



***Devapala* is a most Powerful King of the Pala Dynasty and a Major Patron of Buddhism: A Review**

Dr. Md. Ashikuzzaman Khan Kiron

Associate Professor, Department of Pali and Buddhist Studies, University of Dhaka, Dhaka-1000,
Bangladesh, kiron@du.ac.bd

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18871441>

ARTICLE DETAILS

Research Paper

Accepted: 15-02-2026

Published: 10-03-2026

Keywords:

Devapala, Buddhism,
Kamboja, Patron,
Contribution, *Vihara*, *Arab*.

ABSTRACT

The Pala dynasty's most powerful king was Devapala. The Pala dynasty ruled for a total of more than four hundred years. During this period, Devapala was the most capable king to highlight the glory of the Pala dynasty. His fame spread across India and beyond. He contributed to the construction of Nalanda Vihara, which encompasses five villages. India continues to honor this memory today, establishing one of India's most esteemed positions globally. The credit for this must go entirely to King Devapala. Credit must be given to the fact that all the successful efforts of a king made it possible. However, despite numerous attempts, achieving success often remains unattainable. Even in many cases, success is no longer successful. He also completed the unfinished task left by his father. Thus the discussion paper presents the contribution of King Devapala and the contribution he made as a devoted and major patron to the welfare of Buddhism.

1. Introduction

To whom the saying 'worthy son of a worthy father' applies is King *Devapala*. He proved it through his outstanding contribution. His excellent leadership qualities elevated him to that position. *Devpala has made that position one of his notable contributions*. History follows and imitates history. However, it is not that exceptions do not occur. That lesson is available from the history of ancient Bengal. A review of the histories of the 18 or 22 kings who ruled the Pala dynasty can make that truth real. Not only had that, but the history of this dynasty also provided an opportunity for the next dynasty to receive exemplary



education. Subsequently, the narrative of this history underwent a transformation. However, the discussion article provides a concise summary of *Devapala's* significant contributions and support for Buddhism.

2. Review of Literature

All the research works found on the discussion article are. Namely: *History of Bengal (Majumder, 1943)* the history of West Bengal basically refers to the history of the western part of Bengal, located in the eastern part of the Indian subcontinent. *Buddhadharma (Bondhapādhyāya, 1989)* the book discusses various aspects of Buddha and Buddhism. The book covers topics such as the biography of Buddha, the essence of Buddhism, Buddhist literature, preaching, the education and initiation of Buddhism, pilgrimage, and the *tirodhana* of Buddhism, among others. *An Advanced History of India (Ray & Dutta, 1946)* this renowned book consists of two parts. And similarly, according to the periods, the same are divided into more parts. For example, part I, ancient India, the second part of the same volume consists of the Medieval, and Mughal periods. The discussion article does not contain any theories or information about King *Devapala*. I have written the discussion article for this purpose.

3. Research Questions

The present study has the following Questions: Namely: a. Who was King *Devapala*? b. What role did *Devapala* play in the *Pala* dynasty? c. Did King *Devapala* accept Buddhism? D. What role did he play for Buddhism? e. Above all, presenting aspects of a Buddhist perspective on King *Devapala*.

4. Research Methodology

Devapala was a political figure in ancient India. He is the most powerful king of the *Pala* dynasty, who played an important role in patronizing Buddhism. So, qualitative research methods have been used to compose the discussion research paper. Qualitative methods have several divisions. Among them, discussion research is regarded as a research method that draws on historical methods. For this, various types of information, theories, and data have been used to carry out the discussion research. Notable sources include historical texts, travelogues, and political biographies; king *Devapala*-related essays, and various inscriptions.

5. A brief overview of *Devapala*

5.1. Specification of *Devapala*



Devapala's father's name is *Dharmapala* and grandfather's name is *Gopala*. His mother was the *Rashtrakuta* princess *Rannādevī*. He was the third and most powerful king of the Pala dynasty. *Mahendrapala* was the successor of *Devapala*. 'His wife or life partner or conjugal partner was *Mahatadevī*.'¹ He was the most powerful king of ninth century Bengal and Bihar region of India.

5.2. Characteristic features of *Devapala*

There is no doubt that *Devapala* was a worthy son of his father. Various high praises have been given to him in various places including various copperplates. Such praise is true as well as exaggeration. There is no dispute that King *Devapala's* kingdom was one of the most powerful kingdoms in India during *Devapala's* time.²

Devapala was well-known as a self-righteous king. He possessed a pure spirit. He was pure in body and deed. His character has been eulogized by various coppersmiths. He paid homage to *Veeradeva*, a renowned Buddhist scholar of his time. In this context, it can be said that there is no doubt that the custom of paying respect to the wise and virtuous in different countries of the world undoubtedly came from there. The practice is still ongoing in India and outside of India.

5.3. Title of *Devapala*

A review of the political history of ancient Bengal reveals that the kings of the dynasty of that time used to attach or adopt one, two or more titles to their names. There was no exception to this in the case of kings of the Pala dynasty. Every influential king of the Pala dynasty appears to have adopted such a title along with his name. '*Devapala* also took the title '*Parameshwara-Parambhattaraka Maharajadhiraja*' along with his name.'³ The tradition of adopting such titles contributes to a king's recognition of his honor and power. This has been practiced since time immemorial in our South Indian subcontinent. The continuation of which is still known today. It will probably continue. However, he ruled from 810-845 AD. However, there is disagreement about this reign.

5.4. Area of *Pala* and *Devapala's* State

Kings of Ancient India Almost all kings were active in conquering kingdoms. These kings were influenced by their predecessors. *Devapaal* also maintained that consistency. According to various traditions, 'his kingdom extended to the *Kamboja* kingdom in the north and the *Vindhya*s in the south. The reign of *Devapala* is known from the account of the Arab traveler *Suleiman*.'⁴ The person he used to conquer the kingdom was his general *Jayasena*. If *Jayasena* was the son of his younger brother



Bakapala.⁵ However, there is disagreement over the location of the *Kamboja* state. According to the *Tamrapatta*, *Devapala* reigned for at least thirty-five years. "Among the later Pala kings, *Narayanapala* (ninth century) reigned for fifty-seven years, though no special achievements are to be found in the history of his long reign."⁶ *Darbhapani* was *Devapala's* minister. *Darbhapani's* father was *Garga*. *Kedarmisra* was also the minister of *Devapala* and was the grandson of *Garga*.

6. The conflict of the three forces

Devapala played a role in the *Trishakti* conflict. Basically this conflict started during the time of King *Dharmapala*. *Devapala* got it perfectly. During *Devapala's* time his rival was *Ramabhadra Pratihara*. *Devapala* defeats him miserably and renders *Ramabhadra* dull.

Later, when the first *Bhoja* was seated on the throne of *Pratihara*, the conflict between Pala and *Pratihara* started again. But it is true that the victory of the *Pratihara* kingdom is heard in this war but in the end the victory of the Pala king *Devapala* is known.⁷

Gurjar is mentioned in the *Badal* inscriptions. Perhaps they were *Gurjar Pratiharas*. Their king was *Bhoja*. *Gurjara Pratihara* power was defeated by the intelligence of *Devapala's* minister *Kedarmishra*.⁸

7. United Bengali nation

Devapala is the greatest Bengali warrior, the creator of the empire. He was a handsome young man. He was styled *Sriman Harshvan* on his coins. A greater contribution than the huge empire he created like his father and grandfather was his calling and uniting the Bengali nation during his time (eighth-ninth century period).⁹ Historians believe that *Devapala* established his capital at *Munger*.

No such novel has been written with *Dharmapala* and *Devapala* as heroes. If *Gangaridai Mahapadmananda* is excluded then this father-son two-persons will be considered as the greatest two conquering Bengali emperors of all-time.

8. *Devapala's* foreign policy and relations

It can be said for any country from ancient India to the present period that maintaining foreign policy and relations is one of the responsibilities and duties of the state. King *Devapala* ruled over the regions of ancient India including Bengal and Bihar. Besides, he maintained good relations. He maintained good relations with India and other countries outside India. For example, he maintained good relations with the kings of Java, *Javadwipa* and *Sumatra*. There is even evidence that he maintained good relations with



South and Southeast Asia. As he used to keep in touch with King *Shailandra* by sending messengers. As a result *Shailandrārāja* built a monastery at *Nalanda*. It is assumed that *Devapala* had good relations with *Shailandrārāja* dynasty. Both the kings of the two dynasties namely *Devapala* and *Balputradeva* were among the patrons of Buddhism and culture. Many Buddhist monks and saints from South and Southeast Asia came to *Nalanda* to seek knowledge. Later they went back to their country and propagated various praises of the *Pala* dynasty and Buddhist practices. *Devapala* made an important contribution to the propagation and development of Buddhism by maintaining and exploiting his foreign policy and good relations.

9. *Devapala's* religion and his contribution in religion

Devapala was a devout Buddhist king like his father and patronized Buddhism in many ways. *Devapala's* fame spread across India and beyond. King *Baladeva* of the *Malay Peninsula* requested five villages from King *Devapala* for the construction of *Nalanda Vihara*.¹⁰ That *Nalanda* was a famous place for cultural practices. This suggests that *Nalanda* was already famous as a famous place even before the establishment of *Vihara*. That is why *Devapala's* respect and devotion to *Nalanda* was there from the beginning. Besides, he worked devotedly for the betterment of *Swadharma*. During his time *Vikramshila Vihara* and *Sompur Vihara* were completed.¹¹ However, *Devapala* cared for *Nalanda Vihar*. He appointed *Virdeva* as the director of *Nalanda Vihara*. Whose overall supervision and patronage was provided by *Devapala*. The interpretation of this saying is that the *Viharas* of that time can be compared to the modern universities. At that time the kings used to appoint its director or principal. And currently, the head of state completes this recruitment process in that sequence. Where, it appears that good relations and philosophical beliefs are a secret matter. *Devapala* felt that Buddhist monasteries were the focal point of Buddhist practice. Where, mainly these sacred activities are held. That is why he oversaw such a great work. This established him as a great king.

9.1. Charitable activities of *Devapala*

'Almost all of *Devapala's* donations contain symbols of Buddha's invocation and *Dharmachakra*. Among these, the '*Hilsa inscription*' on the pillar of the Buddhist Tara statue found near Patna is one of them.'¹² Kings naturally love to give. *Devapala* was no exception. Charity helps people to become great people. Giving also increases human generosity. Just as the kings of those days ruled the kingdom, they also provided donations and assistance for the welfare of the society. All the kings of *Pala* dynasty used to donate more or less. *Devapala* is one of them. Therefore, the assessment of *Devapala* was somewhat special in the society and state of that time. That's why he was also well known as a donor in the society

and in the state. Another thing to be mentioned in this context is that he did not donate only for the welfare of *Swadharma* or Buddhism. Just as he has given to his own religion, he is giving to the welfare of other religions and people.

10. Coins of *Devapala*



Figure: Coins of *Devapala*¹³

The coin found in *Devpala* has the *Ekeswarī* image of Lakshmi in *Prakriti Swarupa Dhyanassya* and Sri written on it. At once similar to the coins of *Dharmapala*. It reads-*Shri-ma-n-har-sha-va-n-deve-pala*. It may mean-*Devapala* was the cause of *Harsha*, himself *Saharsha* and hence he may have assumed the title of *Harshavana*. However, colored coins of *Dharmapala* have been found but not of *Devapala*. However, due to global humanitarian indifference, it is not surprising if it goes abroad from its home country. *Ajit Ghosh* first reported this coin in 1951.¹⁴

11. Tomb of *Devapala*



Figure: Tomb of Raja *Deva Pala*¹⁵

He was known as '*Maharajadhiraj*'. Also regarded in history as the third most powerful king of the Pala dynasty. His grave is only 25 kilometers away from the grave of his father and grandfather. It was located in *Barendra Bhumi*, Bangladesh. It can be further clarified that his burial place is hidden from the public eye in *Janmanab Shunya Palli* of *Ameed Union* in *Patnitala* of *Naogaon District*. At present the *Chaitya* built on the ashes is being identified.¹⁶



The four centers of *Nathism* in Bangladesh's *Naogaon* district are essentially the last surviving monuments of *Nathism*. *Yogi's Kshapa* under *Patnitala* Thana is particularly notable among them. A number of people of *Nath* religion still live there. Historians believe that this *Yogi* has the burial place of *Devapala* in *Kshapa*. But could not provide enough evidence. Alexander Cunningham was the first person to report this information. "The *Jabuna* Temple stands on a large low mound of bricks ruins, which is said to have been 'the bouse' of Raja Deva Pala, according to Buchanan. But the name given to it by the people is Raja *Dava Pala ki Chhatri*, which is the usual term of a mausoleum built over the ashes of a person of consequence. I think, therefore, that is must be the place where Raja *Dava Pala* dies, and where his body was burned."¹⁷

12. Evaluation of *Devapala* in Biographical Novel

Kamal *Rahman* has written a contemporary novel based on the third and most influential king of this dynasty, *Devapala*, during which four hundred years of the political history of the Pala dynasty centered in Bengal and Bihar.

Among the kings of the Pala dynasty, *Devapala* was able to raise himself to a unique height by his own merit and power. As a result, he was able to create an illustrative example. After *Devapala*, only the emperor *Ashoka* was able to create such a large empire. This state was bordered by China in the east and Afghanistan in the west. It is considered to be the only large empire centered on Bengal and Bihar. The period of these Pala kings is referred to as the best period of Bengali. Our mental condition is such that instead of honoring the heroes of our own country, we worship the lords of distant countries. And we also love to do things we shouldn't. We preach the heroic stories of those to whom our independence was lost. For example, the name of *Ikhtiyar Uddin Mohammad Bakhtiyar Khalji*.¹⁸ So it appears that we have no hesitation or hesitation in putting the stigma of his escape on Raja *Laxman Sen*.¹⁹ Forgetting history is born from the distortion of history. Even in recent times we have not been able to get rid of it. King *Devapala* built his empire with immense courage and achievement. However, leaving no worthy successor, the empire had to dissolve within a few hundred years. In the novel, he has tried to capture that history.²⁰ From which the Bengali nation has many lessons to learn.

13. Political importance of *Devapala*

There is not much to say about the political importance of *Devapala* separately. It can be realized in the entire writing in the discussion article. But it is said that *Dharmapala* and *Devapala* expanded into northern India in the Pala kingdom founded by *Gopala*, ending the long anarchy. The expansion of the



empire of the King of Bengal to North India is undoubtedly a historical event. Such success has not been seen before or since. This success bears testimony to the glory of the Pala clan. The three Pala kings were in political power for about a hundred years. Among them, immortalized wrote the history of *Devapala*.

14. Conclusion

Given the above discussion, it is clear that *Devapala* made a truly memorable contribution to the political history of the Pala dynasty. At the same time, as a devoted patron of Buddhism, he worked for the welfare of this religion in many ways, like his father and grandfather. As a result, he gained equal recognition in both religious and political history. His leadership at various political levels, beginning with the construction of the *Vihara* for religion, and his various benevolent works, such as the repair of the *Vihara*, earned him a place of fame and honor. Therefore, the world will remember *Devapala* as the influential king of the Pala dynasty in the history of Bengal and India.

Notes and References

- Daily *Janakantha*, *Rājarānī*, 21.07.2021.
- *Triratna Cakma. Sahajparā. Devapala er Krititva o Caritra Mullayana*. 02. 03.2022.
- Majumder, R. C. (1943). *History of Bengal*. Dhaka: University of Dhaka. P. 116.
- Majumder, R. C. Op. cit.
- *Badal Pillar Inscriptions*, Verse 13; Burgess, James. (1882). *Epigraphic India, Archeological Survey of India*. II, p. 160.
- Cattapādhyāya, S. (1990-1992). *Prācīn Vārater Itihās Vol.II.*, Kolkata. p. 288.
- *Adhuni Itihas. The world's knowledge. Itihas Sikkha Kendra. Devapala*.
- *Badal inscriptions*
- Dasgupta, T. FB. 14.07.2021.
- Majumder, R. C. Op. cit.; Chowdhuri, H. & et. al. (1946). *An Advanced History of India*. India: Macmillan & co. P. 166.
- *Vide-Nalanda Copper-plate Inscription of Devapala-Deva*.
- Bondhapadhyaya, A. (1989). *Buddha & Buddhism*. Kolkata. P. 62.
- Dasgupta, T. FB. 21.06.2019
- Dasgupta, T, Op. cit.



- Kabir, S. FB.
- Kabir, Shahriar. *Raja Deva Pala er Samadhir Khoje*, FB. 20.05.2023.
- Cunningham, A. (1879-1880). *Report of a Tour in Bihar and Bengal*, Vol. XV.
- In the history of ancient India and Bengal we know as *Bakhtiyar Khalji* is *Ikhtiyar Uddin Mohammad Bakhtiyar Khalji*. He was an Afghan general. He was appointed as a commander by King *Ghori* and *Ghori* was originally an Iranian Sunni ruler. Also *Bakhtiyar Khalji* was the commander of the early Delhi Sultanate who conquered Bengal and Bihar in 1203 AD as a Muslim commander.
- *Lakshmana Sen* was called *Gauredeshwara* and was the fourth king of that dynasty. His reign was from 1178-1206 AD.
- Rahman, K. (2016). *Devapala*. Review. Dhaka: *Dhrupada Prokashoni*.