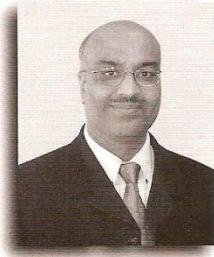


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Porbandar - Home City of the Bardai Brahmins



Porbandar is a coastal city on the shores of Saurashtra in the western state of Gujarat, (India) internationally famous as the birth place of Mahatma Gandhi. It may indeed be the mythical city of Sudamapuri, named after Sudama, a class mate of Lord Krishna, in whose memory a temple is built here. However, whatever its past or present claims to glory, to Bardai Brahmins, Porbandar, the major city in the plains of Barda, is their home city. Ask any Bardai Brahmin about their origins and without going into details about his/her village, the simple answer invariably be, Porbandar, often affectionately shortened to Por.

Amongst the ancient cities/towns (some older than two thousand years old) of Saurashtra, Porbandar enjoys a special reputation as a very ancient city present in the times of Lord Krishna and the Mahabharata (3000BC). Claims for such a mythological existence is difficult to ascertain because of scant scientific and/or historical evidence. However, the recent discoveries of two underwater cities in the Bay of Khambatt, off the shores of Gujarat, which may be as old as 9000BC based on the dating of artefacts from these sites, may shed more light and give credence to such claims.

There is, however, very strong historical evidence as regards present day Porbandar.

Indeed, on 6th August 1990 (Indian calendar, Shrivani Poonam, Vikram Savant 2046, which happened to be Rakshabandhan day also) Porbandar as a city completed one thousand years and the citizens of Porbandar celebrated by lighting up the whole city.

There are two sources of information relating to this. One is from the historical record (tamrapatra) of the king of Ghumli (also the name of the capital city, now in ruins, located at the foothills of the Barda Mountains) Maharaja Bashkaldev who gave a whole village, called 'Charli' to a Brahmin called Damodar and in that he mentions 'Poarvelakool' (Porbandar). The other more specific evidence comes from the books of the Jethwa dynasty state Barot, Sri Babubhai (from a caste of people, Barots, whose main profession is to accurately record family names/ events /and history). According to his record, it was at 9.15am, Monday (Shrivani Poonam, Vikram Savant 1046) that the Ghumli's king, Maharaj Bakhuji Jethwa inaugurated the first state trade boat to set sail in the Indian Ocean giving Porbandar the official status of a main state port. Henceforth this date is taken as the establishment of Porbandar (Poarvelakool) as a city.

Porbandar was originally called 'Poarvelakool'. The suffix 'Poar' is a collective name associated with the trader class which later changed to 'Por'. Also to the north of the city, on the creek, there is an eighth century site of Goddess, Porav Mataji. So the word 'Por' may have derived from this.

Alternatively, 'Por' may have derived from 'Puri' denoting 'Sudamapuri'. Hence in some records of the 17th century Porbandar is called Puribandar. The word 'Velakool' is a Sanskrit name for a port. In the times of the Muslim rule and under the state language Parsi (Persian language), the name 'Bandar' denoting port was adopted and 'Verakool' was dropped. 'Poarvelakool' became 'Porbandar'.

The city of Porbandar prospered because it attracted all classes of people e.g. Jains, Brahmins, Sadhus, Bhatiyas, Vaniyas, Lohanas, Naagars, khattis, Rajputs, Chaarans, Mahers, Kolis, Rabaris, Kharwas, Memans, Khojas, Voras, Kabavalis, and various artisans and traders.

Being the major city in the Barda Plains, Bardai Brahmins settled in the outlying villages migrated to this city in search of a better urban life and access to various amenities including education. Porbandar became the window to the world and then essentially it became the doorway to the outside world. It was from here that migrations not only to other cities of India or Asia occurred but being a sea port it was only matter of time before Bardai Brahmins travelled via sea routes to Africa initially (in the period 1910-1960) and subsequently (chiefly from 1965 onwards) to other continents (Europe and America). Indeed most of the Bardai Brahmins settled in the west have arrived in the west via this route. Therefore, for Bardai Brahmins who may not have set foot in India, having been born in Africa or here in the west, Porbandar is still considered as the ancestral home city. It is this city you want to visit more than any thing else when one visits India for the first time. It is this city that my father often talked about mentioning names of streets or places of interest to which I could not relate to, but only dream of visiting once. So the map of Porbandar is for all those first-time visitors. I hope you will get as much fun discovering Porbandar as I have. The map was handy for pin-pointing addresses of my relations in Porbandar. I hope it would help you re-connect with your relations and more importantly to your roots.

Dr Chandrakant M Thanki



