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### **Tribeni: A historical town of Bengal**

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#### **Abstract:**

The term “Yuktaveni” (connected) and “Muktaveni” (disentangled) both are related to Tribeni or Tribeni sangam. But both concepts are not same about Tribeni. Yuktaveni generally refers to confluence of three rivers Ganga, Yamuna, and the illusive Saraswati near Allahabad. But the hooghly district of West Bengal also houses another Tribeni where the Bhagirathi or hooghly river disintegrates into three branches. Three branches are Hooghly, saraswati and Yamuna. Both places are famous for pilgrimage. Tribeni of west bengal had a historical past. This historical town was an old holy place for all types of religious people, the sanctity of which has been recognised for many centuries. Name of this place mentioned in many literary sources like Pavanduta, Mansamangal and Chandimangal etc. Tribeni was a hinterland of Saptogram port. Before the advent of Muslim in Bengal, Tribeni was ruled by the rulers of Orissa, Palas and Senas of Bengal. Many feudatory kings-built temples and bathing ghat in this place. The muslim took it over during the early phases of Bengal in thirteenth century. Zafar Khan Gazi’s mosque was a famous architectal achievement in that time. Which is not only the oldest mosque in Bengal but also the oldest Islamic architecture in undivided Bengal. Jagannath Tarka Panchanan was a legendary sanskrit scholar of tribeni. He had immense knowledge of all branches of Dharmasastras and ancient Hindu laws.

**Keywords: Tribeni Sangam, Pilgrimage, Historical town, Hinterland of Saptogram port, Zafar Khan Gazi’s Mosque, Jagannath Tarka Panchanan.**

**Introduction:** Tribeni is one of the most important ancient towns of pre-colonial undivided Bengal. It is currently located in Hooghly district of West Bengal, India. The popularity of this town as a pilgrimage center is very old. Tribeni or Tribeni Sangam is associated with two words “yuktaveni” and “muktaveni”. By “Yuktaveni” we refer to the confluence of three rivers like Ganga-Yamuna and invisible Saraswati which meet near Allahabad and “Muktaveni” refers to the free flow of three rivers in West Bengal’s Hooghly district namely Bhagirathi or Hooghly, invisible Saraswati and Yamuna. Naturally, both Tribeni near Prayag in Allahabad and Tribeni in Hooghly district of West Bengal are popular as Tirtha kshetras or pilgrimage centers but are linked in one place and freed in the other by

river flow. Tribeni, an ancient town in the Hooghly district of West Bengal, has been a popular pilgrimage center for people of all faiths for centuries. The name Tribeni has been mentioned in several literary sources such as Dhoi's "Pavandut", Vipradasa's "Mansamangal" and Mukundaram's "Chandimangal" etc. Tribeni had special importance as the hinterland of Saptagram, one of the most important ports of Bengal in eastern India. During the first phase of the Muslim invasion in the 13th century, the port of Saptagram in Bengal became important as a political and administrative center. The famous Shashan Ghat of Tribeni and the monuments of several temples adjacent to the Ghat can be said that before the Muslims this area was under the rule of the Pala and Sen Kings of Bengal and Orissa. In the Thirteenth century, Tribeni was captured by the Muslims. A notable architectural feat of the Muslim period was built in pre-colonial Bengal, known as the "Tomb and Mosque of Zafar Khan Ghazi". It was not only the oldest mosque of Bengal, but it is also one of the oldest Islamic architectural masterpieces of undivided Bengal. Jagannath Tarka Panchanan was a famous Sanskrit scholar from Tribeni and an expert on ancient Hindu law. He was famous in India as an expert on several ancient Hindu scriptures. He had several tolls and chathuspathis at Tribeni. Tribeni was not only famous as a pilgrimage centre. This town was one of the ancient Bengal an educational center, commercial activity area, special style of architecture-sculpture is also important. The researcher has tried to highlight a regional history of Tribeni town in the discussion article which belongs to the writing of local history. Historian Jawhar Sircar in his article "Reconsidering local history: some facts, some observations" mentioned that, "In a comprehensive sense, it is the study of many facets that pertain to a specific local area: covering its history, ethnography, geography, natural history."<sup>1</sup> Vinoy Ghosh in his book 'Paschim Banger Sanskriti' mention that "the process of writing history 'from the bottom up' through the use of local materials and a local focus."<sup>2</sup>

### (I)

This ancient town of Bengal called Tribeni was built in the Ganga, Bhagirathi River basin. The Ganga is a virtuous and holy river to the people living in the Ganga, Bhagirathi riparian basin. Their belief is that bathing in this river will free one's sins. Upendrakumar Das in his book "Bharatiya Shaktisadhana" mentions "The three rivers of Muladhara are Ira, Pingala, and Sushumna, respectively, rivers Ganga, Yamuna, and Saraswati. Tribeni is located at Muladhara because of the confluence of these Tribeni. Bathing here If done, the saint is freed from all sins. This is connected Tribeni. Again, there is Tribeni of those three pulses in Ajnachakra, it is called Mukta Tribeni."<sup>3</sup> The influx of people to this area, rich in religious reasons, has increased its excellence for centuries. W.W. Hunter mentioned in his "Statistical Account of Bengal" – "The sacred character of Tribeni arises as its name implies, from its being the point of junction of three rivers - the confluence of the Bhagirathi or Hughly, the Saraswati and the Jamuna an important river of Nadia and the 24 Parganas, taking place at Tribeni Ghat. The Ghat, which consists of a splendid flight of steps, is said to have been built by Mukund Deo, the last independent king of Orissa, whose dominion extended up to this spot."<sup>4</sup> and also mentioned "The principal Hindu festivals

celebrated at Tribeni are the following: (I) Makara Sankranti, or Uttarayan , the day on which the sun enters the sign of Capricorn, held in the month of January, on the last day of the Hindu month of Paush, and the first day of the succeeding month of Magh.”<sup>5</sup> Rivers are intimately involved in Indian civilization and culture. The life of river-centered human beings can be seen almost everywhere in India when we look at the history of India. As rivers have built civilization, so this river has become the cause of conflict in human life. The importance of rivers in human life is political and economic as well as religious. Culturally, the river's place is very important in human life. Bengal is one of the river provinces of India. Several rivers flowing through this Bengal have made important contributions to the life and culture of the people of different parts of Bengal. Niharranjan Roy in his book “Bangalir Itihas” says “In Hindu tradition, the water of the Ganga washes away sins, not the Padma. The Ganga is Snigdha, Papa Hara Padma is Kirtinasha; Padma is a terrible madman. Ancient Sanskrit literature and inscriptions agree that the Ganga-Bhagirathi is the oldest and the Punyatwa river, the Jahnavi, the ultimate pilgrimage of the Hindus. Padma is sometimes called Ganga, but Bhagirathi-Jhanvi is never called. Mentioning the books and scripts of Bangladesh in this context. In Dhoi's “Pavandut” the Bhagirathi of the Tribeni confluence is called the Ganges; In Laxmansen's Govindapur Patrol, the name of the river is Jhanvi, in the eastern part of Betdd Chaturka of Burdwanbhukti; In Ballal Sen's Naihati script, Ganga Bhagirathi is called Sursurit (heavenly river or Deva River).”<sup>6</sup> Sudhir Kumar Mitra in "Hugli Jelar Itihas o Bangasamaj" mentions, "Tribeni bath means awakening of Nidrita Shakti Kundalini; Tribeni bath is done in Muladhara Padma. The three pulses of Ira, Pingala and Sushumna are united by the root. Sushumna is imagined as Saraswati in between, Yamuna on the left and Pingala Ganga on the south. This is the confluence of Ganga, Yamuna, and Saraswati. Therefore, taking a bath in Tribeni awakens the latent energy of the saint and paves the way to enlightenment and the bather attains unearthly peace. Therefore, bathing in Tribeni is said to be the most holy place and this place is said to be a holy place.”<sup>7</sup> “Tribeni is also found in 'Chaitanya Bhagavata' by Srimad Vrindavana Das

**" Sē'i saptagrāmē āchē sapta'rṣi sthāna.  
 Jagatē bidita sē tribēṇī ghāṭa nāma  
 Sē'i gaṅgā ghāṭera pūrbē sapta ṛṣigaṇa.  
 Tapa kari pā'ilēna gōbinda caraṇa.  
 Tina dēbī sē'i sthānē ēkatra milana.  
 Jāhnabī, yamunā, sarasbatīra saṅgama.  
 Prasad'dha' tribēṇīghāṭa' saphala bhubanē.  
 Sarba pāpa kṣaya haṃ yāra daraśanē.  
 Nityānanda mahāprabhu parama ānandē.  
 Sē'i ghāṭe snāna karilēna sarba- bṛndē”<sup>8</sup>**

“There is a place of seven sages in that Saptagram.  
 Tribeni Ghat is known in the world.  
 Seven sages before that Ganga ghat.

After doing penance, Govinda Charan got it.  
 The three goddesses meet at that place.  
 Confluence of Janhavi, Yamuna, Saraswati.  
 The famous 'Tribeni ghat' is successful in the world.  
 All sins are destroyed by his sight.  
 Nityananda Mahaprabhu is very happy.  
 All the people bathed in that ghat.”<sup>8</sup>

In the 10th century, the poet Dwija Vipradas wrote a book called "Mansamangal" in which the description of Tribeni was quoted:

“**Dēkhiyā tribēnī gaṅgā**                      **cāṁda rāja manē raṅgā**  
    **kulētē cāpāya madhukara.**  
**Ānandita mahārāja**                      **karē nānā tīrtha kāja**  
    **bhaktibharē pujē mahēśbara.**  
**Tīrtha kāja samāpiyā**                      **antarē hariśa haiyā**  
    **uṭhē rājā bhramiyā nagara.**  
**Chatriśa āśramēra lōka**                      **sahi kōna duḥkha sōka**  
    **ānandē bañcaṅgē nirantara.”**<sup>9</sup>

“Seeing Tribeni Ganga                      Chand Raj is colored in mind  
    Madhukar presses on Kule.  
 The happy Maharaj                      performed various pilgrimages  
    Worship Maheshwar with devotion.  
 After completing the pilgrimage, Harish became happy in the heart  
    Up Raja Bhramia Nagar.  
 There is no grief with the people of Trish Chashram  
    Constantly deprived of happiness.”<sup>9</sup>

Tribeni and Saptagram are mentioned in Vipradas Pippalai’s account of the trade route of Chand Sadagar in his poem ‘Manasamangal’. Sujata Banerjee in her book “Prakouponibesik banger itihaso sangskriti” says, “The Bhagirathi flowed into three streams at Tribeni in Hooghly district. Saraswati on the right, Bhagirathi in the middle and Yamuna on the left flow in the southeast face. The waters of Rupnarayana and Damodar rivers used to flow into the Saraswati near the port of Tamralipta, but after the 8th century, the mouth of the Saraswati narrowed due to the accumulation of alluvium at that place and hence it lost its importance as a port of Tamralipta.”<sup>10</sup> As the copper-clad port became distressed by siltation, Saptagram on the banks of the Saraswati (now in Hooghly district) gained importance as a port. When the river changed its course due to natural causes, some populated geographical areas lost their importance. Again, new land became prominent in its place. The decline of Tamralipta and the rise of Saptagram are just like that. The rise of Saptagram as a port and the proximity of Tribeni, the area adjacent to this port, made this place populated by people from the marginal areas. During the Sultanate rule in the 14th century, the capital of Southwest Bengal was established at Saptagram. Tribeni along with

Saptagram Inextricably linked: Saptagram was one of the oldest cities in India and sea-going ships used to anchor at Tribeni during all the visits to Saptagram, Pliny wrote in the first century.

## (II)

Another notable architectural achievement of the history of Tribeni town is the Tomb or Astana and Mosque of Zafar Khan Ghazi. This ancient mosque of Bengal, built in the thirteenth century, is one of the oldest examples of Islamic architecture. This architectural feat was created in Bengal in India during the Turko-Afghan rule. These foreign Turko-Afghans established their authority in Bengal as well as in different parts of India. Just as they built palaces for living, they also built mosques and adjacent tombs for religious worship. In this case, they built this type of prayer room building by using the ruins of various temples in this country. Vinoy Ghosh mentioned in his book “Paschim banger samskriti”, “Acharya Jadunath Sarkar called this Jafar Khan Kirti pillar of Tribeni – “a museum of Muslim Epigraphy”. We can add a little more to his words – “and of Hindu Sculpture”. Zafar Khan’s Mosque and mausoleum are truly a museum of Muslim inscriptions and Hindu temples and statues-sculptures.”<sup>11</sup> Zafar Khan Ghazi's Astana is divided into two parts, namely Zafar Khan, his son and daughter-in-law on the east side and Barkha Ghazi and his sons on the west side. There is no roof over the tomb. There are four doors in Jafar Khan Samadhi house, each door has enough signs of Hindu sculpture. On the other side of the door, there is a small shrine with a statue of Goddess Dandayaman and two yakshas carved next to it. The outer walls of the hermitage are carved with rows of Vishnumurti panels, navagraha murti, flowers, foliage, etc., on large blocks of stone. The masonry of the stones indicates that the stones were not planned or arranged according to the rules of architecture. Astanas and mosques, both houses, this unorganized construction is particularly understandable. The stone panels carved with images of deities are almost all upside down. The sculptural signs on both sides of the door of the Samadhi house (goddess idols in the temple with yakshas), it seems that Astana is a Hindu temple, the Samadhi house is the sanctum sanctorum of that temple. Originally, the sanctum sanctorum of the temple has been converted into a burial chamber. No one has recorded the life story of Zafar Khan Ghazi in such a way. The inscriptions which have been found do not contain any account except a slight mention of Zafar Khan’s achievements. From 1298 to 1313 he was the Adhiswara of Saptagram. He built the present mosque in 1298 AD. In 1847, while visiting the Zafar Khan Mosque, Moni Sahib recovered a Kursinama of Zafar Khan kept by the servants of the mosque. Based on that resume, he published a short biography of Zafar Khan in the Journal of the Asiatic Society. It is known that Zafar Khan Gazi from Mundagao included in Chakla, Muksudabad, Pargana Konwar, along with his nephew Shah Sufi (Pandua) came to Triveni-Saptagram region to propagate Islam. Gazi Zafar Khan first conquered the Triveni-Saptagram region and with him the battle of Mann and Bhudev Nripati took place. This happened during the reign of Kaikas. Zafar Khan Ghazi was killed in this battle and buried in Tribeni. Later Ulukh Khan continued that struggle. He also died and was buried in Tribeni.

Several ancient scripts have been found in the tomb of Barkha Gazi. Moni Saheb found the inscriptions while visiting Tribeni. The scripts are engraved in Bengali. Moni Saheb deciphered those scripts. Later Rakhaldas Banerjee published this text with some corrections. Based on those fragmentary inscriptions, it is said that Jafar Khan Astana was a Vishnu temple earlier. There are numerous scenes of Ramayana and Mahabharata carved in the temple, such as Rama-Ravana battle scenes, stripping scenes etc. It does not seem that there was only one Vishnu temple at this place. From the remains of temples, which are found in mosques and hermitages, it seems that there were several temples here - Vishnu temple, Surya temple, Shiva temple etc. Moni sahib saw avatars of Narasimha, Varaha, Rama, Krishna, Lakshmi etc. and idols of gods and goddesses. In addition to the statues of Brahmanical deities or the sculptural signs of the temple, there are Buddha images carved on the pillars of the mosque. There are two rows of pillars in the mosque, each row has six pillars. One of these pillars has a Buddha image carved on it. Compared to other pillars, this pillar has its own characteristics. The pillar is a quadrangular pillar, not octagonal or hexagonal like other pillars. The pillar is a separate temple pillar. Along with the Buddha images, Jain images are also found here. A block of stone written in Arabic is visible next to the south gate of Barakhan Gazi's tomb. A sign of a statue can be seen on its opposite side. Only the coils of the feet and back of the snake are not visible. This idol was considered by Rakhaldas Bandyopadhyay to be the idol of Jain Tirthankara Parsvanath. Tribeni was one of the pilgrimage sites of all the communities of Bangal, Buddhists, Jains, and Hindus. Apart from Hindu temples, Buddhist and Jain temples were also there.

Apart from all these signs of Tribeni, some other signs are found which are particularly noteworthy. The idols of several deities have been found intact at this place - a Ganesha idol, a Brahma idol, a Hargauri idol, a Ganga idol. The idols were found from the area adjacent to Tribeni Ghat. The construction of the idols suggests that they belong to the Sena period and are not older than the twelfth century. A small model of the Rekh-temple, as a miniature artifact, was found in Jafar Khan's Astana. This, of course, is not a Rekh-Deul model, but a decoration of a large Rekh-Deul boundary. This ornament is the miniature of Rekh -deul. It is impossible to have this ornament on the temples of Bengal. Tribeni was under the rule of the Orissa kings for some time in the thirteenth century. The Odisha king who built the Tribeni ghat may have also built a rekh-deul. Regional 'Shikhar' architecture became popular in Bengal during the Pala-Sena period. Apart from this regional 'Shikhar' architecture of Bengal, the North Indian 'Nagar' style of temple architecture known as 'Rekh-Deul' developed in the state of Odisha was also common in Southwest Bengal at the same time. A political reason behind this is that while the Pala and Sena kings extended their empires in North, East, Kamrup and Central Bengal and Magadha and even Varanasi, the Ganga kings of Orissa continued to rule in Southwest Bengal. Gangaraja Anantavarma Chorganga extended his kingdom up to Hooghly in the latter part of the 11th century. As the vast area of southwest Bengal belonged to the Ganga kings, Orissa culture spread and many temples in Orissa style were built in that region. Pranab Roy in his book "Banglar mandir sthapotya o bhaskorjo" mentions that "The temple-architecture style which

developed in Eastern India during the Pala-Sena period stagnated after the Muslim conquest. In fact, after the Muslim conquest, the construction of the 'Shikhar' temple of the Pala-Sena period was completely stopped." <sup>12</sup>

### (III)

Navadwip, Bhatpara, Guptipara and Tribeni were particularly famous for Sanskrit education in Bengal. These four places were called four societies at that time. L. S. S. O' Malley in his "Bengal District Gazetteer, Hooghly" mentions "At Tribeni, in the Hooghly district, long a famous seat of Sanskrit learning, such learning is now in decadence. Jagannath Tarkapanchanan was a native of this place, and a long train of eminent pandits before and after him associated with the name of Tribeni" <sup>13</sup> The center of Sanskrit education in Tribeni had more than thirty tols. Pandit Jagannath Tarka Panchanan was the son of this Tribeni. He was born in 1694. Tarka Panchanan was born in Tribeni when Shobha Singh's rebellion on one side and the British were establishing their base in Calcutta city after getting permission to build a fort on the other. From the reign of Hussain Shah about two hundred years before him, the reputation of Jagannath dynasty was established throughout Bengal. His subjects of teaching were Nyaya, Smriti, Purana, Tantra, Literature, Alankara, Ayurveda, Veda-Vedanta etc. Jagannath's toll in Tribeni was then one of the Sanskrit universities of Bengal. He also received the patronage of Nadia, Burdwan and Sobhabazar (Calcutta) dynasties. The educational structure in pre-colonial Bengal included Chatuspathi, Tol, Maktab and Madrasa. For Hindus there were Chatuspathi, tolls and for Muslims there were Maktabas, Madrasahs. At that time there were no schools, colleges, and universities in Bengal like modern times. Most of the people of Bengal used to study from this institution. The Company started translating ancient and medieval Hindu and Muslim scriptures, legal texts into English through its governors at that time for its administrative convenience. In a word, they started this work to gain knowledge about various customs, laws, etc. of the East. As a result, the Asiatic Society was formed in Bengal. The main purpose of this institution was the study of Oriental studies. In this work they depended on the clerk and scholars of Bengal. Jagannath Tarka Panchanan was one such scholarly personality who involved himself in this work with skill.

At the request of William Jones, Jagannath made a memorable achievement by composing "Vivadabhanagarnava", a scripture used by Hindus. Muslim civil cases were tried with the help of "Fatwa-e-Alamgiri", a collection of laws compiled during the reign of Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb. But the Hindus had no such written ethics. When there was a problem in the judicial system, it was usually resolved by bringing Brahmin scholars to the court. Warren Hastings felt the urge to compile a code of practice from the ancient Sanskrit texts of the Hindus. He assigned the burden of this work to eleven Pandits of Bengal. They completed the work of writing the book in two years. The book was first translated into Persian and later translated into English by Haled Sahib. Which is published as 'A Code of Gentoo Laws'. As a result of being translated twice, the translation differs greatly from the original Sanskrit. Therefore, it is necessary to write another authentic book later. Orientalist William Jones, the founder of the Asiatic Society, took responsibility for this work. On the

recommendation of Jones, Jagannath was appointed for this job on a salary of 300 rupees per month and his assistants on a salary of 100 rupees per month. One or two other Pandits were appointed for this work, but Jagannath alone completed the work within three years. For this work, Jagannath received a monthly pension of Rs 300 till his death. This book was translated into English by Mr. Colebrooke- named 'Digest of Hindu Law on Contracts and Successions'. It was published in 1798 from Calcutta. A manuscript copy of the original is in the library of King Radhakanta Dev of Shobha Bazar. It is still out of print. Jagannath died in Tribeni in 1807.

**Conclusion:** The excellence of Tribeni as one of the oldest historical towns of river-dependent Bengal has been observed in several cases in the discussion article. Tribeni has been famous for centuries to the people of Bengal as a place of pilgrimage. Besides this, this historical place has contributed many important things to the pages of history namely-a famous centre of education, a field of commercial activities and architectural and sculptural styles etc. As Saptagram as a commercial port of East India has been noticed in an important role as a subject of economic history writing, as the town like Tribeni is the hinterland of that port, realizing the importance of regional history writing, the researcher has tried to highlight the history of this ancient historical town of Bengal in the discussion article.

**Notes:**

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