king acted accordingly

and rest three sons became the rulers of the areas. In this way, it is said that Chatara Gaddi was a big monastery conducted by a ruler of Sena dynasty (Sharma, 1968).

The Sena kings in Nepal area used the word 'Rupanarayanetyadi' in their eulogy or Prashasti. It is not obvious whether the word Rupanarayana was the name of any ancestor of the dynasty or the name of their original place or the word was merely their adjective (Koirala, 1968). A king named Rupasena is mentioned in the line of successors of the Senas of Bengal who proceeded towards western Himalayan region after 1220 AD. (Mukhopadhyaya, 1994). On the other hand, a river named Rupanarayana is between Midnapore and Howrah districts of West Bengal, India (The Britannica Atlas, 1979). In ancient times, this river was located in Tamralipti district, which is known as Tamluk these days and is in Midnapore district, thirty-three miles south-west from Kolkata, on the bank of river Rupanaryana (Hindi Vishvakosha, 1965). This place was the main and important place of the Senas of Bengal. Regarding the eulogy, it is also said that this is related with the place Rupanagar (Saptari district, Nepal). This place was the earliest capital-seat of the Senas of Nepalese region. The above mentioned Chatara-Gaddi was situated near this place previously, no doubt (Koirala, 1968).

Rupanagara is situated in Saptari district (Nepal) on the East-West-Highway. The bricks of extra-ordinary size and terracotta are seen in this area. Besides these, the images of Narayana, Vishnu, Uma-Maheshvara and Nrityaganেশa are found which are considered to be of the thirteenth century. (Amatya, 2046 BS). On the other hand, ruins of the royal palace or Shisha Mahala, the stable or Ghoradaura, the pond, the court or Kachahari etc. are also found. So, it is quite obvious that the Senas first settled in this area. (Pokharel, 2041 BS). Other remains of the palaces and temples are found scattered in many places in Saptari district like Rajbiraj, Shambhunath,

Manaraja, Garhiya etc. (Das and Yadav, 2041 BS). There are many ruins also in the nearest hills. These ruins-like matters are worshipped somewhere as 'Devi' and somewhere as 'Mahadeva' (Amatya, 1978-79). Form some other sources also it is indicated that the Senas settled first in the Saptari area of Nepal and afterward established their independent principalities (Choudhary, 1970).

Conclusion

In fact, according to different circumstantial evidences, it can be said that a king named Mukundasena, who was a descendant of the Senas of Bengal, settled in the area of Rupanagar at present in Saptari district, Nepal in the first half of the thirteenth century and expanding his rule towards the area of Magaras, established the seat of Makawanpur (Amatya, 1971). The kingdom of Makawanpur was expanded towards Palpa and afterward its expansion went towards the regions of Rajapur, Tanahun, Lama, Pyuthan, Madariya, Darchha, Risinga, Vinayakapur, Gulmi etc. This is evident by the fact that the term 'Rupanarayanetyadi' is used in the eulogies of all the kings of the Sena dynasty of the above mentioned regions (Rajvanshi, 2020 BS), while the rulers of Gulmi, Argha, Isma etc. called themselves of the lineage of 'Kala Makawani' (DoI, 2031 BS). The king of Makawanpur, Hariharasena (1631-1672 AD) adorned the title 'Hindupati' having been victorious up to the areas of Gondavara. This area was under the rule of Mughal Nawabs and it seems obvious that Hariharasena defeated the Muslim army of Nawab and took this title (Ghimire, 2045 BS). In this way, the kingdom of Makawanpur was established as a vast kingdom of the Senas in the areas of twenty-two districts of the present-day Nepal. The territory was expanded towards Palpa in the period of Rudrasena in about the last decade of fifteenth century (Das, 2068 BS). Afterward, the kingdom was divided more than once, by which several Sena rulers started their own independent rules. Finally, in eighteenth century, the rules of the Senas were ended by the new rising power Gorkhalis in Nepal.

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