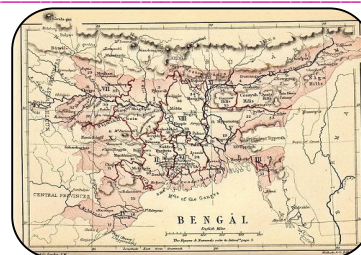




HISTORICAL SUB-REGIONS OF EARLY-BENGAL



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ABSTRACT

The present article will deal with the historical geography of early Bengal and also the geographical demarcation of early Bengal from the rest of the country and also the demarcation between the four subdivisions of early Bengal. Though information of early history of the lower Gangetic valley is not enough for a complete reconstruction of its history but a systematic study of the available sources would definitely help in at least a partial reconstruction of the contemporary history with provisional reconstructions regarding the mode of human life with its associated experiences. Similarly, the reconstruction of the historical geography of Bengal also encounters the same problem of dearth of sources.

KEYWORDS: Behavioural avoidance coping, playing positions, female kabaddi.

INTRODUCTION :

From historical perspective among the sub-regions in Bengal, four divisions have constituted the main part. They are:

- 1) Pundravardhana or the Varendra region,
- 2) Radha and its southern part known as Suhma,
- 3) Vanga and
- 4) Samatata.

However, in the historical context, in my opinion, the historical sub-regions have much validity and relevance in the early history of Bengal. It is pertinent to mention it here that these four subdivisions never experienced political unification under a single political authority and witnessed uneven political developments.¹ However some political powers could extend their influences over the other sub- regions and as a consequence at certain point of time the terms like Gauda and Vanga connoted rather wider territories including more than one geographical segment of early Bengal. Nevertheless the idea of political boundaries is self-defeating, in a sense that it is impermanent and subject to redefinition, restructurization and reconsideration from time to time. Another noteworthy point in this context is that the cultural profile should be examined separately sub-region wise in the case of its early history, as Bengal is constituted by a number of geographical and cultural sub-regions, there after attempts should be made to try to form an overview of the pattern. This framework must

¹Ranabir Chakravarti, 'Trade and Commerce', retrieved on 20th May, 2010, *WWW.Banglapedia*. Prior to AD 600, the political integration of the sub-regions was attempted by Gopachandra (AD 525-40). During Sasanka's (AD 595-619) time there was further strengthening of this political integration and his authority was extended till Gauda, Dandabhukti and as far south as Ganjam in Orissa and perhaps to Samatata as well. His seat of power was Karnasuvarna.

recognize the variations even within a well defined single cultural region but no doubt the historical process witnessed certain similar patterns and changes which were commonly witnessed by the four sub-regions together. But the boundaries of these sub-regions are flexible and prone to changes due to political as well as geological changes. However in upholding the validity of the sub-regions in the present work, the presence of an active interaction and cultural exchange can not be denied among these sub-regions. Rather this interactive process and the exchange of the respective cultural ethos in the historical process have created the regional identity of the present day Bengal. And a great degree of homogeneity can be seen in this identity, both culturally and linguistically.

For the purpose the work I will try to delineate the four geographical segments of Bengal from each other.

PUNDRAVARDHANA:

Pundravardhana is located in northern Bengal and later on came to be known as the Varendra region. It is demarcated from the other sub-regions by the Padma and the Karatoya rivers. Administratively, it was constituted as Pundravardhana bhukti when it became a province of the Gupta kingdom² and remained so till the end of the Pala period. From archaeological excavations at Mahasthan, or Pundranagara as it was called under the Mauryas and the Guptas, many Mauryan coins and other artefacts datable in the third and the fourth centuries BC have been recovered. The outline of the ancient city of Pundranagara can still be easily traced.³The capital city of Pundra or Varendra seems to have been *pundanagala* equating with Pundranagara mentioned in a fragmentary Mauryan Brahmi inscription palaeographically dated in the third century B.C. discovered at Mahasthan twelve kilometres north of Bogra town.⁴When the jurisdiction of the Paundravardhan bhukti which had covered Samatata and Srihatta from the beginning of the tenth century, was extended to Vanga and Pundravardhana under the Senas from the beginning of the twelve century AD the sub-region came to be designated as Varendra- mandala within the bhukti.

Thus the center of this sub-region was Pundravardhana or Pundranagara, which is identifiable with the present day Mahasthangarh near Bogra district in the present day Bangladesh. Pundravardhana occupied a pivotal position in the ancient period, in the history of Bengal, particularly of North Bengal which is testified by the discovery of a fragmentary stone inscription in Brahmi character palaeographically dated to the third century B.C. also testifies its importance in the time of the Mauryans and also that the Mauryan Empire exercised political control over the Delta. The inscription, as deciphered, contains a royal order to the local governor directing him to give as loan coins from the treasury and paddy from the granary during an emergency to the people of the neighbouring area and for realizing the loans when good days prevail over them⁵ and also to distribute funds from the imperial treasury during times of scarcity due to flood, fire or pests. Credit goes to Alexander Cunningham was the first historian who identified Mahasthangarh with *pundanagala* of the Brahmi inscription of the third century BC in 1879. And since the much attention have been paid to the unearthing the archaeological materials of Mahasthan. The first scientific excavation of this place was conducted by the Archaeological Survey of India under the supervision of K N Diskhit in 1928-29, and it was confined to three mounds of the name *Bairagir bhita*, *Govinda bhita* and *Munirghon*. The excavations continued till 1992, though a bit irregularly. In 1992 an agreement for joint-collaboration was drawn between Bangladesh and France to stir up the archaeological search-work of the area. Since then Bangladesh-France joint ventures were conducting excavations with much success since 1993. And recently the

² A. Bhattacharyya, *Historical Geography of Ancient and early Medieval Bengal*, Calcutta: Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar, pp. 73-75.

³ B. M. Morrison, *Political Centers and Cultural Region in early Bengal*, Arizona: UA, p 14.

⁴ D.R. Bhandarkar, "Mauryan Brahmi Inscription of Mahasthan", *Epigraphia Indica (EI)*, Vol. XXI, 193 1, pp. 84-85.

⁵ D.R. Bhandarkar, "Mauryan Brahmi Inscription of Mahasthan", *Epigraphia Indica (EI)*, Vol. XXI, 193 1, pp. 84-85.

joint mission during the excavations could unearth eighteen construction layers in the course of excavation.⁶

Scholars hold divergent views about the location of Pundranagara but still Pundranagara has conclusively been identified with Mahasthan, considering few factors. Hiuen Tsang, the Chinese traveller, counts the distance of *Pun-na-fa-tan-na* from Kankjol identified with Kajangal now Rajmahal towards east by 600 *li* or about 120 miles.⁷ The distance of Mahasthan from Rajmahal towards the east is about 120 miles which tally with 600 *li* mentioned by the Chinese traveller. Moreover, the Chinese pilgrim's mention of *po-shi-po*⁸ identified with Vasu Vihara about 20 *li* or 4 miles to the west of *Pun-na-fa-tan-na* testifies to this fact that Mahasthan is the *pundanagala* (= Pundranagara) of the Brahmi inscription and the capital city of the Pundra country. The description of *po-shi-po* or *po-khi-po* as given by the Chinese pilgrim fits no other place than Vasu Vihara which is 4 miles off to Mahasthan. The Chinese pilgrim crossed a large river *ka-lo-tu* identified with the Karatoya and reached at *ka-mo-lu-po* identified with Kamrupa (present day Guwahati) after covering a distance of 900 *li* or 180 miles from *pun-na-fa-tan-na*.⁹ The distance between Guwahati and Mahasthan is approximately the same. That is why there is enough ground to infer that Pundrangala as mentioned in the Brahmi inscription is present day Mahasthangarh.

The importance of Pundranagara can be well due to its convenient geographical location, as it stands on the west bank of the River Karatoya which was a very significant river and was perhaps three times wider than the Ganga as stated by Minhaj us Siraj.¹⁰ Though at present the river has silted in many places and also is reduced to an insignificant stream. Pundravardhana offered overland connection with the mid- Gangetic valley through the Rajmahal gap. It perhaps provides the reason for the earliest advent of the NBPW in the Pundravardhana region in the Bengal delta along the traits of urbanism in the 4th – 3rd centuries B.C. Another important evidence of this cultural inflow to the deltaic Bengal from the mid-Gangetic valley is the Mahasthan stone Inscription.¹¹ As already discussed this inscription is a testimony to the earliest existence of an urban settlement in Bengal delta and its cultural interaction with the sedentary communities of the Gangetic Valley. It also reveals the political integration of the deltaic region to the Magadhan dynasty with Pundrangala (Pundranagara) as its administrative center. And this political connection between this sub-region and the powers in Magadha continued in the later period.

The river, Karatoya, as it seems, springing from the Himalayan mountain on the furthest north of the Bhutan border passed through the districts of Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri, and touching the districts of Dinajpur, Rangpur, Bogra and Pabna it fell in to the Ganges i.e. Padma as shown in the map of Von Den Brooke. Passing through the various channels and under the different names, the Karatoya threw her water in the Bay of Bengal and established her connection with the sea port of Chittagong. In the *Karatoya Mahatmya* it is stated that from quite ancient time in the *Push Narayanijug*, the people of Hindu extraction used to come to have bath for the purification of their sins in the bank of Karatoya where now Mahasthan stands. In the *Periplus of the Erythraen sea* of about the first century A.D. and the Geography of Plotemy of about the second century A.D. there comes a reference to the province of 'Kirada'. This is possibly the places on either side of the river Karatoya as it is presumed that 'kirada' is

⁶"Mahasthan", *Banglapedia*, , Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2003, p. 346.

⁷Thomas Watters, *On Yuan Chwang's Travels in India*, Vol. 11(London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1905), p. 184.

⁸A.K.M. Yaqub Ali, *Aspects of Society and Culture of the Varendra*, 1200-1576 A.D. (Rajshahi, 1998), p. 28

⁹Thomas Watters, *On Yuan Chwang's Travels in India*, Vol. 11, London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1905, p.185.

¹⁰Minhaj Siraj, *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri*, ed..Abdul Hai Habibi , Kabul : Historical Society of Afghanistan, 1963, p. 427.

¹¹Renewed excavations at Mahasthangarh have provided geological data to suggest that the earliest settlement at the site dates to the post-Mauryan period (S. Gill, 'Mahasthangarh: A Riverine port in Ancient Bengal', H. P. Ray (ed.) *The Archaeology of Sea-faring in the Indian Ocean in the Ancient Period*, New Delhi: Pragati Publishers, 1999, p. 156). It was between c. 2nd century BC -2nd century AD that sites in the coastal area became active and this was marked by a quantitative and qualitative improvement in the material culture (Gautam Sengupta 1996: p. 120).

a Greek version of the river Karatoya. On the basis of this presumption the river Karatoya can be traced to a long antiquity. In the seventh century A.D. Hiuen Tsang, the Chinese pilgrim, had to cross a river *ka-lo-tu* i.e. Karatoya while reaching Kampura from Pundravardhana. The river Bagmati which according to Muslim chronicles was three times larger than the Ganges and has been identified with the Karatoya flew close by the eastern side of Mahasthan.¹²

Mahasthan is the earliest known centre of urban settlements in Bengal. The site of the citadel, oblong in shape covers a large expanse of 5000 ft. long from north to south and 4000 ft. wide from east to west. The area involved is about 185 hectares. The area is surrounded by a good number of early historic and early medieval sites within a radius of approximately 20 km. Of the earlier archaeological units traced in the region are: an early Brahmi stone inscription of the third century B.C., punch-marked and cast coins of silver and copper, a large number of semi-precious stone beads, glass beads, Sunga terracotta plaques, Rouletted ware and impressive structural remains of the ancient and medieval periods. The high terrace about 15 ft. in general elevation above the land level appears to have been originally protected on the east by the Karatoya River and on the other three sides by a continued moat. The moat on the south is now known as the Baranashi *khal*, that on the west as the Gilatala *khal* and that on the north as the Kalidaha *sagar*, the last being a water-flow of an extensive *bil* of that name.¹³

VANGA:

Another sub-region was that of Vanga, geographically demarcating the southern part of Bengal this representing the proper deltaic part of the lower Gangetic Valley. This sub-region is surrounded by the Bhagirathi, the Meghna and the Padma. There have been changes in the landscape and boundaries of this area due to active deltaic formations. However it was not before the 2nd half of the 6th century AD that this sub-region had an independent kingdom.

RADHA AND SUHMA:

Radha has got equal concentration of archaeological sites like the Pundra area; but it has not yet gained enough historical attention. Unlike the Radha, the Pundra area, Vanga and Samatata has been getting sustained academic attention from the historians. Radha lies in upland West Bengal and is a semi-arid terrain, situated at the eastern fringe of the Chottanagpur plateau and the Rajmahal hills and has its geomorphic continuity with the adjacent districts of Bihar and Orissa. This region includes Bankura, Purulia, Burdwan, Birbhum and a part of Midnapur districts of West Bengal and lies in the West of the Bhagirathi River. This region is formed by the eroded rocks of the Chottanagpur Plateau and is drained by the Mayurakshi, Ajay, Damodar, Rupnarayan, Dwarekeswar, Silai and Kasai etc. all originating in the Chottanagpur Plateau and flowing through this region in an easterly and south-easterly direction. Basically this unit is composed of the plains of the aforementioned rivers and slope from the direction of the plateau side to the Bhagirathi. This is an old plain formed mostly of the weathering of early rocks and across which the rivers flowing down from the Chottanagpur plateau have cut their own beds. The eastern section of this plain is more or less alluvial, with prominent river meanders. As one moves west, the landscape is occasionally harsh, giving way to extensive gravelly uplands, known as tarhs. Now most of these plains have been however converted into paddy fields.

Moreover it also consists of the moribund and the mature deltas along the Bhagirathi and Hoogli River. This sub-region is further divided into Dakshina Radha and Uttara Radha with Ajay River as their border.¹⁴ But the inclusion of a part of the Katwa sub-division within Uttara-Radha may imply that at times the Khai, rather than the Ajay could have formed the boundary between the Dakshina Radha and Uttara Radha.¹⁵ The former was called Suhma in the early period and the famous port of Tamralipti or

¹² Mahasthan, *Banglapedia*, Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2003, p. 346-47.

¹³ Ibid. pp.346-347.

¹⁴ A. Bhattacharyya, *Historical Geography of Ancient and Early Medieval Bengal*, Calcutta, 1977, p. 51.

¹⁵ R. C. Majumdar, *History of Ancient Bengal*, Calcutta: 1971, p.13.

the present day Tamluk is incorporated within this geographical segment¹⁶. Dakshina Radha is mentioned in the Gaonri plates of Vakpati Munja (981 AD).¹⁷ According to it Dakshina-Radha included Bhurisreshtika (Bhursut) and Navagrama in the Howrah and Hoogli districts, as well as Damunya (to the west of Damodar) in the Burdwan district.¹⁸ Thus it clearly shows that Dakshina Radha embraced considerable of area lying between the Ajay and Damodar rivers. The southern boundary of this area could have reached the Rupnarayan and the western boundary could have extended beyond the Damodar far into the Arambagh sub-division.¹⁹ Tradition however, recorded in the Digvijaya-prakasa, restricts Radha to the territory lying to north of the Damodar (*Damodar-ottare bhage...Radhadesah prakirtitah*)²⁰. Closely connected with Dakshina Radha, as a territory subject to the same ruling family of the Suras was Aparā-Mandara, which was perhaps identical with Ma(n)darā in the Arambagh subdivision of Hoogli.

Uttara Radha is mentioned in the Tiruvalangadu plates of Rajendra Chola and the Naihati grants of Vallalāsena.²¹ According to this plate of Rajendra Chola, which enumerates his Gangetic campaign (c. AD 1022-23) he conquered the Uttiraladha king Mahipala I. The other places of early-Bengal recorded in this inscription in relation to this campaign are Tandabhutti (Dandabhukti), Takkanaladham (Dakshina Radha), and Vangaladesa (southern and coastal Vanga).²² The Naihati grant includes it within the Vardhamana Bhukti.²³

But during the time of Lakshmanasena it formed a part of the Kankagrama bhukti. Among the places mentioned in inscriptions, as being situated in Uttara-Radha, Siddhalagrama has been identified with Siddhangram in Birbhum district and Vallahittha with Balutiya on the northern borders of the Burdwan district.²⁴ The Saktipur grant of Lakshmanasena²⁵ suggests that the Mandala of Uttara-Radha also embraced the villages in the Kandi sub-division of Murshidabad.

As to the limits of the Uttara-Radha mandala, it is interesting to know that Jaina Prajnāpāna knows Kotivarsa or Bangarh in the Dinajpur district as a city in Radha.²⁶ The southern part of it was known as Dandabhukti according to the copper plate inscriptions belonging to the 6th and 7th centuries i.e., Jayarampur Copper Plate Inscription of Gopachandra, (R.Y. 1),²⁷ Medinipur Copper Plate Inscription of Sasanka²⁸ and another Medinipur Copper Plate Inscription of Sasanka.²⁹ And Daṇḍabhukti was

¹⁶ A. Bhattacharyya, *Historical Geography of Ancient and Early Medieval Bengal*, Calcutta, 1977, pp.45-48.

¹⁷ K. N. Dikshit, 'Gaonri plates of Vakpati Munja (981 AD)', *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XXIII, 1984, p. 101-111.

¹⁸ R. C. Majumdar, *History of Ancient Bengal*, Calcutta: 1971, p. 13.

¹⁹ Ibid, p.13.

²⁰ Ibid, p.13.

²¹ B. M. Morrison, *Political Centers and Cultural Regions in Early Bengal*, Arizona, 1970, p.167. This grant was issued in the 11th regnal Year (1st half of the 12th century AD) records the donation of the village of *Vallahittha* in *Svalpadashnaviuh* belonging to *Uttara Radha maṇḍala* of Vardhamana Bhukti to *Ovasudevasarman* for the performance of *Hemasvamahadana*.

²² Ranabir Chakravarti, 'Trade and Commerce', retrieved on 20th May, 2010, *WWW.Banglapedia*.

²³ R. C. Majumdar, *History of Ancient Bengal*, Calcutta, 1971, p.13.

²⁴ Ibid. p. 13.

²⁵ B. M. Morrison, *Political Centers and Cultural Regions in Early Bengal*, Arizona, 1970, p. 168. This grant was issued in the 6th regnal year (AD1185) and records the grant of 89 *dronas* of land situated in *Kumarapurachaturaka* yielding 500 *Puranas*, in *Madhugirimandala*, in *Dakshinavithi* of *Uttara Radha* in *Kankagramabhukti* to *Brahmana Kuveradevasarman*.

²⁶ R. C. Majumdar, *History of Ancient Bengal*, Calcutta, 197, p. 14.

²⁷ N. K. Bhattasali, *Epigraphia Indica*, XVIII, p. 74-86.

²⁸ B. M. Morrison, *Political Centers and Cultural Regions in Early Bengal*, Arizona, 1970, p. 160-61. It was issued in his 8th regnal year records the purchase by Subhakitrti of 40 *dronas* of land and 1 *dronavapa* of *vastu* in *Kumbharapadraka* in *Keta* (?) *Kapadrika* which he then donated to *Damyasvamin* of the *Bharadvaja gotra*

²⁹ B. M. Morrison, *Political Centers and Cultural Regions in Early Bengal*, Arizona:UA, 1970, p. 161. It was issued in the 19th regnal year (c. 595-619AD) records the donation of the village of *Muhakumbharapadraka* by *Srisamanta maharaja Somadatta*, ruler of *Daṇḍabhukti* and *Utkala*, to *Bhaṭṭesvara* of the *Kasyapa gotra*

incorporated into Vardhamana bhukti as Dandabhukti mandala by the 2nd half of the 10th century, according to the copper plate inscription of Nayapala³⁰ and the copper plate inscriptions of the Kambojas³¹. Geographically, this *bhukti* corresponds to the southern part of the present day Medinipur district of West Bengal and the district of Baleswar in the present day Orissa.³²

Perhaps the name of Gauda is also associated with this sub-region. In its early part of history, Gauda consisted of the present day district of Murshidabad and the southern part of the Maldah district, Karnasuvarna represented by the ruin of Rajbadiganga, as its center.³³ Thus geographically the area of Gauda roughly overlaps with that of Uttara Radha.

Thus a part of the territory to the west of the Bhagirathi was known as Radha, to which the term Suhma was related³⁴. Originally the core areas of Vanga and Radha could have been separate from each other. Radha (including Subhabhumi or Suhma)³⁵ occupied an area to west of the Bhagirathi and north of a part of coastal Vanga to the west of the same river.³⁶

Tabaqat-i-Nasiri which belongs to a later period than the period of my research interest (2nd half of the 13th century AD), refers to the main two divisions of Bengal, viz, Radha and the Varendra region, on the eastern and the western sides of the Ganges respectively.³⁷ The Jaina Sutras describe the people of Radha as uncultured. The Acharanga Sutra describes Radha as a pathless country where the local people troubled the mendicants, including setting their dogs upon them.³⁸

SAMATATA:

The other sub- region i.e. Samatata is situated at the south- eastern margins of Bengal. Its northern part is constituted by Srihatta and the southern part by Harikela respectively. During the long reign of Srichandra (AD 925-AD 975) it was well integrated as a political unit to cover the whole of this sub-region. And though before the 6th century AD we find references to various administrative units, these however did not cover the whole of it. , Samatata is located on the eastern margins of Bengal. Srihatta and Harikela sub-regions are respectively located on its northern and southern fringes. Srihatta corresponds to the depression called Haor basin in present Sylhet division of Bangladesh and Harikela corresponding to the coastal regions of the present Chittagong district, Bangladesh.³⁹ Geographically the sub-region is a low-land constituted by a delta and floodplains made by the activities of the rivers of Surma and Meghna and the Tippera surface, with low hill range of Lalmai on its eastern end.⁴⁰ It is known from the inscriptions and the coins discovered from the area around Lalmai, that the area around it from the 8th century AD onwards was known as Pattikera. Moreover, in locating Samatata, the narrative of Yuan Chwang is helpful. It is stated in the narrative that the Chinese traveller proceeded from Kamarupa southwards, and after a journey of 1,200 or 1,300 *li* (6 *li* = 1 mile) reached the country

³⁰ Ibid. pp. 165. It was issued in his 13th regnal year (c. 1038-53 AD) and records the donation by the same of a village named Brhatchattivannain Dandabhukti mandala, in Vardhamana bhukti, to the Brahmana Pandita Asvathasman.

³¹ A. Bhattacharyya, *Historical Geography of Ancient and Early Medieval Bengal*, Calcutta, 1977, p. 82.

³² Ibid. pp.81-82.

³³ D.C. Sircar, *Select Inscriptions Bearing on Indian History and Civilization*, vol. 1, 2nd edition, Calcutta, 1965, pp.121-122.

³⁴ A. Bhattacharyya, *Historical Geography of Ancient and Early Medieval Bengal*, Calcutta, 1977, p. 45.

³⁵ A. Bhattacharyya, *Historical Geography of Ancient and Early Medieval Bengal*, Calcutta, 1977, p. 48.

³⁶ B.N. Mukherjee, Kharoshti and Kharoshti-Brahmi Inscriptions in West Bengal (India), *Indian Museum Bulletin*, Calcutta: 1990, p. 66.

³⁷ H. G. Raverty, ed. & trns., *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri of Minhaj-Uddin*, Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1881. pp. 584-85. It refers the Ganga to have formed the boundary between the 'Lal and the city of Lakhan-or' on one hand and the city of Barind and the city of Devikot on the other hand.

³⁸ Nitish Sengupta, New Delhi, 2001, p.18.

³⁹ A. Bhattacharyya, *Historical Geography of Ancient and Medieval Bengal*, Calcutta: Sanskrit Pushtak Bhandar, 1977, pp. 69-70.

⁴⁰ M.H. Rashid, pp 28-29.

of Samatata, and that this country was on the seaside and was low and moist, and was more than 3,000 *li* in circuit.⁴¹ Then, again, from Samatata the pilgrim journeyed west for over 900 *li* and reached *Tan-mo-lih-ti*⁴² which was decidedly Tamralipta, modern Tamruk in the Midnapur District. The Meghna constituted the boundary between Samatata and Vanga.⁴³

The sub-region of Samatata thus was located on the eastern margins of the delta and relatively less developed and settled than Pundra or Radha. Major expansion and proliferation of agrarian settlements became visible on account of the grants of landed property to groups of *brahmanas* and/or Buddhist monasteries, recorded in the various copper plate inscriptions. This process continued unabated in the following period i.e. from the Seventh to the Ninth Century AD.⁴⁴

The earliest reference of Samatata is found in the Allahabad Pillar inscription Of Samudragupta (340AD-76 AD) where it is mentioned as a frontier state (*Pratyanta-rajya*) along with Davaka, Kamarupa, Nepala and Karttrpura.⁴⁵ The *Brhatsanghita* (6th century AD) of Varahamihira distinguishes it from Vanga.⁴⁶ Samatata, as already mentioned was also referred to by Hiuen Tsang and also by I-tsing. Samatata is also mentioned in the Kailan Copper Plate Inscription⁴⁷ of Sridharanarata of Rata Dynasty. The copper Plate grant of Bhavadeva found at Devaparvata,⁴⁸ suggests that the capital of Samatata was

⁴¹Watters, *Yuan Chwang*, vol. II, pp. 188-89.

⁴²Ibid, p 18.

⁴³A. Bhattacharyya, *Historical Geography of Ancient and Medieval Bengal*, Calcutta: Sanskrit Pushtak Bhandar, 1977, pp. 69-70.

⁴⁴Eaton, pp 194-227.

⁴⁵*CI*, vol.3 (rev.) pp.213,1.22.

⁴⁶D.C Sircar, *Studies in the Geography of Ancient and Medieval India*, New Delhi: MBD, 1971, p.156.

⁴⁷*IHQ*, vol. XXIII, 1947, pp. 221-241.

S. I., 2, pp 36-40.

D.C Sircar, *Studies in the Geography of Ancient and Medieval India*, p. 149.

Banglapedia, the Kailan Copper Plate Inscription supplies a variety of interesting information regarding ancient Samatata, but not much about the dynasty itself or of its rule. Shridharana Rata, the second ruler of the dynasty, issued it in the 8th year of his reign from his capital Devaparvata. By this charter the king donated 25 *patakas* of land for charitable purposes: 4½ *patakas* to Buddhist organisations, 13 *patakas* to Brahmins and 7½ *patakas* to be retained (temporarily) by the king's minister. The lands lie in two *visayas*: the well-known Guptinatana (in or near Mainamati) and Patalyika, not yet identified. The description of the donated lands contain certain interesting place-names and local terms such as Dashagrama village, Advaganga river, Billa (=Bil), Naudanda (=Naudara), Nau-Shivabhoga, etc. They quite clearly indicate that some of these lands were situated in an area where water and boats played a significant role in the life of the people. The description agrees well with the geographical and topographical condition still prevailing in the areas round Kailan and indeed in most of the areas of central Comilla outside the Lalmai-Mainamati hills.

The inscription mentions the ruling king, Parama-Vaisnava Shridharana Rata, his father and predecessor and the founder of the dynasty Shri Jivadharana Rata, Yuvaraja Baladharana Rata, and the king's mother Bandhudevi. Both the Rata kings are styled as *Samatateshvara*. But except a few vague general eulogies, the record supplies no significant information about them or their kingdom.

However, the description of the capital and the river Ksiroda is graphic and picturesque. The vast capital city was centred round the royal residence, probably inside a hill-fort, and is aptly described as *sarvatobhadra* because of its four prominent gateways facing the four cardinal points. And the river Ksiroda encircled it like a moat, and 'elephants played in its waters and both of its banks were adorned with a cluster of boats'.

⁴⁸*Journal of Asiatic Society*, letters, vol. XVII, p.83.

B.M.Morrison, *Political Centers and Cultural Regions of early Bengal*, Arizona: UA, 1970, p.162.

D.C. Sircar, *Studies in the Geography of Ancient and Medieval India*, Delhi, 1971, pp. 150, where it is mentioned as the Tippera copper Plate Grant of Bhavadeva. It suggests that the capital of Samatata in the Eight and the following centuries was not at Karmanta but at the city of Devaparvata on the river Kshiroda. The grant was issued in the eight Century AD.

Devaparvata on the banks of the river Ksiroda.⁴⁹ Devaparvata is identified with the ruins lying on the southern end of the Lalmai-Mainamati hills.⁵⁰

As has already been discussed, Samatata was reduced to the status of a tributary polity by Samudragupta. By the end of the 6th century AD the area of Samatata appears to have been ruled by the king Vainyagupta which shows for the first time the spread of the Gupta authority to the eastern part of the delta.

Here the question of political geography of these sub-units is also raised. In this context, it can be said that the traditional geo-political sub-units of this sub-region are Radha, Suhma and Gauda⁵¹. In this context, Dilip, K., Chakrabarti⁵² has made three interesting suggestions. He suggests that Kotasur in the lower Mayurakshi valley was the ancient capital of the sub-unit of Gauda. He has made this conclusion in the light of the following two facts:

- 1) In the whole of the Gauda tract, there is not a single fortified early- historical settlement except Kotasur and
- 2) He further contends that ancient Gauda must have included chunk of modern Birbhum also and it can be inferred from the traditional linkages between the Kandi area of Murshidabad and the Mayurakshi area of the neighbouring district of Birbhum and if so, then the ancient capital of Gauda must have been situated at Kotasur.

Chakrabarti has further contended that Mangalkot in the junction of the Kunnur and the Ajay was the capital of northern Radha, whereas Pokharna on the Damodar was the capital of southern Radha. According to him Tamluk was the capital of Suhma, situated perhaps on the Midnapur coastal tract and parts of Hooghly.

The distributional pattern of the sites of the early phase of the history of Bengal is interesting. Noticeably these sites had a specific geographic spread. These sites are concentrated mostly in the Northern Bengal, the Ganga –Bhagirathi Delta and the Radha region. In the case of the Radha region, its situation was such that it is both geo-ecologically within the deltaic region and also at the same time had geographical proximity with the Chotanagpur plateau as a resource base. This region can be said as the nucleus of Neolithic-Chalcolithic culture phase (1800B.C. – 800 B.C.) in Bengal and also ‘represent the convergence of the attempts to exploit and utilize local resources’.⁵³

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⁴⁹The river Ksiroda is identified with the dried up river bed of modern Khira or Khirani which flows by the eastern side of the Mainamati hills and skirts their southern end near the Candimuda peak where another branch of the river which flows by the western side of the hill meets it. The southern end of the Mainamati hill is thus surrounded by the erstwhile Ksiroda river where Devaparvata seems to have been situated.

⁵⁰N.K.Bhattachali, *IHQ*, XXII, pp.169-71

⁵¹ Dilip, K. Chakrabarti, *Archaeological –Geography of the Ganga Plain: the lower and middle Ganga*, Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001, p.272.

⁵² Ibid. p. 272.

⁵³ Amita Ray, ‘Urbanization in Bengal’, *PIHC*, 48th session, 1987, Goa, p, 20.

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