

PREFACE

In a bid to standardize higher education in the country, the University Grants Commission (UGC) has introduced Choice Based Credit System (CBCS) based on five types of courses viz. *core, generic, discipline specific general elective, ability and skill enhancement* for graduate students of all programmes at Honours level. This brings in the semester pattern, which finds efficacy in sync with credit system, credit transfer, comprehensive continuous assessments and a graded pattern of evaluation. The objective is to offer learners ample flexibility of choose from a wide gamut of courses, as also to provide them lateral mobility between various educational institutions in the country where they can carry their acquired credits. I am happy to note that the University has been recently accredited by National Assessment and Accreditation Council of India (NAAC) with grade "A".

UGC (Open and Distance Learning Programmes and Online Programmes) Regulations, 2020 have mandated compliance with CBCS for U. G. programmes for all the HEIs in this mode. Welcoming this paradigm shift in higher education, Netaji Subhas Open University (NSOU) has resolved to adopt CBCS from the academic session 2021-22 at the Under Graduate Degree Programme level. The present syllabus, framed in the spirit of syllabi recommended by UGC, lays due stress on all aspects envisaged in the curricular framework of the apex body on higher education. It will be imparted to learners over the six semesters of the Programme.

Self Learning Materials (SLMs) are the mainstay of Student Support Services (SSS) of an Open University. From a logistic point of view, NSOU has embarked upon CBCS presently with SLMs in English/Bengali. Eventually, the English version SLMs will be translated into Bengali too, for the benefit of learners. As always, all of our teaching faculties contributed in this process. In addition to this we have also requisitioned the services of best academics in each domain in preparation of the new SLMs. I am sure they will be of commendable academic support. We look forward to proactive feedback from all stakeholders who will participate in the teaching-learning based on these study materials. It has been a very challenging task well executed, and I congratulate all concerned in the preparation of these SLMs.

I wish the venture a grand success.

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Vice-Chancellor

Netaji Subhas Open University
Under Graduate Degree Programme
Choice Based Credit System (CBCS)
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Eastern India (With Special Reference to Bengal) : (Earliest to 1203/1204)
Course Code : GE-HI-11

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**Netaji Subhas
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**UG : History
(HHI)**

**Eastern India (With Special Reference to Bengal) :
(Earliest to 1203/1204)
Course Code : GE-HI-11**

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**Eastern India (With Special Reference to Bengal) :
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Course Code : GE-HI-11

Module I

Ancient Bengal : Geography, Regional Subdivision and Population Structure

Unit-1 □ Eastern India : Geography

Structure

- 1.0 Objective**
- 1.1 Introduction**
- 1.2 Location**
- 1.3 Physiographical Classification**
- 1.4 River Systems**
- 1.5 Soil**
- 1.6 Vegetation and agriculture**
- 1.7 Climate**
- 1.8 Conclusion**
- 1.9 Model Questions**
- 1.10 Suggested Readings**

1.0 Objective

- The objective of this unit is to study the broad geographical and ecological setting of eastern India.
- The learners will study the landscape, the riverine system, and the ecological perspectives of the eastern region of India.
- The present unit will also help the learners to understand the vegetation and agricultural condition of eastern India.
- The climate of eastern India will also be a theme of study of the present unit.

1.1 Introduction

History and geography are closely related two disciplines. Geographical factors have important influences on the various cultural aspects on any region. Therefore it is needless to say that the geographical environment of ancient Bengal had

immense influence in making of the socio economic politico cultural scenario of ancient Bengal. According to Beajeau-Gariner, 'A region is the spatial unit distinct from the space that surrounds it'. Most of the geographers found this fundamental constituent of a region in Bengal and declared Bengal as a definite geographical region in the subcontinent of South Asia, consisting of Ganga and Brahmaputra Delta with the very specific and distinct geographical contours and features. The structural evolution of the Bengal basin with the extensive well-defined old allusion land tracts, comparatively new alluvial land, the largest delta of the world and heavy monsoons are the landmark geographical features of the region. The flatness of the region, bounded by the Rajmahal hills on the North West and the Lalmai and Chittagong ranges on the South East, creates a low lying land, gradually sloping from the high plateau of the North towards the Bay of Bengal. Bengal is located on the eastern frontier of the Indian subcontinent and a 'transition zone' with a comparatively narrow land bridge between South Asia and mainland of South East Asia. The many rivers and their tributaries, distinctive water bodies and climatic condition add new dimensions to the geographical features of the land of Bengal.

1.2 Location

Bengal lies between 20°34" N and 26°38" N latitudes and between 88°01" and 92°41" E longitudes convening 143,998 square km and comprising, according to the recent estimates, a population of about 110 million. The average density of population per square km has been estimated to be 714 but it should be more now. It is bounded on the east by the Indian states of 'Assam' and 'Tripura' and on the south east by the Indian state of West Bengal and on the north by the Indian states of Meghalaya and Assam. To the South of Bangladesh lies the Bay of Bengal. Before 1947 it was the largest province and the eastern most part of the British India. The province of Bengal has the most varied environmental condition.

1.3 Physiographical Classification

The term physiography denotes the scientific study of the combination of the geological material in which particular kinds of soil have formed and the landscape in which they occur. In terms of physiography the entire region of present day West Bengal and Bangladesh or former Bengal province of the British India can be

divided into several sub regions and units. B.L.C. Johnson divided this region into nine physiographical units. Ohkspate divided Bengal into three major parts like the northern para delta – the Ganges and Brahmaputra doab, the eastern margin and the delta proper in the South. With the development of the study of physiography more detail physiographical classification has been done by the scholars in this region. Nowadays it is almost divided into 24 sub regions and about 54 units on the basis of physical features and drainage patterns. Some of the important physiographical units are as follows :

1. Old Himalayan piedmont plain
2. Tista flood plain
3. Karotoya-Bengali flood plain
4. Lower Atrai basin
5. Lower purnabhava floodplain
6. Brahmaputra flood plain
7. Ganges river flood plain
8. Ganges tidal flood plain
9. Gopalganj – Khulna bils
10. Arial Bil
11. Meghna river flood plain
12. Meghna Estuarine flood plain
13. Surma-Kusyara flood plain
14. Northern and eastern piedmont plains
15. Chittagong coastal plain
16. St. martin's coral island
17. Barind tract
18. Madhupur tract
19. Northern and eastern hills
20. Akhaura terrace

Among these regions most important are the flood plains of Tista, Brahmaputra, Ganges and the tidal flood plain of the river Ganges. Professor H.C Roy Chowdhury tried to compare the physical division of Bengal region with the politico historical divisions of the same. According to him “the hand of nature has split up the province into four grand divisions which fairly correspond to its major political divisions in historic epochs. North of the main branch of the Ganges, now known as the river Padma, and west of the river Brahmaputra, lays the extensive region which embraces the modernRajshahi Division and the district of Coochbihar. The most important part of this area constituted the ancient land of Pundravardhana of which Varendri was a well-known district (mandala). West of another branch of the river Ganges, namely the Bhagirathi or the Hooghly, stretches the great Burdwan Division—the Vardhamanabhukti of the ancient times. A considerable part of the area was adjacent to the flourishing territory of ancient Radha. Between theriver Bhagirathi, the river Padma, the lower reaches of the Brahmaputra and the estuary of the Meghna lies the central region of Bengal embracingthe bulk of the Presidency Division and a considerable portion of the Dacca Division. This area was known to Pliny and Ptolemy as the territory of the Gangaridai, and to Kalidasa as the land of the Vangas who were specially noted for their skill in handling boats. Beyond the Meghna in the east stretches the Chittagong Division within whose embrace are supposed to lie the buried remains of the royal seat of Samatata. It has to be noted that the division of ancient Bengal referred to above at times transgress the limits set by the nature.

1.4 River Systems

Bengal is the land of rivers since ancient times. In fact this may be regarded as the main features of the territory of Bengal. The most important two rivers among almost 230 major and minor rivers of this territory are the river Ganges and the river Brahmaputra. The river Tista is also very important. Since ancient times Tista is a major source of water for a number of minor rivers and channels of north Bengal. In ancient times another important river of the northern region was Karatoya. But now it is almost dried.

The river Ganges formed the most important and elaborate drainage system of Bengal originated from Gomukha glacier in the Himalayas the river flowed eastward and enters the province of Bengal of the point where the low line Rajmahal hills almost touch its waters. It is not a mere accident that the famous capital cities like

Gauda, Lakshmanavati, Pandua should have grown up in the neighborhood of this salient. According to Matsya Purana the river Ganges flow through Rajmahal, Santalbhum, Chhotanagpur, Manbhum, Dhalbhum, Brahmatata or northern Rarh, Vanga and Tampralipti. But later by the 18th century CE this course have been changed. The main branch of the river Ganges or Bhagirathi is known as the river Padma. This river flowed more eastward. At first the river Padma was not the main stream. By the beginning of the 16th century CE other stream of the river Bhagirathi has shrunk to a very shallow stream. Thus the other stream known as the river Padma became the main stream of the river Ganges. The river Padma also changed its course from time to time. The river Brahmaputra and the Meghna joined with the river Padma in its lower course.

Most of the rivers of north Bengal generally flowed southward and joined into the river Ganges and the river Brahmaputra. Among these the river Tista, Mahananda, Torsa, Koshi etc. are very important. The river Tista is comprised of three big channels – Karatoya, Purnavaba and Atrai.

The land of Bengal can also be regarded as the land of rivers. This is the most important geographical feature of this land. The fertile agricultural bed of Bengal is the creation of these rivers and channels. But at the same time the frequent changes in the course of these rivers have been responsible for the ruin of many old places. Sometimes it is done by washing them of and sometimes by making them unhealthy and inaccessible. Professor H.C Roy Chowdhury gives a detail description of the role of river system in the distraction of old places. According to him the shifting of the beds of the Koshriver gave rise to the swamps and flood that contributed to the ruin of the city of Gauda. The capricious Padmariver has swept away so many cities and villages within living memory, that we can well imagine the devastating effect of this and other rivers on the province of Bengal. In addition to the frequent shifting of courses, the vast deposit of silt by the rivers in the deltaic region, between the river Bhagirathi and the river Padma, has been a potent instrument in changing its physical aspect to a considerable extent. For the deposit of silt constantly raises the level of land in some areas and makes the other regions comparatively lower and water logged. The vast Sundarbans area in the delta offers an intriguing problem. Many hold the view that the Sundarbans had once been a population tract but were depopulated by the ravages of nature and the depredations of marauding peoples like the Maghs and the Pastugere.

1.5 Soil

It is already mentioned earlier that the land of Bengal is a gift of its extended river system. Therefore, it is quite natural that the soils of Bengal are mostly made of Alluvium. In terms of physiography the soil types can be divided into three broad units such as flood plain soil, hill soil and terrace soil. The flood plain soils are further divided into 13 categories, such as, (1) Calcareous alluvium; (2) non-Calcareous alluvium; (3) Calcareous brown flood plain soil; (4) Calcareous grey flood plain soil; (5) Calcareous dark grey flood plain soil; (6) non-Calcareous grey flood plain soil; (7) non-Calcareous brown flood plain soil; (8) non-Calcareous dark flood plain soil; (9) Black terrain soil; (10) acid basin clays; (11) acid Sulphate soil; (12) Peat; and (13) grey Piedmont soil. The terrace soil can be divided into following categories – (1) shallow red brown terrace soil; (2) deep red brown terrace soil; (3) brown mottled terrace soil; (4) shallow grey terrace soil; (5) deep grey terrace soil; and (6) grey valley soils. Another important category is the artificial or the manmade land. Sometimes soil raised artificially on cultivation platforms. This is known as the artificial land.

1.6 Vegetation and agriculture

The fertile lands of Bengal possess varieties of natural vegetation. The most common trees are mango, jackfruit, banyan, shirish, palm, bamboo and coconut. Other than these Teak, Mehgani, Shaal etc. and the Mangroves like Sundari, Goran and Geonya are also very important trees. The agriculture of Bengal is primarily revolved round the cultivation of three main varieties of rice namely Borrow, Aus and Aman. Sugarcane is another important agricultural product Bengal.

1.7 Climate

Bengal belongs to tropical climate. The temperature begins to rise from about the end of the month of March and reach in its zenith during the months of May and June. Temperature goes on declining from October to December. The months of December and January are the coolest period. Traditionally the season cycle of Bengal is divided into 6 seasons such as summer, monsoon, autumn, late autumn or

dewy, winter and spring. Annual rainfall of Bengal ranges from 60 to 200 inches. The average of the annual relative humidity ranges from 80 per cent to 61 per cent.

1.8 Conclusion

The territory of Bengal lacks some of the extra ordinary varieties of physical aspects for which the great subcontinent of India is justly famous. But in spite of these varieties of physical aspect of Bengal it made it unique. The snow-capped peaks with cold hued crests of Darjeeling, a vast reverie plain which forms the focus of three great river systems where the country widens out into a panorama of irrigated fertility, of swamps and flats in the south cut up by hundreds of coves sand creeks, once the “Royal throne of Kings” now the residence of the lord of the jungles are enough reasons to take pride.

1.9 Model Questions

1. Write a note on the ancient geography of eastern India.
2. Write briefly about the river system of ancient Bengal.

1.10 Suggested Readings

1. Amitabha Bhattacharyya, *Historical Geography of Ancient and Early Medieval Bengal*, Calcutta, 1977.
2. Bimala Charan Law, *Historical Geography of Ancient India*, Delhi, 1984.
3. Dilip K Chakrabarti, *Archaeological Geography of the Ganga Plain: the Lower and the Middle Ganga*, Delhi, 2001.

Unit-2 □ Historical divisions of Early Bengal

Structure

- 2.0 Objective**
- 2.1 Introduction**
- 2.2 A brief survey of sources**
- 2.3 Early Politico-Geographical divisions of Bengal region**
- 2.4 Pundravardhana**
- 2.5 Rarh**
- 2.6 Vanga**
- 2.7 Gauda**
- 2.8 Samatata**
- 2.9 Minor Sub-divisions**
- 2.10 Conclusion**
- 2.11 Model Questions**
- 2.12 Suggested Readings**

2.0 Objective

- The objective of this unit is to study the politico-geographical divisions of early period of Bengal's history.
- The sources of early Bengal's history will be studied.
- The present unit will discuss the five major politico-geographical divisions of ancient Bengal apart from the minor subdivisions :
 - Pundravardhan
 - Rarh
 - Vanga
 - Gauda
 - Samatata

2.1 Introduction

It is indeed a difficult task to define the geographical territory of ancient Bengal as there was no 'Bengal' up to 11th century CE. But for easy convenience it would be better to take the territory of undivided British province of Bengal as our area of discussion. Prof. H. C. Raychaudhuri described the area of Bengal province in the British India as the territory stretches from the Himalayas in the north to the Bay of Bengal in the south, and from the Brahmaputra in the east to the lower reaches of the Suvarnarekha in the west. The early Bengal as an entity of historical geographical study in the pre-11th century CE era consist of many units and sub-units of which five were more prominent. These five units are Pundravardhana, Radha, Vanga, Gauda and Samatata. There were many other units, co-units and sub units also.

2.2 A brief survey of sources

There is no mention of any of the units or sub-units of the ancient land of Bengal in any Vedic hymns. The earliest mention of the name Vanga can be found in *Aitareya Aranyaka*. The expression '*Vangavagadhah*' indicates the peoples of Vanga and Magadha who according to the *Aitareya Aranyaka* were guilty of transgression. *Aitareya Brahmana* also mentions Pundras as the peoples who lived beyond the frontiers of Aryandom and were classed as Dasyus. First clear mentions of Vanga occur in the ancient Epics and the Dharmasutras. Most of the old Dharmasutras like Bodhayana, also considered Vanga as the region inhabited by the peoples who belonged to inferior culture which lay outside the pale of Vedic culture.

A changed view can be traced in the Epics. *Mahabharata* shows a clear picture of eastward Aryan migration process. Here Bhima, the second eldest brother of the Pandavas, undertakes a decisive campaign in the land of the present-day Bengal. In *Ramayana*, the peoples of Vanga are no longer shunned as impure barbarians. Rather they entered into intimate political relations with high-born aristocrats of Ayodhya. In Jain and early Buddhist texts regular mentions of Vanga and Pundra can be found. Later historical texts like the Greek records, *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, *Milinda Panha* and others contain scattered references of Bengal region. From the 4th century CE onwards some epigraphic records also found which enable us to trace more clearly the politico-geographical divisions and administrative units of Bengal.

2.3 Early Politico-Geographical divisions of Bengal region

As I have mentioned earlier that although there were many politico-geographical units and sub-units in the region we generally regard as Bengal, but the most prominent of them were five units. These are Pundravardhana, Radha, Vanga, Gauda and Samatata. A brief description of these units and other smaller units are given below.

2.4 Pundravardhana

Later Vedic texts and the Epics contain some scattered mentions of the Pundras and most of these texts describe them as the inhabitants of Pundravardhana – a land situated at the east of Monghyr. However these texts could not provide us any clear picture of this region. The Mahasthangarh Fragmentary stone inscription may be regarded for providing the earliest clear reference to Pundravardhana as a political division during the Mauryan period. On the basis of epigraphic records and other texts the territory of the Pundras can be placed in north Bengal. Most of the scholars suggest Mahasthangarh as its capital.

The political history of Pundravardhana is also not clear to us. Since Mahasthangarh inscription of the Mauryas mention about Pundanagala, which is the Prakritized form of Pundranagara of the Sanskrit records, therefore it confirms the identification of Pundranagara with Mahasthangarh and indicates that the Pundra region formed an administrative division within the Mauryanempire.

Further epigraphical references begin to occur from the Gupta period onwards. The expansion of Magadhanempire during the Gupta periodwitnessed some changes in the territorial organization of the areas subsumed under the empire. The region corresponding to Bengal could not escape the changes brought about by the expanding influence of the imperial Guptas. The contents of the MehrauliPiller inscription of Chandragupta I, the Allahabad Piller inscription of Samudragupta have been interpretedby scholars to suggest that this region was part of Gupta empire. The Damodarpur copper plate of Kumaragupta I, dated c. 448 CE, refers to the bhukti or province of Pundravardhana which was important enough to have a governor appointed by the Emperor himself. The Paharpur copper plate of Kumaragupta I also refers to Pundravardhana and its city-council, which is dated c. 479 CE. Budhagupta's second Damodarpur copper plate also refers to Jayadatta, the viceroy of the province

of Pundravardhana. Another Gupta inscription dated about 543 CE refers the provincial governors of Pundravardhana as Devabhattacharaka which means the son and the favourite of the Emperor. In some Gupta inscriptions traces of many visaya can also be found within the bhukti of Pundravardhana. In the Pala-Sena inscriptions Pundravardhanabhukti includes a large number of administrative units and sub-units. Many of these administrative units yet not been clearly identified. But there is no doubt that the bhukti was a much larger province during the Gupta period as well as the Pala-Senaera. Although there is no clear evidence of the extension of the bhukti but it seems that virtually the whole of modern Bangladesh fell within the ancient Pundravardhanabhukti, apparently from the Pala-Sena period onwards, if not earlier.

In the inscriptions of Bengal the name Pundravardhana was changed into Paundravardhana in the early part of the 12th century, when it occurs first in the Manahali inscription of Madan Pal and remained in use till the end of the Sena rule. The Rajatarangini of Kalhana mentions Pundravardhana as the capital of Gauda which is also proved by a reference in Purushottam's lexicon dated about 11th century CE. By the 3rd quarter of the 12th century CE, the city of Pundranagara lost its importance as the ruling Sena kings shifted their capital to Gauda. Towards the end of the 13th century CE or the beginning of the 14th century CE Pundravardhana region was occupied by the Muslim invaders.

2.5 Rarh

One of the most important division of ancient Bengal region was Rarh. Broadly it was divided into two parts viz. DakshinRarh or south Rarh and Uttar Rarh or north Rarh. By the end of the 6th century CE this region was divided into several smaller regions like Kankagram-bhukti, Vardhamana-bhukti, Danda-bhukti etc. By around 9th century CE previously mentioned south and north divisions replaces apparently the older segmentation of the area into Vajjabhumi and Subbhabhumi.

The southern part of Rarh-bhumi included present day Howrah, Hooghly, Burdwan districts. The northern part included present day Murshidabad and Dinajpur districts. The Chola inscriptions refer UttaraRarh region as Uttiralabam. Belava and Naihati grants also mentioned UttaraRarh and these records include it within the Vardhaman-bhukti. During the reign of Laxmanasena it formed part of the Kanakagram-bhukti. Danda-bhukti was an ancient and medieval territory spread approximately what are now Bankura, Hooghly, Paschim Midnapore and Purva Midnapore districts. This fell within the territory of Dakshin Rarh. Usually the river

Ajay regarded as the border line between north and south Rarh. Some scholars prefer taking the river Khari as the border line between the two parts. The Jain records mentioned Kotivarsha as a city in northern Rarh. Scholars have identified this place with Bangarh of Dinajpur district. This clearly indicates the northern limit of the division.

According to the twin Midnapore copper plates of Sasanka Dandabhukti of southern Rarh was an independent feudatory state Maharaja Somdatta and Mahapratihara Shubhakirti were its feudatory rulers under Sasanka. Although *Digvijaya-Prakasha* restricts the area of dakshin Rarh within the territory lying north of the river Damodar but epigraphical references clearly show that the southern boundary may have reached the river Rupnarayana and the western boundary may have extended beyond the river Damodar and stretched upto Arambagh subdivision.

During the reign of Lakshmanasena northern Rarh was attached to the Kankagram-bhukti. It is still not very clear that from which region the bhukti derives its name. Some scholars suggested Kankajol near Rajmahal as the original land of the ancient Kankagram. Some scholars recognise it as the Kogram village near Bharatpur in the district of Murshidabad. Some scholars also suggest that the bhukti of Kankagram represents the old kingdom of Gauda – Karnasubarna mentioned by Varahamihir, Banabhatta and Huen Tsang. Kankagram-bhukti was further divided into many administrative sub-units called vithi.

During the Pala Sena era the Rarh region mostly included within the territory of Vardhamana-bhukti. The Pala Sena records mentioned the main sub-division of the Vardhamana-bhukti as – Danda-bhukti Mandal, Pashchim Khatika, Dakshin Rarh and Uttara Rarh Mandal. Thus the territory of Rarh region changed from time to time. By the end of the 13th century some of these regions also came under the pale of the Muslim rule.

2.6 Vanga

The earliest reference of Vanga is found in *Aitareya Aranyaka*, where it is mentioned as the land of the non Aryans. Ancient Epics and the *Dharmasutras* mention several times the name of Vanga. According to *Bodhayana Dharmasutra* Vanga situated at the outside of the pale of Vedic Aryan culture. But some incidences mentioned in the Epic *Ramayana* show a tendency towards the incorporation of the Vanga people within the Aryan culture.

Apart from literary sources it is mentioned in the Mehrauli inscription of king Chandra, records of the Chalukyas of Vatapi, Kamayuli copper plate grant of Vaitya Deva, and various grant records of the Pala kings and Sena kings are important inscriptional sources.

It is indeed a difficult task to separate references of Vanga as ethnic name and a geographical sub-division of a particular land. One should keep it in mind that the land of Vanga of the ancient records is not synonymous to the geographical territory of present day Bengal. Kalidasa in the *Digvijaya* section of the *Raghuvamsham* places the region amidst the strain of river Ganges. The western boundary of Vanga probably extended beyond the Hooghly to the river Kamsabati or Kansai (Kapisa) in the district of Midnapore. Some scholars suggested that during the Pala-Sena era the territory of Vanga sub-division was curtailed and formed a new sub-division called *Vardhamana-bhukti*. There is a confusion among the scholars regarding the existence of *Tamralipti* within the territory of Vanga. According to *Prajnapana*, a Jain Upanga, *Tamralipti* was a port-city of Vanga. But probably during the Pala-Sena era it could not have extended as far as *Tamralipti* as the region beyond the river *Bhagirathi* now formed part of *Vardhaman-bhukti*. *Kamayuli* copper plate grant mention 'Anuttaravang'. Scholars interpret it as south Vanga which means there by a division of Vanga into two parts – north and south. According to H. C. Raychaudhuri, 'the two divisions of Vanga implying *Vaidya Deva's* grant may have corresponded roughly to the two *bhagas* of the some territories mention in the latter Sena inscription namely the *Vikramapura-bhag* and *Navya*'.

In some inscriptional records another term also found – the term *Vangala*. *Vanga* and *Vangala* are obviously related with each other. According to the *Tirumala* rock inscription of *Rajendra Chola Bangladesha* was located immediately after *Takkanaladam* which means southern *Rarh*. Using this reference R. C. Majumdar concluded that there is no doubt that *Bangladesh* refers to southern Bengal. Some scholars argued that *Vanga* and *Vangala* denoted are two separate tracts of land. For them *Vangala* was probably identical with *Chandradwip* which often identified with *Barishal*. It may be included some parts of present day *Noakhali* and *Khulna* region. According to A. K. M. Yakub Ali, 'like other *Janapadas*, the territorial jurisdiction of *Vanga*, with the change of political power, extended at times beyond its boundaries, or contracted within its limits. As such, it is hardly possible to determine its exact boundaries. But the sources at our disposal enable us to hypothesize that at least in the 12th century AD, *Vanga*.... generally corresponded to the eastern and southern

Bengal, lying on the eastern side of the river Bhagirathi, and comprising mainly, as it appears, of modern Chittagong and Dacca divisions’.

Thus the geographical definition of Vanga changed from time to time. Earlier it has more extended territory but gradually it lost some of its regions due to the emergence of more smaller administrative sub-units. By 13th century the Muslim rulers conquered this region established their hegemony.

2.7 Gauda

The emergence of Gauda kingdom marked an important benchmark in the history of Bengal. But the region has a much early history. Panini in his grammar book *Ashtadhyayi* refers Gaudapura. Kautilya also mentioned the rich products of Gaudadesa in his *Arthashastra*. This was known to Vatsyana, the author of the *Kamasutra*; Kalidasa and many others.

According to Varahamihir Gauda was different from the other parts of Bengal. *Bhabhisiya-Purana* mentions Gauda as a region located between the north of Burdwan and south of the river Padma. Varahamihir in his *Vrihatsamhita* distinguish Gaudaka from particularly Pundra or Pundravardhana-bhukti, Tamraliptika or Tamralipti, Vanga Samatata, and Vardhamana-bhukti.

Gauda as a kingdom emerged during the decaying phase of the Guptas. Sasanka was the most prominent ruler under whose reign Gauda reached in its zenith. It is generally believed that Sasanka has established his capital city at Karnasuvarna located near Rangamati, around 12 miles south of present day Murshidabad. Most of the 7th century CE-writers describe the kingdom of Gauda-Karnasuvarna. But AnarghaRaghava, a late 8th century Kavya written by Murari mentions Champa as the capital city of Gauda instead of Karnasuvarna. Some scholars argued that Champa is probably identical with Champa-nagari which stood on the left bank of the river Damodar near the city of present day Burdwan.

During the rule of the Pala kings Gauda came under the pale of the Pala empire. At first the Pala rulers commonly obtain the title of Vangapati. But the later Pratihara and Rashtrakuta records refer the Pala kings as the Gaudeswara. Probably from the later regnal days of Dharmapala the title Gaudeswara became the official style of the reigning emperors. Even earlier Gauda and Vanga are sometimes mentioned side by side but political union under the same sovereign ruler styled both Vangapati and

Gaudeswara was first making them interchangeable terms. Around the 12th century CE the Gaudarashtra is said to have included Rarh and Vurishreshthika (probably Vurshut on the banks of Damodar in the Hooghly-Howrah districts). The Jain records of the 13th and 14th centuries mention that Gauda included Lakshmanavati in the present Malda district. Sometimes the term Gauda used in a very extended sense. For example the expression Pancha-Gauda is taken to embrace besides Gauda proper the countries known as Sarasvata (Eastern Punjab, Kanyakubja, Gangetic Doab), Mithila (north Bihar) and Utkal (northern Odissa). During the early Muslim rule Gauda became synonymous to Lakshmanavati of Malda district. Gradually it lost its importance and incorporated within the territory of Subeh-Bengala.

2.8 Samatata

Samatata region is often identified with present day Tripura-Noakhali region. But this location is also not beyond doubt. The punch-marked coins and other archaeological evidences like Wari-Bateshwar ruins indicate that Samatata was a province of the Mauryan empire. The Allahabad pillar inscription of Samudragupta and other later records of the imperial Gupta rulers describe Samatata as a tributary state. The Vrihatsamhita of Varahamihir distinguishes Samatata from Vanga. Famous archaeologist Dilip Kumar Chakravarti considers Wari-Bateshwar to be a part of the trans-Meghna region. In his words, 'it appears that Wari-Bateshwar belongs to the Samatata tract. Till now this is the only early historic site reported from this tract, but the very fact that it existed as early as the mid-5th century BCE in this part of Bangladesh shows the geographical unit of Samatata, although inscriptional record documented it in the 4th century CE, has a much earlier antiquity which touches the Mahajanapadas period. Secondly, on the basis of the fact that Wari-Bateshwar is a fortified settlement, we argue that in addition to its character as a manufacturing and trading centre, it was also an administrative centre and most likely to be the ancient capital of the Samatata region'.

It is generally believed that during the declining phase of the Mauryan empire the eastern part of Bengal became the flourishing state of Samatata. But any satisfactory information regarding any rulers of this state has yet not been obtained. After the decline of the imperial Guptas two independent dynasties flourished in this region. These are Khadga dynasty and Chandra dynasty. The Khadga rulers were originally from Vanga region. According to the Chinese record Khadga rulers

established their capital at Karmantavasaka. This city is generally identified with Badkanta near Kumilla and Tripura. The most important ruler of this dynasty was Rajabhata.

The Chandra rulers were ruled over Samatata, Vanga and Arakan region. They were the followers of Buddhism. As a result of this Samatata region became a flourishing centre of Buddhism during their rule. Maynamati was another important religious and administrative centre of the Chandra rulers.

Samatata continued to play an important role in the local history of Bengal until the Muslim conquest of Bengal in the 13th century.

2.9 Minor Sub-divisions

Apart from the above mentioned five divisions of the territory of Bengal there are many other minor sub-divisions existed in different times. Mention may be made of Harikela, Chandradwipa, Tamralipta, Suvarnavithi etc. Harikela is often mentioned as a country in some 7th century literature. Chinese traveller I-Tsing mentioned it as the eastern most limit of east India. *Karpuramanjari* and *Arya Manjusri Mulakalpa* mention Harikela as a distinct entity. According to Prof. Dilip Kumar Chakravarti Harikela is probably synonymous with the Chittagong area including Sylhet. It was dissociated from Vanga throughout the ages.

2.10 Conclusion

In conclusion it may be said that the territory inhabited by the Bengali speaking people stretches from the Himalayas in north to the Bay of Bengal in the south. The geo-political boundaries of Bengal changed from time to time. In fact there was no 'Bengal' in the ancient time. The region what today known as Bengal was divided into several units and sub-units. Among these Gauda, Vanga, Samatata, Pundra, Rarhetc were very important. Other than these there were many minor divisions like Harikela, Chandradwipa, Barendra, Suvarnavithi, Vardhamana-bhukti, Kankagrama-bhukti etc. Since the ancient period Tamralipta got importance as a port-city. It played a very important role in the maritime trade during the ancient and early medieval periods. Thus a picture of a prosperous territory can clearly be assumed from the various archaeological and literary references on the ancient Bengal.

2.11 Model Questions

1. Write an essay on the sub-regions of ancient Bengal.
2. Write a short note on Pundravardhanabhukti.
3. What are the most important sub-regions of ancient Bengal ? Write a note on Samatata-Harikela region of ancient Bengal.
4. Write a short note on Rarh.
5. Write a short note on Vanga.
6. Write a short note on Gauda.

2.12 Suggested Readings

1. Dilip K Chakrabarti, *Ancient Bangladesh*, Dhaka, 1992.
2. R. C. Majumdar (ed), *History of Bengal*, vol. I, Dhaka, 1985.

Unit-3 □ The Population Structure

Structure

- 3.0 Objective**
- 3.1 Introduction**
- 3.2 Ethnicity**
- 3.3 Caste structure**
- 3.4 Conclusion**
- 3.5 Model Question**
- 3.6 Suggested Readings**

3.0 Objective

- The objective of this unit is to study the population structure of early Bengal,
- The first major aspect, which will be covered, is the ethnicity of the people of Bengal in ancient era.
- The second major aspect, which will come under discussion, is the caste system and its structural formation.

3.1 Introduction

Bengal is the land of Bengali speaking people who generally identified as the Bengalis. As in the previous chapter I have already mention that it is indeed a difficult task to define the geographical territory of ancient Bengal as there was no ‘Bengal’ up to 11th century CE. But for easy convenience it would be better to take the territory of undivided British province of Bengal as our area of discussion. The British Indian province of Bengal and the territory inhabited by the Bengali speaking people are not the same. The territory inhabited by the Bengali speaking people stretches far beyond the political boundaries of the present day West Bengal and Bangladesh or even the province of Bengal of British India.

Ethnically the Bengalis are an Indo Aryan native to the Bengal region in South

Asia, specifically in the eastern part of the Indian subcontinent, presently divided between Bangladesh and the Indian states of West Bengal, Tripura, Barak Valley of Assam, who speak Bengali, a language from the Indo Aryan language family.

Bengalis are the 3rd largest ethnic group in the world. Apart from Bangladesh and the Indian states of West Bengal, Tripura, Assam's Barak Valley, Bengali-majority populations also reside in India's union territory of Andaman & Nicobar Islands as well as Chittagong hill tract of present day Bangladesh, with significant populations in Arunachal Pradesh, Delhi, Chattisgarh, Jharkhand, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Uttarakhand.

3.2 Ethnicity

Although nowadays we usually generalise the people of Bengal as the Bengalis but ethnologically Bengalis are heterogeneous group divided into various caste and ethnic groups. Vedic literature indicates that the primitive inhabitants of Bengal region were different in race and culture from the Vedic Aryans. The detail history of the different races that settled in Bengal since the primitive times is difficult to trace. Broadly the people of Bengal can be classified into two distinguished elements such as the population consisting of the primitive tribes like the Kols, Sabaras, Pulindas, Hadi, Dom, Chandala and others designated as the Mlechchhas; and the other consisting of the higher classes of people which come within the framework of the caste system. The former group are the representatives of the earliest inhabitants of Bengal and the majority of them were probably descended from the non-Aryan people who referred to as the Nishadas in the Vedic literature. Anthropologically they are known as the 'Austro Asiatic' or 'Austriac' people. These primitive people formed the substratum of the population of Bengal but gradually were submerged by new waves of people with a high culture and civilisation so that ultimately they touched only the outer fringe of the so called Bengali society while the latter formed its very basis and foundation.

3.3 Caste structure

Aryanisation of the subcontinent led to the tendency of resolving the varna divisions into a hierarchical order. Theoretically hierarchy was determined on the basis of the order of precedence of the qualities that the components of the different varnas exhibited in their character and actions. For instance, the Brahmans as the custodians of sattva were considered to be the purest of all. In other words, the

Brahmans were believed to be the embodiment of sacredness and were regarded as gods on earth. Significantly, the degree of purity declined successively with the qualities as represented by the Ksatriyas and the Vaishyas - namely, raja and tama. The shudras, who occupied the lowest rung of the social order, were believed to have possessed no such quality. In fact, the PurusaSukta hymn of the Rig Veda, which is considered to be a later interpolation, provided a religio-cultural justification of the hierarchical divisions based on the four-fold varna system.

Aryanisation of the subcontinent led to gradual absorption of outsiders and the cultural transformation of the castes, more particularly of those occupying the lower rungs. The characteristics of the varna system were later elaborated in minute detail in the jati system. Subsequently, the broad-based division of labour as represented by varna found expression in the jati system, thereby resulting in an elaborate system of occupational distinctions and interrelations among various groups.

In Bengal the gradual spread of Aryan culture led to the classification of different groups with particular occupations as distinct jatis. The cultivating, trading, artisan and service castes came to be recognised as Shudras in terms of varna. Indeed, the proliferation of specialised occupational groups led to an increase in the number of jatis, which by far exceeded the number of varnas. Significantly, the bulk of the people covered under the occupational groups of jatis were invested with the responsibilities of meeting the needs of the society. As a consequence the structure of Hindu society came to be understood in terms of jati rather than varna. Thus, slowly varna lost its significance in daily social life. In regions like Bengal where there was no Ksatriya or Vaishya group in the indigenous population, even the Brahmans were known as a jati, although they were also referred to as Varnashrestha, i. e., the highest of the Varnas.

But more importantly, by emphasising the connection between jati and occupation, the proponents of the caste system tried to lay the foundations of an absolutely non-competitive arrangement of production and distribution that ensured the livelihood of each individual and guaranteed minimum social security. The system guaranteed production and distribution in a smooth manner within the constraints of limited resources and conditions of scarcity and stagnation that prevailed in the localised economy of India since the seventh century CE.

However, variations did prevail in the caste system in different parts of India. Interestingly the impression that one gathers about the caste system, more particularly from the smriti literature, does not fully correspond to the social conditions prevalent

in Bengal in ancient times. It needs to be asserted that none of these ancient smritis was composed in Bengal. Therefore attempts to garner reliable information about the hierarchical division of Bengali society based on Varna from the pages of ancient smriti literature would be totally unjustified.

As some scholars have argued, prior to the eleventh century hardly any smriti literature composed in Bengal could throw light on the Bengali social scenario. Moreover, on the basis of reliable historical evidence it could only be presumed that from the eleventh century onwards compilers of Bengali social commentaries consciously accepted the very basis of the Brahmanical logic of the hierarchical division of the Hindu social order.

During the Sena-Varman rule several smritis and other literary texts were composed in Bengal. In this context, the works of Bhabadeva Bhatta and Jimuta Vahana deserve special mention. In fact, these literary texts contain reliable information on society and history and could justifiably be utilised by historians for constructing historical narratives on Bengal's past. Apart from the smritis and other literary texts, Puranic and classical texts such as the *Brahma Vaivarta Purana*, *Brihaddharma Purana* provides important information on Bengali society. At the same time, the genealogical texts also contain some relevant information. Similarly, there are two texts by the name of *Vallalacharita*. One of the texts was supposed to have been composed by Ananda Bhatta at the behest of the Raja of Nabadvip, Buddhimanta Khan. This text was composed around 1510 CE. However, the first and the second volumes were supposed to have been authored by Gopala Bhatta under the directives of Vallala Sena, roughly around 1300 Saka Era.

The picture that one gets of the caste system in the *Brihaddharma Purana* is quite different from the one that emerges from the *Vallalacharita*. In the case of the former, Ksatriyas and Vaishyas are classified differently, and the Shudras have been divided into two broad categories, namely, Sat Shudras (from whom higher castes could accept food and drinks) and Asat Shudras (whose touch was considered to be polluting). At the same time in terms of social ranking Brahmans were said to have been immediately followed by Ambasthas (Vaidya) and Karanas (Kayasthas). Similarly, Shankharis, Modakas, Tantubayis, Das (Peasants), Karmakaras, Suvarnavanikas and various other sub-castes and mixed castes (Sankara castes) also found a place in the narrative of the *Brihaddharma Purana*. On the other hand the *Vallalacharita* offered a narrative that was much different from those of the Puranic texts. To be precise, it could be argued that during Vallala Sena's time, the caste system in Bengal

underwent significant changes. For instance, according to the authors of the *Vallalacharita*, Subarnavanikas had been relegated to the ranks of impure Shudras and Brahmans were forbidden to supervise their religious functions. At the same time, the authors of the *Vallalacharita* have also stated that in order to withstand the challenge posed by the Vanik (merchant) and Das (Servile peasants), Vallala raised the Kaivartas to the ranks of sat Shudras. Moreover, it has also been averred that Malakaras, Kumbhakararas and Karmakararas too were elevated to the ranks of sat Shudras.

But more importantly, it needs to be stated that though in the *Brihaddharma Purana*, Tantis, Gandhavanikas, Karmakararas, Taulikas (betelnut traders), Kumaras, Shankharis, Kansaris, Barujibis (Baruis), Modaka and Malakaras had been classified as Uttama-Sankar castes; Subarnavanikas (goldsmiths) were classified with Jal-Achal (from whom Brahmans and other upper castes were forbidden to accept food and water) castes, such as Dhibaras (Fishermen) and Rajakas (washermen). In the *Vallalacharita*, some reasons have been propounded to explain the phenomenon. It has been argued that such transformations took place for political and social reasons. At the same time, it also needs to be asserted that though the narrative in the *Vallalacharita* might not be fully acceptable to historians, there is no doubt that it is certainly more reliable than the genealogical texts composed in the 16th and 17th centuries.

Some details relating to the lower castes in Bengal can be highlighted. Relevant historical information about the Kaivartas was available for the first time from the documents of the Pala period. Kaivarta chief Divya or Divvok had been a powerful official during the Pala period. He in collusion with several feudal lords revolted against Pala dominance and killed Mahipala II. Following the death of Mahipala II, some parts of Bengal passed into the hands of powerful Kaivarta overlords namely, Divya, Rudoka and Bhima. This historical development might have brought about a change in the social position of the Kaivartas, particularly in North Bengal.

The Pala documents also provide some information about the untouchable castes, which were outside the frontiers of Hindu society. In the list containing the names of the beneficiaries of landgrants in the Pala copperplates, Brahmans, who in turn were followed by various peasant communities, immediately followed high government officials. In fact, there was no reference either to the Ksatriyas or the Vaishyas. But, beyond such social groupings there were several other groups who were referred to as Medh, Andhra and Chandalas. The Chandalas were considered

to be the lowest of all the social groupings. Social commentators like Bhabadeva Bhatta have referred to them as an Antyajaja Jati. In several charya songs information about several other low castes such as Doms or Dombs, Chandalas, Shabaras and Kapalikas have also been found. In some medieval texts it has been pointed out that contact of Brahmans with such lower castes was forbidden.

Bhabadeva Bhatta classified lower caste groups such as the Chandals, Pukkashakas and Kapalikas as untouchables. The Kapalikas were regarded as an uncivilised community, who followed bizarre rituals and practices. The Shabaras, who mostly inhabited the mountainous regions, also were regarded as lower castes. However, it could be argued with some certainty that they did occupy a higher social standing than the Doms and Chandals, who were regarded as antyajajatis.

Antyajajati or untouchable groups were essentially composed of Badhs/Banars, Kapalikas/ Kols (belonging to the Adivasi grouping), Koncho (who were also referred to as Koche and were generally classified within the Adivasi grouping), Hadis (who were also referred to as Handis), Doms, Bagtits (Bagdis), Sharakas (considered to be a part of the ancient community of Shrabakas), Byalgrahi and Chandals. The majority of the antyajaja castes remained outside the varnashrama system. In most cases they were regarded as servants of the society and as such were assigned the lowest social standing. From the charyagitis, one gets an impression about the vocations pursued by the untouchable communities in Bengal. For instance, they were mostly engaged in making objects out of bamboo, felling trees, rowing boats, preparing liquor and hunting. Interestingly many of these Antyajajatis were also believed to have practiced various forms of black magic.

Significantly, there was hardly any major social movement in Bengal between the 10th and the 15th century aimed at the elevation of the Antyajajatis in the Hindu social scale. In fact, there was hardly any case of social mobility among them, and for the great majority of the population comprising essentially the lower castes, the major sources of social mobility remained inaccessible. Prolonged pursuit of a particular occupation for generations in the absence of alternative job opportunities naturally gave rise to strict social conventions, which in the traditional context were overlaid with rituals. Similarly, if the sources of mobility remained inaccessible to a caste for generations its position in the caste hierarchy sometimes assumed an element of permanence and the duties of the caste, including its occupation, appeared inviolable. In other words, scrupulous observance of caste duties too often resulted in social rigidity, much to the detriment of the interests of the lower or untouchable communities.

3.4 Conclusion

In conclusion it may be said that we know very little of the degree and the nature of the civilisation possessed by the pre-Aryan population of Bengal and much less of the contribution of each of the racial elements to the common stock of the civilisation developed on the soil of Bengal. But in this respect we may postulate for Bengal what has generally been accepted for the rest of India. It is now generally held that the foundations of civilisation of India – its village life based on agriculture – were laid by the Nishadas or Austric speaking peoples and the same was also probably true for Bengal.

3.5 Model Question

1. Do you think that the caste system found the basic structure of the ancient Bengali society ?
2. Write an essay on the ethnicity and caste system of ancient Bengal.

3.6 Suggested Readings

1. Dilip K. Chakrabarti, *Ancient Bangladesh*, Dhaka, 1992.
2. R. C. Majumdar (ed.), *History of Ancient Bengal*, Delhi, 1989.

Module II

**Early History of Bengal
up to 320 A.D.**

Unit-4 □ Bengal in the Classical Literature : Gangaridai

Structure

- 4.0 Objective**
- 4.1 Introduction**
- 4.2 Bengal in the Indian Classical Literature**
- 4.3 Bengal in the Foreign Literary Sources**
- 4.4 Gangaridai**
- 4.5 Debate regarding the identification of Gangaridae**
- 4.6 Wari-Bateshwar Ruins**
- 4.7 Conclusion**
- 4.8 Model Question**
- 4.9 Suggested Readings**

4.0 Objective

- The objective of the present unit is to study the reflection of Bengal in the literary sources.
- Two major literary sources will be discussed :
 - The classical Indian literature
 - The foreign account
- The debate regarding the identification of Gangaridai and its possible geographical location will also come under analysis in the present unit.

4.1 Introduction

Archaeological excavations in various parts of Bengal reveal its much early history. It was a settlement since prehistoric times. But unfortunately that history is

yet not been very clear to us. Later Vedic literature like *Aitareya Aranyaka*, *Aitareya Brahmana* etc. contain references of Bengal region. Epics and *Dharmasutras* also mention about this region. Most of these literatures mention this region as the settlements of non-Aryans or the people who belonged to inferior culture in comparison with the Vedic Aryans. Only in the Ramayana, a different view can be found. This contains some references of the aristocratic relationship with the people of Bengal region. However a general inferior view regarding the people of Bengal can clearly be traced in almost every ancient Indian classical literature composed before 4th century BCE.

6th century BCE is generally considered as an important benchmark in the history of India. This was the time when Indian history got its historicity in terms of sources for the first time. The emergence of the 16 Mahajanapadas, especially of Magadh had opened a new era in the history of India. The rise of Magadh marked a shift of power centre from north-west India to eastern India. Thus the eastern land started getting importance in literature by the 6th century BCE.

4.2 Bengal in the Indian Classical Literature

Although the primeval historical account of Bengal is still trying to find its foothold in the firmament of ancient Indian history, the early Indian literary sources as well as foreign accounts, i.e. the Brahmanical sources (chiefly Ramayana, Mahabharata and the Puranas), the Buddhist and Jain sources, and other contemporary literary works provide rich resources relating to the societal, cultural, and demographic graffiti of primordial Bengal.

It is already mentioned earlier that the *Aitareya Aranyaka* was the first Indian literary work where the name of Vanga mentioned clearly. Ramayana and Mahabharata made extensive references of the land of Bengal. Jain works like *Acharanga-sutra*, *Upanga-sahitya*, Buddhist works like *SamyuttaNikaya*, *TalapattaJataka*, *Milinda Panho* also mention several times about various regions of Bengal. Secular literary texts like *Dasakumara-charit*, *Pavanaduta* etc. mention about Bengal.

4.3 Bengal in the Foreign Literary Sources

Foreign literary sources are also very important for reconstructing the history of ancient Bengal. The pale of foreign literary sources includes the Greco-Roman,

Chinese and Arab works. The Greek accounts play significant roles to comprehend the geographical changes that had happened in eastern India since the fourth century BCE. According to Greek sources, the land corresponding to modern Northeast India and submontane Himalaya were by that time dwelt in by the Kiratas. Ergo, the sources recount that the Pundra and the Kirata territories bordered or even merged. It probably corroborates the inference that the larger region was earlier known as Kirata, and a segment of the Kirata terrain subsequently came to be identified as Pundra. The name of Pundra is also scripted in the early Chinese accounts which referred to it as a region situated in the northern part of Bengal. According to the descriptions of Chinese travellers Fa-Hien, Hiuen Tsang and I-Tsing, the river Karatoya had made the boundary between Pundravardhana and Pragjyotisa Kamarupa. Buddhism was booming that time in Pundravardhana as elucidated by Fa-Hien. Hiuen-Tsang mentioned Pundravardhana as Pun-na-fantan-na in his writings. The Tang-Shu by Hiuen-Tsang described that from the Gupta period onwards Pundravardhana formed a bhukti (translated as province) under different imperial eras. Hiuen-Tsang's elucidation points out the location of Pundravardhana between Kajangala and the river Karatoya.

4.4 Gangaridai

Gangaridai occurs as the name of a people and of a country in Greek and Latin writings, dates of which range between 1st century BC and 2nd century AD. The term Gangaridai and its variants Gangaridae, Gangaridum and Gangarides are found in the works of classical authors.

Writing about the countries beyond the Indus on the basis of the knowledge obtained by Alexander and his soldiers, Diodorus (69 BC-16 AD) mentions that beyond the Ganges were the dominions of the Prasioi and the Gangaridai. Quintus Curtius Rufus tells us that two peoples, the Gangaridai and the Pharrisii, inhabited the further banks of the Ganges. Strabo (63 BC - 21 AD) informs us that the Ganges flows through the Gangaridae, forming its eastern boundary. Pliny (c 1st century AD) writes that the final part of the Ganges flowed through the country of the Gangarides. Virgil (c 30 BC) mentions Gangaridai without indicating its location.

The earliest reference to Gangaridai is found in the written works of the Greek ethnographer Megasthenes (350-290 BCE). In the writings of Greek historian Diodorus Siculus, recorded between 60 and 30 BCE, he speaks of Alexander the

Great pursuing King Porus of the state of Paurava to the nation of Gandaridai, which he described as “a nation possessing the greatest number of elephants and the largest in size.” Historians have proposed that Alexander the Great left the region in anticipation of a joint attack by the Prasii and Gangaridai Empires. The invasion of the region and subsequent withdrawal of Alexander the Great is mentioned in a number of other writings by Greek and Roman historians. The aforementioned Megasthenes also wrote of the wealth and might of the people he referred to as the Gangarides, noting that their king possessed 1,000 horses, 700 elephants and 60,000 troops.

Dhana Nanda, the last ruler of the Nanda dynasty, was king of the Gangaridai region at the time of the invasion by Alexander the Great. The Nanda dynasty was an amalgamation of the Prasii and Gangaridai Empires. Dhana Nanda was later dethroned by Chandragupta Maurya, the founder of the Maurya Empire, which ruled until 185 BCE. Renowned Bengali historian, Rakhaldas Bandyopadhyay, noted that during the rule of Chandragupta Maurya, the state of Gangaridai was independent.

The earliest surviving description of Gangaridai appears in *Bibliotheca historica* of the 1st century BCE writer Diodorus Siculus. This account is based on a now-lost work, probably the writings of either Megasthenes or Hieronymus of Cardia.

In Book 2 of *Bibliotheca historica*, Diodorus states that “Gandaridae” (i.e. Gangaridai) territory was located to the east of the Ganges River, which was 30 stades wide. He mentions that no foreign enemy had ever conquered Gandaridae, because it of its strong elephant force. He further states that Alexander the Great advanced up to Ganges after subjugating other Indians, but decided to retreat when he heard that the Gandaridae had 4,000 elephants. In Book 17 of *Bibliotheca historica*, Diodorus once again describes the “Gandaridae”, and states that Alexander had to retreat after his soldiers refused to take an expedition against the Gandaridae. The book 17 also mentions that a nephew of Porus fled to the land of the Gandaridae, although C. Bradford Welles translates the name of this land as “Gandara”. In Book 18 of *Bibliotheca historica*, Diodorus describes India as a large kingdom comprising several nations, the largest of which was “Tyndaridae” (which seems to be a scribal error for “Gandaridae”). He further states that a river separated this nation from their neighbouring territory; this 30-stadia wide river was the greatest river in this region of India (Diodorus does not mention the name of the river in this book). He goes on to mention that Alexander did not campaign against this nation, because they had a large number of elephants. Diodorus’ account of India in the Book 2 is based on

Indica, a book written by the 4th century BCE writer Megasthenes, who actually visited India. Megasthenes' *Indica* is now lost, although it has been reconstructed from the writings of Diodorus and other later writers. J. W. McCrindle (1877) attributed Diodorus' Book 2 passage about the Gangaridai to Megasthenes in his reconstruction of *Indica*. However, according to A. B. Bosworth (1996), Diodorus' source for the information about the Gangaridai was Hieronymus of Cardia (354–250 BCE), who was a contemporary of Alexander and the main source of information for Diodorus' Book.

Ptolemy (2nd century CE), in his *Geography*, states that the Gangaridae occupied “all the region about the mouths of the Ganges”. He names a city called Gange as their capital. This suggests that Gange was the name of a city, derived from the name of the river. Based on the city's name, the Greek writers used the word “Gangaridai” to describe the local people.

The *Periplus of the Erythrean Sea* does not mention the Gangaridai, but attests the existence of a city that the Greco-Romans described as “Ganges”.

Dionysius Periegetes (2nd-3rd century CE) mentions “Gargaridae” located near the ‘gold-bearing Hypanis’ river. Hypanis River probably identified with Beas River. “Gargaridae” is sometimes believed to be a variant of “Gangaridae”, but another theory identifies it with Gandhari people. A. B. Bosworth dismisses Dionysius' account as “a farrago of nonsense”, noting that he inaccurately describes the Hypanis river as flowing down into the Gangetic plain.

Gangaridai also finds a mention in Greek mythology. In Apollonius of Rhodes' *Argonautica* (3rd century BCE), Datis, a chieftain, leader of the Gangaridae who was in the army of Perses III, fought against Aeetes during the Colchian civil war.

4.5 Debate regarding the identification of Gangaridae

Scholars are not unanimous regarding the identification of the region Gangaridae. The *Gangaridai* or *Gangaridae* are mentioned in Greek & Latin works, and the term is actually used to denote either a geographical region or a people living in that region or probably both. It is obvious that the term does make reference to the river Ganga or the Ganges and, in all likelihood, it describes a region on the Indo-Gangetic plains or a people living along the Indo-Gangetic plains. But the course of the Ganges itself, from its origin in the Himalayas and its travels along the

subcontinent till the Ganga-Brahmaputra delta where it empties out into the sea, is so vast that it is nigh impossible to pinpoint or identify an exact location of the *Gangaridae*. Some have tried to determine the *Gangaridae* to be the Hellenic or Greek version of the Sanskrit *Ga-ga-hr-daya* (loosely, 'Heart of the Ganga') but this theory of an etymology, though brave, is ill-suited; it twists facts to suit theories rather than twist theories to suit facts. You see, ancient Greek writers referred to the *Gandaridae* and the Romans who came later referred to the *Gangaridae*. There's a difference between the two. Some Greek writers call Agrammes or Xandrames as a powerful king of the peoples beyond the river Beas, "the Gangaridae and the Prasii", who had his capital at Pataliputra. Going by Megasthenes' description, the Gangaridae were the people occupying the delta of the river Ganga, which would put the Gangaridae not at Magadha but under its supremacy in the whereabouts of present West Bengal and Bangladesh. The Prasii were the *Prachyas* or Easterners living to the east of *Madhya-desa* (Middle Country); these were the Panchalas, Surasenas, Kosalas, Kasis and the Videhas. Porus the Younger is believed to have fled to the kingdom of Agrammes when Alexander invaded the former's kingdom.

According to Pratap Barman, the ancient land of northeastern India was mentioned as Mandachal in the, Kiskindha Kanda of Ramayana and the dwellers of Mandachal were mentioned as demons or Mandai. The cities of Mandachal were ornamented with gold, even the fish were also described in golden colour. This was the reason traders throughout the world were attracted towards India for business in the later part of history. The land of the Mandai people was termed as Gangaridai by the Greek writers. Ptolemy mentioned about Gangaridai in his map in 100 AD. The Mandai people call the river as Gang, and the land of the Mandai people to the east of river Ganga were termed as Gangaridai. The Mandai living at the bank of river or the plains of river Ganga were known as kalinga and those reside in hills were the Mandais. The Mandai people had a powerful kingdom in the east, for which Alexander the great had to return back and gave up the hope of conquering the world. The Mandai people were mentioned as Daityas, Rakshashas, Danavas, Ashursetc in ancient religious writings.

A. B. Bosworth notes that the ancient Latin writers almost always use the word "Gangaridae" to define the people, and associate them with the Prasii people. According to Megasthenes, who actually lived in India, the Prasii people lived near the Ganges. Besides, Pliny explicitly mentions that the Gangaridae lived beside the Ganges, naming their capital as Peralis. All these evidences suggest that the Gangaridae lived in the Gangetic plains.

Diodorus stated that the Ganges River formed the eastern boundary of the Gangaridai. Based on Diodorus's writings and the identification of Ganges with Bhagirathi-Hooghly, the western distributary of Ganges, Gangaridai can be identified with the Rarh region in present day West Bengal.

Plutarch, Curtius and Solinus, suggest that Gangaridai was located on the eastern banks of the Gangaridai River. Ramesh Chandra Majumdar theorized that the earlier historians like Diodorus used the word Ganga for the Padma River.

Pliny names five mouths of the Ganges River, and states that the Gangaridai occupied the entire region about these mouths. He names five mouths of Ganges as Kambyson, Mega, Kamberikon, Pseudostomon and Anteboule. These exact present-day locations of these mouths cannot be determined with certainty because of the changing river courses. According to D. C. Sircar, the region encompassing these mouths appears to be the region lying between the Bhagirathi-Hooghly River in the west and the Padma River in the east. This suggests that the Gangaridai territory included the coastal region of present-day West Bengal and Bangladesh, up to the Padma River in the east. Gaurishankar De and Subhradip De believe that the five mouths may refer to the Bidyadhari, Jamuna and other branches of Bhagirathi-Hooghly at the entrance of Bay of Bengal.

According to the archaeologist Dilip Kumar Chakrabarti, the centre of the Gangaridai power was located in vicinity of Adi Ganga (a now dried-up flow of the Hooghly river). Chakrabarti considers Chandraketurgh as the strongest candidate for the centre, followed by Mandirtala. James Wise believed that Kotalipara in present-day Bangladesh was the capital of Gangaridai. Archaeologist Habibullah Pathan identified the Wari-Bateshwar ruins as the Gangaridai territory.

4.6 Wari-Bateshwar Ruins

Wari-Bateshwar is an archaeological site in Narsinghdi district of present day Bangladesh. Most of the scholars believe that this site is connected with the Gangaridai territory mentioned in the Greco-Latin sources. Wari and Bateshwar are two adjacent villages in Amlabo Union under Belabo police station in Narsinghdi district, Bangladesh. It is situated on an isolated bit of the Pleistocene terrace at Manohardi-Sibpur, which is detached from the Madhupur tract by the Old Brahmaputra and the Laksya rivers. Since the 40s of the last century, a large number of cultural materials of Wari-Bateshwar have been reported from surface collections and chance

excavations. Systematic archaeological exploration at the site was carried out in 1998-99 season by the author and subsequently a number of excavations conducted at the site since 2000. Archaeological investigations at Wari-Bateshwar revealed that the site had been occupied from the 4th century BC onwards with occasional breaks.

A two thousand five hundred year old fort-city was discovered at Wari-Bateshwar, after extensive exploration and limited excavation. In the 600m × 600m fortified enclosure, there are four mud ramparts. Though most of the parts of the ancient ramparts have been destroyed but evidence of 5-7 feet height walls still exist in some places. The ramparts are surrounded by moat, which, in course of time, silted up and turned into paddy fields. However, the eastern part of the silted moat can easily be visualized.

In the west and south-west side of Wari-Bateshwar citadel, there is a 5.8 km long, 20 m wide and 10 m high mud rampart known as Asom Razar Garh. Most probably this was linked to the defensive system of Wari-Bateshwar fort-city which can be considered as the second fortification wall.

The ancient inhabitants of Wari-Bateshwar were familiar with developed technical knowledge. By cutting the stone, they could manufacture beads. Raw materials, chips and flakes of semi-precious stone bead manufacture have been discovered during excavation. Through using different types of chemicals, they could decorate the beads. They could also coat the northern black polished ware using different chemicals. High technology was used to control the temperature during pottery manufacture. They knew the technique of coin manufacture melting metal. They had the knowledge of iron processing. The location of Wari-Bateshwar fort-city and AsomRajarGarh prove that, the inhabitants were experts in geometric knowledge. These factors indicate the ancient inhabitants' close acquaintance with technological and scientific knowledge as well evidently indicate their artistic sense, adoration of beauty and skills in several technological works. Northern Black Polished Ware has a close relationship with urban culture. Generally northern black polished wares are found in the archaeological sites of the second urbanisation of the subcontinent. It is said that to meet the practical needs of the rulers and traders of the second urbanisation, these northern black polished wares were produced. For the presence of Old Brahmaputra River, it is assumed that Wari-Bateshwar was a river port and a trade centre. From the discovery of semi-precious stone beads made of agate, quartz, jasper, carnelian, amethyst, chalcedony etc. Dilip Kumar Chakraborti mentions

that Wari-Bateshwar might be the Souanagoura a trading centre which was mentioned by Ptolemy. Basing on the artefacts that have been discovered, we also agree that Wari-Bateshwar was that Souanagoura.

4.7 Conclusion

Thus in conclusion it may be said that although the location of the territory of Gangaridai is yet not been clear to us but undoubtedly it was a rich and powerful settlement of ancient time. The relation between the Prasii kingdom and the Gangaridae is also not clear. It is plausible that Gangaridae formed a confederacy with Prasii to face the threat of Alexander's invasion. According to Dr. Hemchandra Ray Chowdhury, "It may reasonably be inferred from the statements of the Greek and Latin writers that about the time of Alexander's invasion, the Gangaridai were a very powerful nation, and either formed a dual monarchy with the Pasioi, or was closely associated with them on equal terms in a common cause against the foreign invader."

4.8 Model Question

1. Write an essay on the Gangaridai civilisation of ancient Bengal.

4.9 Suggested Readings

1. Nitish Sengupta, *Land of Two Rivers*, London, 2011.
2. R. C. Majumdar (ed.), *History of Ancient Bengal*, Delhi, 1989.

Unit-5 □ Bengal before the Gupta Rule : Bengal under the Guptas

Structure

- 5.0 Objective**
- 5.1 Introduction**
- 5.2 Bengal during the Kushana Rule**
- 5.3 Gupta rule in Bengal**
- 5.4 Administration under the Imperial Gupta rulers**
- 5.5 Brahmanisation of Bengal during the Gupta period**
- 5.6 Conclusion**
- 5.7 Model Questions**
- 5.8 Suggested Readings**

5.0 Objective

- The objective of the present unit is to discuss the historical evolution of Bengal during the pre-Gupta and Gupta era.
- The unit will discuss the Bengal's history during the Kushana era.
- The political and socio-cultural aspects of the history of Bengal under the Gupta rule will be discussed.
- Two major points will be discussed :
 - The Gupta Administration in Bengal
 - The development of Brahmanical ideology in Bengal.

5.1 Introduction

The condition of present day Bengal region during the post Mauryan period is not very clear to us. Literary evidences and numismatics indicate a disintegrated

phase of time. In fact the collapse of the vast Mauryan Empire had resulted an overall period of disintegration in northern India between the 2nd century BCE and 1st century CE.

5.2 Bengal during the Kushana Rule

The 1st century CE witnessed the growth of the Kushana empire. It extended up to Bihar in the east. It has also been suggested by some scholars that Kanishka I possibly conquered some parts of the western part of Bengal. It is needless to mention that there is no strong evidence in favour of this hypothesis. Thus it is quite natural that there are a lot of controversies regarding this hypothesis.

Kushan coins have been discovered in several places in Bihar, Bengal and Odisha. Some scholars argue for suzerainty of the Kushan kings over this entire region. But most of the scholars have countered this argument. They argue that coins can travel by way of trade far beyond the limits of any kingdom where those coins are originally issued.

Other than numismatic evidences, a number of characteristic potteries of the Kushana cultural phase have been found from various sites of Bengal. This pottery culture is characterised by a unique red polished body with stamped design along with a large number of dull or sturdy red ware having bright red slips. The archaeological sites of Mangalkot, Chandraketugarh, Pakhanna, Clive House, Tamluk, Deulpota, Natsal, Tilpi has yielded profuse quantity of above pottery from Kushana cultural level. Other than this red ware, the most distinctive types of Kushana craft is roulette ware. It is a grey ware dish with an incurved and beaked rim of diameter varying from 24-33 cm. This generally contains roulette decorations of variety of geometrical shapes like triangles, wedges, dots etc. This type of pottery is generally wheel-made, slipped and having smooth surface. Roulette ware of Kushana cultural phase was subsequently found at numerous sites of Bengal. The Bengal version of the roulette ware can be classified into two categories based on its colour, firing difference and fabrics. The first one has dark brown or black surface and the second one has grey interior with a grey or reddish exterior. Both of the varieties have been found from Chandraketugarh. Almost all the early historic sites of Bengal having Kushana cultural phase have yielded roulette ware. Mahasthangarh, Wari-Bateshwar, Tamluk, Tilpi, Natsal have unearthed profuse quantity of roulette ware from stratified level. However it should be keep in mind that the Arikamedu version of Kushana

roulette ware was different from the Bengal version. This indicates that roulette wares were produced at multiple production centres in the lower Ganga plain with the epicentre in the region of Chandraketugarh-Tamluk.

Thus it is not easy to say whether Bengal or any part of it ever formed a province of the Kushana Empire. But epigraphic and literary evidences as well as archaeological remains clearly indicate that the early centuries of the Christian Era witnessed a overall prosperity and economic growth Bengal mainly through the way of overseas and inland trade. There were at least two major ports namely Tamralipta and Chandraketugarh flourished during the post Maurya and Pre-Gupta period. Fertile lands, increased food supply, increasing population etc provide the background for the growth of towns and cities in ancient Bengal and as a result a large number of cities sprang up in this region. The economic advancement fed by agricultural surplus, proliferation of crafts and expanding trade paved the way for brisker rate of urban growth reached its peak in the 1st and the 2nd centuries CE. After an extensive study of Kharosthi and Kharosthi-Brahmi inscriptions discovered from the different parts of Bengal like both 24 Paraganas, Bankura, Midnapore and Burdwan B. N. Mukherjee suggested that these inscriptions clearly indicate that ancient Vanga had its prosperity rooted in the fields of agriculture and trade. But during the latter half of the 3rd century CE the condition had been changed again. Thus the Gupta epigraphic records showed that the overall political condition of Bengal at the beginning of the 4th century CE was not very unified. A number of sturdy states emerged during this time. The most prominent feature of these states was their shelter by the natural barriers of rivers and swamps.

5.3 Gupta rule in Bengal

Gupta rule in Bengal has often being viewed as a phase that brought in new ideas and inspirations in different aspects of life in Bengal, which prior to this stood as a peripheral region to the middle Gangetic valley. The establishment of the Gupta empire at Magadha marks the end of the disintegrated political condition of overall northern India. The territory of Bengal was not an exception. Imperial extension of the Gupta rulers marks the end of the independent existence of the various small states flourished in Bengal at beginning of the 4th century CE.

It is indeed a difficult task to decide when exactly Bengal was subjugated by the Gupta rulers. For some scholars it was done during the reign of Samudragupta, while

the others argue for his father Chandragupta I. Nihar Ranjan Ray observes that by the end of 3rd and the beginning of the 4th century CE Bengal was emerging out of its distinctly tribal, social and political pattern. Monarchy became well established. The ethnic names of settlements were becoming known as place (Janapada) names. The same is true for other aspects of life like religion also. On the whole he observes that the remote area of Bengal came to be united with the large area of politico-cultural ideology of north India.

Although the actual process of the Gupta conquest of Bengal is not very clear to us. But the epigraphic records leave no doubt that in the days of Kumaragupta I, northern Bengal formed an important administrative division of the Gupta empire under the name of Pundravardhana-bhukti. It was placed in charge of a provincial governor appointed by the Emperor himself. The provincial governor, in his turn, appointed officers to take charge of the various administrative sub-units into which the province was divided. It is to be noted, however, that occasionally even the district officers seem to have been appointed directly by the Gupta Emperor.

The Damodarpur copper plate of Budhagupta indicates that northern Bengal formed an integral part of the Great Gupta Empire down to the end of the 5th century CE. Another inscription from Damodarpur, dated in the year 544 CE, refers to a suzerain ruler, whose name ended in Gupta, but whose proper name is lost. In that year the son of the Gupta emperor was acting as his governor in Pundravardhana-bhukti. It appears most probably that the overlord in question belonged to the dynasty of the later Gupta who claimed suzerainty over northern Bengal down to the end of the 6th century CE.

Samatata region was most probably a semi-independent state during the reign of Samudragupta. According to Gunaighar copper plate Maharaja Vainyagupta was the ruler of this region. A number of gold coins issued by some Dvadeshaditya have been found in this region. Most of the scholars have identified this king with Vainyagupta. Although Vainyagupta was a suzerain ruler under the imperial Gupta rulers, but he was titled Maharaja in his own records as well as Maharajadhiraja in a seal discovered at Nalanda. Thus his exact status is very difficult to determine. According to R. C. Majumdar Vainyagupta was probably a member of the imperial Gupta family and acted at first as a de facto independent ruler whose dominion included eastern Bengal. But during the declining phase of the imperial Gupta rulers he declared himself openly as the Emperor, taking advantage of the internal disunion and discord

due to the collapse of the Gupta rule. However Vainyagupta's political career proves the direct Gupta rule over Samatata around the 6th century CE.

Thus up to the end of the 6th century CE Imperial Gupta rulers became successful to hold their power over Bengal. The main centre of their power in Bengal was Pundravardhana-bhukti. This administrative unit regarded as much as important that the Gupta emperor himself recruited its governor known as Uparika and sometimes even Vishayapatis. Most probably the Uparika Maharaja of Pundravardhana-bhukti came from royal family.

5.4 Administration under the Imperial Gupta rulers

It is indeed of very difficult task to know the administrative structure of Bengal in the ancient time as there was no 'Bengal' indeed. The epigraphic records of the imperial Gupta rulers helped us to draw a semi-clear sketch of the administrative structure. Although Bengal was formally included within the Gupta empire, but the Gupta rulers never directly ruled the whole of the said territory. Gupta records mention the existences of a number of Mahasamanta, Samanta, Maharaja etc. feudal chiefs. The imperial territory of Bengal was divided into some administrative units and sub units. The largest unit was bhukti. Bhukti was further divided into vishayas and mandalas. The lowest administrative unit was grama or village. In some epigraphic records name of an administrative unit has been found called vithi. The exact nature and its position in the administrative ladder is not clearly known. Most of the scholars suggested that vithi is here a group of villages and it stood between the mandalas and gramas in the administrative hierarchy. The governor of a bhukti was appointed directly by the Gupta emperor. The provincial governor assume the title Uparika. The vishayas were ruled by Kumaramatyas and Ayuktaka. Sometimes the rulers of the vishayas were also known as Vishayapatis. Another important lower administrative post was Adhikarana. Probably they were the in charges of vithis.

5.5 Brahmanisation of Bengal during the Gupta period

The early inscription leaves no doubt about the existence of a number of Brahmins in Bengal who were quite familiar with vedic rites and rituals. It is interesting to note cases of Brahmins who were quite eager to settle in Bengal to

carry on their religious and social duties. The Dhanaidaha copper plate inscription of the year 113 (= 432 – 433 CE) records that a royal officer (an Ayuktaka) purchased some cultivable land by paying the usual price to the government and made a free gift of the same to a Brahmin name Varahasvamin who was a follower of the Samavedin school of the Vedic Brahmanism. The Kalaikuri copper plate inscription of the Gupta year 121 (=400 – 401 CE) records the purchase of 9 kulyabapas of land at the rate of 2 dinaras for each kulyabapa, distributed in the villages of Hastisirsra, Vivitaka, Gubhyagandhika and Dhanyapatalika which were later donated to three Brahmins of Pundravardhana named Devabhata, Amaradatta and Mahasenadatta, for the purpose of in a bling them to perform their daily sacrifices. From the five copperv plate inscriptions discovered from Damodarpur (Rajshahi division) in north Bengal we come to know that a Brahmin named Karppatika requested according to nividharma a kulyavapa of untilled khila land for his performance of Agnihotra rites and in another instance was for the grant of a plot of waste land for the maintainance of his five daily sacrifices (Pañcamahāyajna). Both the applicants obtained the sanction of the government of Pundravardhana-bhukti stationed at the head-quarters in Kotivarsha-vishaya.

Something like a Brahmin colony was founded as a result of the gift as recorded Tippera copper plate grant of Lokanatha. This gift was made at the request of a MahaSamanta to settle more than one hundred Brahmins versed in the four Vedas (caturvidyā). These Brahmins were expected to perform worship with bali, caru etc. and image of Ananta Narayana installed in the temple in Subbangavisaya. The Vappayghosavata grant of Jayanaga records the gift of a village to a Brahmin named Brahmavirasvamin who was also a follower of the Samavedin School of the Vedic Brahmanism.

5.6 Conclusion

Thus in conclusion it may be said that a process of consolidation in so called Bengal region had been started during the Gupta period. At least the existence of a uniform administrative structure can be traced from this time. However that does not prove that the Gupta rulers conquered or established their hegemony over whole of the region. But it denotes at least a great influence of the Gupta administrative structure on this entire territory and its rulers. This influence can be traced even during the reign of the Pala rulers of Bengal.

5.7 Model Questions

1. Write a short note on the condition of Bengal before the Gupta rule.
2. Write an essay on the condition of Bengal under the imperial Gupta rulers.

5.8 Suggested Readings

1. R. C. Majumdar (ed.), *History of Ancient Bengal*, Delhi, 1989.
2. Sayantani Pal, 'Gupta Rule in Bengal', *Proceedings of Indian History Congress*, 69th Session, Kannur, 2008.

Module III

Bengal during the Guptas and Post-Gupta

Unit-6 □ Independent Kingdoms in Bengal

Structure

- 6.0 Objective**
- 6.1 Introduction**
- 6.2 Vainya Gupta**
- 6.3 Conclusion**
- 6.4 Model Questions**
- 6.5 Suggested Readings**

6.0 Objective

- The present unit will aim to understand the fragmentary political identity in the ancient period.
- The objective of the present unit is also to study the history of Bengal under Vainya Gupta.

6.1 Introduction

The province of Bengal and the territory inhabited by the Bengali speaking people are not the same. The territory inhabited by the Bengali speaking people stretches far beyond the political boundaries of the present day West Bengal and Bangladesh or even the province of Bengal of British India. The vast territory inhabited by the Bengali speaking people was not united till the Muslim rule. During the Muslim rule a broad area of so called Bengal became united. Before that the entire territory was divided into numerous small independent or semi independent kingdoms and chiefdoms. Even during the rules of the Pala dynasty and Sena dynasty a number of small kingdoms existed in Bengal. Thus it is indeed needless to mention that throughout the ancient period the entire territory was divided into numerous small kingdoms – some of them were dependent on other broader kingdoms in various ways; some of them had feudatory status; but most of these kingdoms were independent though they have very small size.

It is yet not been clear to us that whether the region of Bengal subjugated by the Mauryans and their subsequent emperors or not. The Gupta rulers had definitely established their control over this territory. It is generally believed that the Gupta emperor Samudra Gupta was the liable one for this extension of imperial control. However it is also matter of confusion that whether the subjugation of Bengal took place during the reign of Samudra Gupta or was accomplished wholly or even partly by his father Chandra Gupta I. The Meherauli iron pillar inscription mentions that the king Chandra among other military exploits also 'extirpated in battle in the Vanga countries his enemies who offered him a united resistance'. The identity of this king Chandra is a matter of controversy. He has been identified both with Chandra Gupta I and Chandra Gupta II.

Although it is not clear that who was liable to extend the Gupta empire up to the territory of Bengal but it is definitely be said that the establishment of the Gupta empire marks the end of the independent existence of the various states that flourished in Bengal at the beginning of the 4th century CE. By the time of Samudra Gupta except Samatata region the entire territory was incorporated in the Gupta empire and the ruler of Samatata had 'gratified the emperor Samudra Gupta by payment of all kinds of tribute, by obedience to his commands and by approach for paying court to him'. In other words Samatata was a tributary state acknowledging the suzerainty of the Gupta emperor but with full autonomy in respect of internal administration. The exact limits of Samatata cannot be ascertained but it may be taken as roughly equivalent to eastern Bengal. Although Samatata was a semi independent feudatory state in the time of Samudra Gupta it seems to have been gradually incorporated into the Gupta empire for in the year 507-08 CE Maharaja Vainya Gupta was the ruler of this region and granted lands in the district of Tippera. He issued gold coins and assumed the title Dvadasaditya. The exact status of Vainya Gupta is indeed a tough task to determine. The most reasonable view seems to be that he was a member of the imperial Gupta family and acted at first as a de facto independent ruler whose dominions included eastern Bengal. Subsequently taking advantage of the decline of the imperial Gupta rulers and also perhaps of the internal disunion and discord he declared himself openly as the emperor.

6.2 Vainya Gupta

Vainya Gupta was one of the last kings of the Gupta Empire. He became known by the discovery of the Gunaighar copper plate inscription dated 507 CE or 188

Gupta Era, which mentions the grant of land to a Buddhist monastery established at Gunaikagrahara (present day Gunaighar). Vainya Gupta may be the son of Puru Gupta.

Historians came to know about Vainya Gupta after discovering the Nalanda clay seal and Gunaighar copper plate inscription and coins belonging to his reign. The artefacts neither contain his father nor his grandfather's name. According to R.C. Majumdar, Vainya Gupta's father was Puru Gupta. The Gunaighar copper plate inscription mentions one Vainya Gupta donating land to a Buddhist monastery at Gunaighar. Majumdar and D.C. Ganguli amongst others feel that Vainya Gupta mentioned in Gunaighar copper plate inscription is same the Vainya Gupta of the Nalanda clay seal inscription who was a ruler of the Gupta Empire. However, Vainya Gupta of the Gunaighar copper plate inscription is a devotee of Shiva and the Vainya Gupta of the Nalanda seal inscription is a worshipper of Vishnu.

The different stages in the decline and downfall of the Gupta empire have not yet been fixed with any degree of certainty. There is however no doubt that it showed visible signs of decline towards the beginning of the sixth century CE. The general political condition in northern India during the declining period of the Gupta empire was disintegrated. Vainya Gupta at this time was ruling as practically an independent king in eastern Bengal. The Gupta empire had to face a final death blow by the sweeping victories of Yashodharman. According to Mandasore inscription of Yashodharman he extended his conquest as far as the Brahmaputra river. However it is difficult to say that on fact how far the boasts of Yashodharman were founded. But in any case the empire of Yashodharman was a short lived one and no trace of it was to be found after the middle of the 6th century CE. The Gupta empire already weakened by the inroads of the Hunas collapsed before the onslaughts of Yashodharman.

6.3 Conclusion

The fall of the Gupta Empire and the failure of Yashodharman to rebuild one on a durable basis led to the political disintegration of northern India marked by the rise of a number of independent powers. The more prominent of these were the Pushyabhutis of Sthanvisvara or Thaneswara, the Maukharis of Kosala or Oudh and the later Guptas of Magadha and Malwa. The later Guptas may have been an offshoot of the imperial Guptas but as yet we have no positive evidence in support

of this view. They however continued tradition of Gupta sovereignty in the central and eastern part of the Gupta empire. Bengal also took advantage of the political situation to shake off the foreign yoke and two powerful independent kingdoms viz. Vanga and Gauda were established there in the 6th century CE.

6.4 Model Questions

1. Write briefly about the emergence of various independent kingdoms during the post Gupta period in Bengal.
2. Write a short note on Vainya Gupta.
3. Write an essay on the political condition of Bengal during the decline of the imperial Gupta rule.

6.5 Suggested Readings

1. R. C. Majumdar (ed.), *History of Ancient Bengal*, Delhi, 1989.

Unit-7 □ The Kingdom of Samatata or Vanga

Structure

- 7.0 Objective**
- 7.1 Introduction**
- 7.2 Samatata and Vanga after Gopa Chandra**
- 7.3 Bengal under the Khadga rulers**
- 7.4 Conclusion**
- 7.5 Model Questions**
- 7.6 Suggested Readings**

7.0 Objective

- The objective of the present unit is to understand the history of Samatata or Vanga region of ancient Bengal.
- The account of Gopa Chandra will also be discussed.
- The history of Bengal under the Khadga rule will also be addressed.

7.1 Introduction

The settlement of Vanga or Samatata region had flourished since long past. It is mentioned in the Mehrauli inscription of king Chandra, epigraphic records of the Chalukyas of Vatapi, and in the literary works of the famous poet Kalidasa. Before the rise of the Gupta empire Bengal was divided into several small independent state. But around the beginning of the 4th century CE these various states had lost their independent existences and was incorporated in the Gupta empire by Samudragupta. There was only one exception in this regard – the kingdom of Samatata or Vanga. The Allahabad Pillar inscription mentions ‘gratified the emperor Samudragupta by payment of all kinds of tribute, by obedience to his commands and by approach for paying court to him’. In other words, Samatata was a tributary state. Although it was

acknowledging the suzerainty of the Gupta emperor but it enjoyed full autonomy in respect of internal administration. The exact geographical limits of Samatata cannot be ascertained but it may be taken as roughly equivalent to the eastern part of present day Bengal.

Although Samatata was a semi independent feudatory state in the time of Samudragupta but it seems to have been generally incorporated into the Gupta empire. The epigraphic record of the Gupta Empire mentions the name of one Maharaja Vainya Gupta as the ruler of Samatata region. The exact status of Vainya Gupta is difficult to determine. The most reasonable view seems to be that he was a member of the imperial Gupta family and acted at first as a de facto independent ruler whose dominions included eastern Bengal. Subsequently taking advantage of the decline of the imperial Guptas and also perhaps of the internal disunion and discord Vainya Gupta declared himself openly as the emperor.

Thus the first independent kingdom which arose in Bengal on the ruins of the Gupta empire was undoubtedly the kingdom of Samatata or Vanga. It seems to have comprised originally the eastern and southern Bengal and the southern part of western Bengal. It is indeed a difficult task to reconstruct the chronological political history of this kingdom as only a few information of that time is available. The main sources of information about this kingdom are five inscriptions discovered near Kotalipara in the district of Faridpur of present day Bangladesh and one inscription discovered in the district of Burdwan. According to these epigraphic records three rulers had ruled this kingdom named Gopa Chandra, Dharmaditya and Samacharadeva. All of them assumed the title of Maharajadhiraj. It proves that these kings were independent and powerful. This imperial title also indicates a changed political status and the disappearance of the imperial authority of the imperial Gupta dynasty over this region.

The exact date of the reign of Gopa Chandra is not very clear to us. It is generally believed that there was not much gap between the reigns of Vainya Gupta and Gopa Chandra. The reason behind this assumption is the epigraphic evidence of the existence of one Maharaja Vijaya Sena who was most probably a vassal chief of both of Vainya Gupta and Gopa Chandra. The epigraphic record also mentions that Vijaya Sena had ruled over the bhukti of Vardhamana under Gopa Chandra. Since he held the same office under Vainya Gupta also therefore it will not be unreasonable to conclude that Vainya Gupta also ruled over the eastern, the southern and the western parts of Bengal.

The relationship between Gopa Chandra, Dharmaditya and Samacharadeva is not cleared to us as well as their order of succession. Pargiter regarded Dharmaditya as earlier than Gopa Chandra on two grounds: first, the use of the earlier and the later forms of 'y' in their respective plates and secondly the additional epithets 'pratita dharma shila' applied to the land-measurer Shiva Chandra in the plate of the latter. The first should never have been put forward as a serious argument. Because it is evident that in many times palaeography does not offer a safe basis for comparative chronology within a short period of time mostly when the time is less than a century. This is clearly demonstrated in the present instance by the fact that in the Mallasarul inscription of Gopa Chandra the earliest of the three forms of the letter 'y' noted by Pargiter has been exclusively used. On the other hand the first plate of Dharmaditya shows a distinctly later form of 'sh'. The addition of epithets to Shiva Chandra may no doubt be cogently explained by his attainment of seniority in service, but may be due to purely personal predilections of the writer. It may also be argued that the epithets were done away with Shiva Chandra had been sufficiently long in service when his name was too well known to require any testimonial. In any case this cannot be regarded as a more cogent argument in support of the priority of Dharmaditya over Gopa Chandra than the identity of Vijaya Sena of the Guraighar copper plate and the Mallasarul copper plate inscriptions favoring the opposite view. For if Gopa Chandra ruled after Dharmaditya we have to assume that Vijaya Sena served as a governor under Vainya Gupta, Dharmaditya, Gopa Chandra and other kings, if any, who might have intervened between them. This is certainly not impossible but less probable than other view that Vijaya Sena served two Kings, Vainya Gupta and Gopa Chandra. Although therefore no certain conclusion is possible, it seems more reasonable to take Gopa Chandra as earlier than Dharmaditya. It is generally regarded that Samacharadeva had flourished after the reigns of Gopa Chandra and Dharmaditya but it is difficult to say definitely that there were no intervening kings.

The existence of a few kings of this line later than Samacharadeva is rendered probable by a large number of gold coins found mostly in different parts of eastern Bengal notably at Sabhar (in the district of Dacca of present day Bangladesh) and Kotalipara (in the district of Faridpur of present day Bangladesh). Only two of these coins bear names of kings that can be read with some degree of certainty. The first is bearing the letters 'Prithu vi (ra)'. The name of the king who issued it was

probably, therefore, Prithuvira or Prithujavira or Prithuviraja. The second coin belongs to a class of which several have been found. On most of them the legend has been read as Sudhanya, but one appears to read Sri Sudhanyaditya. These kings and others whose names are not recorded on the gold coins issued by them presumably ruled in Vanga and may be regarded as later rulers of the kingdom founded by Gopa Chandra.

The six copper plate grants of these kings of Samatata region provide much information about the provincial administration in details. The structure of the administration was not much different from the Gupta administration. Bhukti and Vishaya were the most important administrative units of that time. All of these records undoubtedly indicate that there was a free, strong and stable government in Bengal which brought peace and prosperity to the people and made them conscious of their power and potentialities.

7.2 Samatata and Vanga after Gopa Chandra

Although the six copper plate grants of the kingdom of Samatata give detail information about administration but these are silent about genealogy of the rulers or about any detail political history. Thus it is yet unknown to us that how long the independent kingdom established in this region by Gopa Chandra continued to exist and even how it ended. Hiuen Tsang in his account has mentioned about the kingdom of Samatata which seems to have included the major part if not the whole of Vanga also. According to Hiuen Tsang during the 1st half of the 7th century CE Samatata and Vanga regions were ruled by a line of Brahmana rulers. Some scholars assume that this line of rulers belonged to Bhadra dynasty. Hiuen Tsang mentioned about Shila Bhadra who was the patriarch of Nalanda. Nidhanpur copper plate inscription of Bhaskara Varman mentioned the name of a vassal chief named Jyeshtha Bhadra. These two references indicate that there was probably a ruling line member of which having name suffixed with Bhadra. Unfortunately there is not sufficient evidence in support of this view. The Brahmanical dynasty whatever may be the family name seems to have been overthrown by a line of Buddhist kings who used the word Khadga attached with their name as their family name. That is why the dynasty is generally known as the Khadga dynasty.

7.3 Bengal under the Khadga rulers

Khadga Dynasty ruled the Vanga and Samatata areas of ancient Bengal in c 7th-8th century CE. Information about the dynasty comes from two copper plate grants discovered at Ashrafpur near Dacca of present day Bangladesh, coins, and the Chinese accounts of Sheng-che written in c. 7th century CE etc. Of these, the Ashrafpur copper plate grants are the most important. The first known ruler of the dynasty is Khadgodyama who most probably ruled between c. 625 and 640 CE. But unfortunately nothing is known about his predecessors. Khadgodyama was succeeded by his son Jatakhadga who ruled between c. 640 and 658 CE. The line of succession continued through his son Devakhadga who reigned between c. 658 and 673 CE and his grandson Rajabhata had ruled between c. 673 and 690 CE. Rajabhata was probably succeeded by his brother Balabhata who ruled between c. 690 and 705 CE. The second Ashrafpur copper plate grant refers to an Udirnakhadga. The last part of his name may indicate that he too probably belonged to the Khadga dynasty, but the period of his reign is yet to be determined.

The Khadga kings did not use any paramount title like Paramesvara or Maharajadhiraja etc. This indicates that they were local rulers. The extent of their territory is difficult to ascertain. In one of the Ashrafpur copper plate grants there are references to Talapataka and Dattakataka, identified respectively with Talpara and Datgaon villages under Raipura sub district in Narsingdi.

The Khadgas were politically dominant in the region of Vanga. The Ashrafpur copper plate grants were issued from the Jayaskandhavara of Jayakarmantavasaka, identified with Barakanta or Badkamta in Comilla district of present day Bangladesh, in the 13th regnal year which was in c. 671 CE of Devakhadga. So, it appears that Devakhadga had extended his power from Vanga to Samatata uprooting the Rata king Sridharana Rata (who ruled between c. 660 and 670 CE). This is epigraphically supported by the DeulbadiSharvani image inscription of Queen Prabhavati. The inscription depicts Devakhadga as benevolent (Danapati) and powerful (pratapi) and the conqueror of all enemies (Vijitarikhanda). The conquest probably required legitimacy through construction of or patronage to religious establishments. In accordance with the tradition of the age, this might have led Devakhadga to grant lands to Buddhist monastic establishments.

Both Ashrapur copper plate grants make it clear that Devakhadga and his son Rajabhata together donated 15 patakas and 20 dronas of land to the four viharas and viharikas in charge of the revered preceptor Sanghamitra. The amount of the land donated to each vihara corresponds to about 484 bighas (1 pataka at least 128 bigha) at an average. Devakhadga, however, did not get the monasteries constructed; rather the establishments were already in existence and the Khadga king brought them within a single campus (ekagandikrta) thereby making it a sacred landscape.

Attempts were made to achieve economic gains by utilizing the donated lands. An important aspect of the plate is that it refers to Krsyamanaka, meaning tillers of land. The cultivators appear to have been mere agricultural laborers because they were neither landowners, nor did they have any right to enjoy the lands; land ownership lay with the monastic establishments. And the lands were enjoyed by another stratum of Bhujyamanakas mentioned in the grants. Those who enjoyed the land (bhujyamanakas) were different from those who actually cultivated (krsyamanakas) it. This difference leads one to conceive of a three tier land system in vogue: land-owning monasteries (Viharas and Viharikas), the beneficiaries (bhujyamanakas), and the actual tillers of the soil (krsyamanakas). The system appears to have been the same as mentioned in the Yajnavalkya Smṛti (c 200 BC-200 CE) mahipati (King), Ksetrasvami (landowner) and Karsaka (actual tiller).

Both Devakhadga and his son Rajabhata supported the Buddhist practices in Samatata. The Chinese monk Sheng-Che Ch'an Shih writes that when he came to Samatata (his arrival time is not known) the king of the country was Ho-luo-She-Po-t'o or Rajaraja (bhata), Devakhadga's son. He was a great admirer of the three-gems - the Buddha, the Law and the Order (San-pao) and a zealous upasaka (Wu-po-so-chia) who followed the five Buddhist commandments. The king is said to have given to the monks and nuns offerings (not specified) for their maintenance. Every morning on behalf of the king an officer was sent to the monastery to ask the welfare of the resident monks including Sheng-che. The vihara where the monks and the great Che used to live was the Rajavihara. This Rajavihara may be suggested to have been the same as mentioned in the Gunaighar Copper plate of Vainyagupta (AD 507). All these supports/patronages may be explained as the king's efforts towards legitimising his royal power.

The copper plate of Balabhata, another son of Devakhadga, describes him as having granted 28 patakas of land in the area of Dhanalaksmpataka (unidentified)

for the maintenance of the viharas and stupas and for the renovation and repair works at the axramas. The plate refers to mahabhogakshrama, meaning probably the ashrama where grand religious festivals were held. The viharas were apparently eight in number and in them; the Parimitamatam and Danachandrika were taught and discussed. The donations were apparently made for the residential religious structures erected in the name of the Buddhist Trinity- the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha.

7.4 Conclusion

The first Ashrafpur copper plate grant, however, furnishes a little more information about the religious leaning of the dynasty. It refers to the inscription of the name SrimatDevakhadga below the bull facing the left and not dharmachakra (Wheel of Law). This may indicate Devakhadga's Shaiva leaning which appears to have continued through his son Balabhata who also described himself as paramahesvaraRajaputra in his copperplate.

Devakhadga's queen Prabhavati also caused the goddess Sharvani to be covered with gold leaves out of reverence for the goddess (*mahadevibhaktyahemaliptam-akarayat*) at the village of Deulbadi in the district of Comilla of present day Bangladesh. The goddess Sharvani has eight arms which hold the thunderbolt, the bell, the bow and the shield on the left; and the conchshell, the goad, the sword, and the wheel on the right. She stands on a lotus-seat on the back of a conch lion and belongs to the Brahmanical pantheon.

Nowhere in the Deulbadi image inscription, however, has it been mentioned that the goddess Sharvani was built and installed at Deulbadi. Indeed if we go by the inscription, we can surmise that the image of the goddess was already in existence at Deulbadi when the queen covered it with gold leaves.

The Shaiva leanings of Devakhadga, his queen Prabhavati, and their son Balabhata, should be explained as an act of stabilising Khadga royal power in the newly conquered area of Samatata (Vijitarikhanda). The queen's act of covering the goddess with gold leaves occurs following the word Vijitarikhanda relating to Devakhadga.

Two more inscriptions of the Khadgas have been found in the Shalvan Vihara excavated area which, however, does not point out anything about the activities of the dynasty.

The Deva dynasty, as has been epigraphically suggested, might have supplanted the Khadgas in 8th century CE.

7.5 Model Questions

1. Write an essay on the political condition of Samatata during the post Gupta period.
2. Write a short note on the Khadga rulers.

7.6 Suggested Readings

1. R. C. Majumdar (ed.), *History of Ancient Bengal*, Delhi, 1989.

Unit-8 □ Rise of Gauda

Structure

8.0 Objective

8.1 Introduction

8.2 The region of Gauda

8.3 Later Gupta dynasty

8.4 Conclusion

8.5 Model Questions

8.6 Suggested Readings

8.0 Objective

- The objective of the present unit is to study the rise of Gauda in ancient Bengal's political trajectory.
- The learners will come to know the historical evolution of early Bengal centring around Gauda.
- The present unit also covers the role of later Gupta dynasty in the history of Bengal.

8.1 Introduction

The Gauda kingdom came into being in late 6th century CE in eastern India, as a result of a political disintegration of the Gupta Empire which existed between the 3rd and 6th century CE. The core areas of the Gauda kingdom were located in what is now the state of Bengal in India and the northern part of the country of Bangladesh, with the capital at Karnasuvarna located near the present town of Murshidabad. For a brief period of time under king Shasanka Gauda became a very powerful kingdom vying with other regional powers for political supremacy in India. Unfortunately the kingdom of Gauda could not sustain its power for a long time. Soon after the death of Shasanka the kingdom failed to sustain its power and

therefore declined rapidly. But it passed into history as the base kingdom for the vast empires of future days most notably under the Pala and the Sena rulers between the 8th and 12th century CE.

The fall of the Gupta Empire and the subsequent failure of the effort of Yashodharman led to the political disintegration of northern India marked by the rise of many independent regional powers. Among these powers the Pushyabhuti dynasty of Thaneswar, Maukhari dynasty of Koshala and the later Gupta dynasty of Magadha were the most prominent. Bengal also took advantage of this political situation and two powerful independent kingdoms Vanga and Gauda were established here around the 6th century CE.

8.2 The region of Gauda

The emergence of Gauda kingdom marked an important benchmark in the history of Bengal. But the region has a much earlier history. Panini in his grammar based text *Ashtadhyayi* refers Gaudapura. Kautilya also mentioned about the rich products coming from Gaudadesha to Magadha in his famous work *Arthashastra*. This place was known to Vatsyayan, the author of *Kamasutra*, to the famous poet Kalidasa and many others also.

According to Varahamihira Gauda was different from the other parts of Bengal. The text of *Bhavishya Purana* mentions Gauda as a region located between the north of Bardhamana and south of the river Padma. Varahamihira in his *Vrihatsamhita* distinguished Gaudaka from particularly Pundra or the bhukti of Pundravardhana, Tamraliptika or Tamralipti, Vanga, Samatata and the bhukti of Vardhamana.

Henceforth throughout the so called Hindu period Gauda and Vanga broadly denoted the two prominent political divisions of Bengal. The former comprising the entire northern portion and either the whole or at least major part of western Bengal, and the latter includes entire southern and eastern Bengal. In this regard it should be kept in mind that the actual political boundaries of these broad divisions varied largely in different times. In spite of that these rough geo political divisions persisted throughout the ancient times. The names of other divisions like Pundravardhana or Varendri (northern Bengal), Radha or Suhma (western Bengal), Samatata or Harikela (eastern Bengal) etc were also used along with the broad two divisions. The geo political divisions of Gauda and Vanga are similar with the divisions of Aryavarta (denotes whole of northern India starting from the north of the Vindhya Range) and

Dakshinapatha (denotes whole of the southern part starting from the Vindhya Range) of the ancient times.

8.3 Later Gupta dynasty

Later Gupta dynasty emerged to the power after the decline of the imperial Gupta dynasty and was contemporary of the Maukhari dynasty of Malwa region. The later Guptas established their power in Magadha region. They became successful to extend their sovereignty across the land of Gauda and became able to hold that up to the rise of Shasanka. In spite of having same family name the later Gupta rulers were not related in any way with the imperial Gupta rulers. Probably they were at first feudatory to the imperial Gupta rulers. Gradually during the declining period of the imperial Guptas the later Guptas came into prominence and obtained independence almost around the same time as the Maukhari rulers. The later Gupta rulers became able to sustain their rule till around the middle of the 8th century CE.

The early history of this dynasty is known from the Apsad inscription of Aditya Sena. Aditya Sena was the 8th king of this dynasty according to this inscription. The genealogy given in this record mentions the name of Krishna Gupta as the founder ruler of the dynasty. He was succeeded by Harsha Gupta. Among the other rulers Jivita Gupta, Mahasena Gupta and Madhava Gupta were important. Aditya Sena was the son of Madhava Gupta according to the genealogy mentioned in the Apsad inscription. The first later Gupta ruler who assumed the full imperial title was undoubtedly Aditya Sena. Although initially the later Guptas and the Maukharis were related by matrimonial relationship but later hostility developed between them. They even fought with each other. Krishna Gupta, the first king, may be placed in c. 490 – 505 CE. His son Harsha Gupta succeeded him and ruled till 525 CE. Jivita Gupta, the third ruler of the dynasty reigned between c. 525 and 545 CE. Kumara Gupta, the 4th king ruled between c. 540 and 560 CE. He defeated the Maukhari king Ishana Varman in around 554 CE. Thus he laid the foundation of the greatness of the family. According to Ramesh Chandra Majumdar he established himself as the first independent ruler of this dynasty. Since no record of the imperial Gupta family is known after 543 CE we may assume that sometime around 550 CE both Ishana Varman and Kumara Gupta obtain independence.

Some scholars believe that the later Gupta rulers originally ruled in Malwa and it was only after the reign of Harshavardhana that they came into possession of

Magadha. Kumara Gupta is said to have died at Prayaga after his victory over Ishana Varman. The struggle continued during the reign of Damodara Gupta, who was the son and successor of Kumara Gupta. Damodara Gupta achieved a great victory over the Maukharis.

Damodara Gupta was succeeded by his Mahasena Gupta in the last quarter of the 6th century CE. He seems to have gained a victory over Susthita Varman of Kamarupa. However the simultaneous attack by the Maukharis and the king of Kamarupa resulted in setbacks for Mahasena Gupta.

Further it was during his reign that Shasanka founded an independent kingdom in Gauda (Bengal). The Chalukya king Kirtivarman who ruled between c. 567 and 597 CE is also said to have attacked Anga, Vanga and Magadha at this time. SrongTsan, the then king of Tibet who ruled between c. 581 and 600 CE also led a campaign against Mahasena Gupta. The later Gupta king Mahasena Gupta was defeated by both of the Chalukya king and the Tibetan king. After these defeats Mahasena Gupta seems to have taken shelter in Malwa.

Thereafter for nearly half a century the later Gupta rulers were overshadowed by Harsha's imperial kingdom in northern India. Mahasena Gupta had a son named Madhava Gupta. Madhava Gupta was again made a king of Magadha by Harshavardhana and was succeeded by his son Aditya Sena in c. 650 CE.

Damodarpur copper plate inscription proves the Gupta sovereignty over northern part of Bengal at least up to c. 544 CE. It is very likely that the Gupta sovereign was a member of the later Gupta dynasty. The later Gupta ruler might or might not have been connected by blood with the imperial Gupta rulers but they were to begin with in possession of a substantial portion of the imperial Gupta Empire. That their pretensions as successors of the imperial Gupta rulers were tacitly recognised is proved by references to the Gupta suzerainty in the records of the Parivrajaka rulers of Bundelkhand in the 6th century CE.

It is generally believed that the suzerainty of the later Gupta rulers continued over northern Bengal throughout that century. However the Gupta suzerainty of Gauda during the 6th century CE does not appear to have been either peaceful or uninterrupted. If Yashodharman really carried his triumphal march right up to the bank of the river Brahmaputra as he claims that event must have considerably weakened the power and position of the Gupta rulers in Gauda. It is exceedingly likely that although the Gupta suzerainty in Gauda survived this catastrophe but it

gradually became more nominal than the real. Gauda came to be regarded as an important political unit by the mid of the 6th century CE. The Haraha inscription of the Maukhari king Ishana Varman dated about 554 CE also indicates the political importance of Gauda region. In v. 13 of this inscription the king claims to have defeated the lord of the Andhras and 'made the Gauda people take shelter towards the sea shore after causing their land territories to be deprived of their future prospects'. The reference to the sea combined with the expedition of Ishana Varman to the Andhra country seems to indicate that the conflict with the rulers of Gauda took place in the southern part of western Bengal. Although this region was geographically in Gaudadesha but it was probably a part of the kingdom of Vanga founded by Gopa Chandra at the time of Ishana Varman's conquest.

Therefore it may be said that the fight between Ishana Varman and the ruler of Gauda was an important episode of the late classical period. Obviously the invasion and the defeat of the Gauda ruler was an outcome of the prolonged enmity between the Maukhari dynasty and the later Gupta dynasty since Gauda was under the later Gupta rule. Ishana Varman was succeeded by Sarva Varman. He probably conquered some parts of Magadha. He granted a village in the Shahabad district. This event indicates that he was in possession of at least some parts of Magadha. Similarly his successor Avanti Varman was also in possession of some parts of Magadha. According to some scholars later Gupta king Kumara Gupta defeated Ishana Varman and his son Damodara Gupta also defeated the Maukhari ruler. It is therefore evident that in the hereditary struggle between the later Gupta dynasty and the Maukhari dynasty victory inclined alternately to the two sides none of which could claim any decisive success.

According to some scholar after the success of Sarva Varman and Avanti Varman the later Gupta rulers left both Magadha and Gauda. Most probably they had shifted to Malwa. But whatever might have been actual history up to the end of the 6th century later Gupta king Mahasena Gupta's rule extended over Gauda, Magadha and spread up to the river Brahmaputra. But the prolonged hostilities between the Maukhari rulers and the later Gupta rulers invasions of the Chalukya ruler from the south and Tibet from the north made the later Gupta rulers too weak to keep control over Magadha and Gauda, and withdrew to Malwa. Advantage of this political situation was taken by Sasanka who set up an independent kingdom in Gauda.

In the long hostility between the later Gupta dynasty and the Maukhari dynasty

fortune was more favourable to the later Gupta ruler Mahasena Gupta. He also defeated Susthita Varman, who was the ruler of Kamarupa. Although there is a debate regarding the home territory of Mahasena Gupta that whether it was Malwa or Magadha, but also it is evident that both Magadha and Gauda formed part of his dominions and he put an end to the Maukhari aggression in these territories. The exact political status of Gauda during this period is difficult to determine. It is unlikely that the later Gupta kings directly administered the entire territory. The probability is that it was ruled by a local chief who acknowledged their suzerainty. But by the beginning of the 7th century CE, if not a few years earlier, Gauda formed an independent kingdom under Sasanka, and Magadha also formed a part of his dominions. The rise of this independent kingdom was probably facilitated by the great calamity which befell Mahasena Gupta who, according to some scholars, was disastrously defeated by the Kalachuri ruler. Ujjwaini the capital of the later Gupta kingdom of Malwa was in possession of the Kalachuri king Sankaragana and the two young sons of Mahasena Gupta were forced to live in the court of king Prabhakaravardhana of Thaneshwara.

8.4 Conclusion

In conclusion it may be said that the reconstruction of the history of Mahasena Gupta cannot be regarded as certain but if true it explains the rise of the independent kingdom of Gauda-Magadha out of the ruins of the later Gupta empire. It also explains why Sasanka, the founder of this independent kingdom, was involved in a war with the Maukhari king and the ruler of Kamarupa, the two great enemies of the later Gupta rulers and formed an alliance with Deva Gupta, the king of Malwa. In other words, the political traditions of the 6th century were continued in the 7th century CE. The invasion of the Tibetan King SrongTsan also played an important role in disrupting the kingdoms of the later Gupta dynasty in eastern India and helped Sasanka indirectly to rise in power.

Another important factor towards the same end may be found in the conquest of Kirti Varman, who was the king of Chalukya dynasty. He claims to have conquered Anga, Vanga and Magadha, and this, if true, must have considerably weakened the position of the later Gupta rulers in Gauda and Magadha. Sasanka might have taken advantage of this catastrophe to set up an independent kingdom in Gauda.

8.5 Model Questions

1. Write an essay on the political condition of Gauda during the post Gupta period.
2. Write a short note on the later Guptas.

8.6 Suggested Readings

1. R. C. Majumdar (ed.), *History of Ancient Bengal*, Delhi, 1989.

Unit-9 □ Sasanka

Structure

- 9.0 Objective**
- 9.1 Introduction**
- 9.2 Sasanka's Early Life**
- 9.3 Sasanka's Rise to Power**
- 9.4 Extension of Sasanka's Empire**
- 9.5 Sasanka and Buddhism**
- 9.6 Conclusion : Estimate of Sasanka**
- 9.7 Model Questions**
- 9.8 Suggested Readings**

9.0 Objective

- The objective of this unit is to study the history of Bengal under Sasanka.
- Four basic aspects of the Sasanka's rule will be discussed :
 - The rise of Sasanka as the ruler of Bengal
 - The expansion of the territory of Sasanka
 - Sasanka's relationship with Buddhism
 - The historical evaluation of Sasanka

9.1 Introduction

During the rule of the later Gupta parts of North and West Bengal were under them. It was at about that time this area came to be known as Gauda and although under the suzerainty of the later Gupta rulers, Gauda developed into a principality of great strength and fame, the Maukhari King Ishanvarman is said to have defeated the Gaudas and compelled them to take shelter on the sea coast. Obviously the invasion and defeat of the Gaudas was an episode in the prolonged enmity between the Maukharis and the Guptas, since Gauda was under the Guptas.

Sarvavarman and Avantivarman, successors of Ishanavarman, probably conquered parts of Magadha, and according to some scholars, it was after this that the Guptas left both Magadha and Gauda, and shifted to Malva. But whatever might have been actual history, upto the end of the sixth century, Gupta King Mahasenagupta's rule extended over Gauda, Magadha and spread upto the Brahmaputra River.

But the prolonged hostilities between the Maukharis and the Guptas, invasions of the Chalukya from the South and Tibet from the north made the later Gupta rulers too weak to keep control over Magadha and Gauda, and withdrew to Malawa. Advantage of this political situation was taken by Sasanka who set up an independent kingdom in Gauda.

9.2 Sasanka's Early Life

Very little information about the early life of Shashanka is known. It appears that he ruled for some time as a chieftain (mahasamanta) of Rohtasgarh under the Gauda king of Karnasuvarna, who possibly belonged to the family of the Maukharis. However, Jayanaga, another king of Karnasuvarna, appears to be close to the date of Shashanka. In fact, Karnasuvarna was the capital of Shashanka and the famous metropolis was situated near Chiruti railway station close to Rajbaridanga, the excavated site of Raktamrttika-mahavihara or modern Rangamati in Murshidabad district, West Bengal.

Shashanka has been described both in the inscriptions and literary accounts as the ruler of Gauda. In the narrower sense Gauda is the territory between the river Padma and Bardhamana region. But in course of time it embraced much wider area. In the Satpanchasaddeshavibhaga, the seventh patala of Book III, Shaktisangama Tantra Gauda is said to have extended from the Vangacountry up to Bhuvanasha probably Bhubaneshwar in Orissa. It is not unlikely that the author had described the extension of Gauda country keeping in mind the kingdom of Shashanka, which also embraced a part of Orissa.

9.3 Sasanka's Rise to Power

Among the Kings of Bengal, Sasanka was the first fully sovereign ruler and he occupies a prominent place in the history of Bengal. The exact time and date when Sasanka had ascended the throne of Bengal is, however, not definitely known.

In the Rohtasgarh inscription there is mention of one Sri Mahasamanta Sasanka. From this it is presumed that Sasanka was originally a Mahasamanta, that is, Feudatory Chief. But whether he was a feudatory under the Maukharis or the Guptas is not known.

But the fact that Mahasenagupta of the later Guptas was in possession of Gauda and Magadha during the sixth century A.D. raises the presumption that Sasanka was a feudatory under the Guptas. In 595 A.D. Mahasenagupta took refuge in the court of Prabhakarvardhana. The name of the mother of Prabhakarvardhana was Mahasenagupta. From this it is inferred by some that as a result of the Kalachuri invasion Mahasenagupta took refuge at the court of Thaneswar that is his sister.

However, it is generally agreed that it was from the ashes of the Gupta Empire that the independent kingdom of Gauda took birth. Sasanka was in end-less struggle with the Maukharis of Kanauj and the kingdom of Kamrup. This also points to the conclusion that it was as the successor to the Guptas that Sasanka was locked in a continuous struggle with the houses of Kanauj and Kamrup. Some historians are of the opinion that the name of Sasanka was Narendragupta and he was a scion of the Gupta dynasty. But this opinion is unacceptable to most of the modern historians.

Bana and Hiuen T-Sang have described Sasanka as the king of Gauda and his capital has been named as Karnasuvarna. But the actual site of his capital has not been determined. It is supposed to be a place now called Rangamati, six miles away from Behrampore.

Before the rise of Sasanka the Mana dynasty became a powerful independent kingdom between Midnapore and Gaya district in Bihar. Later this dynasty occupied Orissa. Sasanka defeated Shambhujas or his successor and occupied Dandabhukti that is Midnapore, Utkal, i.e., Orissa, and Kangod, i.e. South Orissa. The kings of Sailotbhava dynasty accepted the over lordship of Sasanka and continued to rule over Kangod, i.e., South Orissa.

The kingdom of Vanga, comprising south and eastern Bengal also recognised the supremacy of Sasanka. But nothing can be definitely said about this. Sasanka did not only make Gauda an independent and sovereign country but extended its dominions upto Ganjam towards the south, the whole of Bengal, Magadha and Varanasi. When Sasanka proceeded against the Maukharis, the Pushyabhutis of Thaneswar opposed him, for the Mukhari king Grahavarman was the son-in-law of Prabhakarvardhana.

Sasanka had a friend and ally in Devagupta of Malava. Devagupta was inimically disposed towards Grahavarmana. As Sasanka proceeded against Kanauj after having conquered Varanasi, Devagupta also was on his march against Kanauj. In the meantime Prabhakarvardhana had died and his eldest son Rajyavardhana was on the throne of Thaneswar.

The joy of succession to the throne was soon marred by the news that Grahavarman, husband of Rajyavardhan's sister, Rajyasree, had been defeated and killed by Devagupta who put Rajyasree in a prison. Rajyavardhana placed the charge of his king-dom in the hands of his brother Harshavardhana and proceeded against Devagupta and for the release of Rajyasree.

Sasanka in the meantime also was on the march for Thaneswar. In the encounter between Rajyavardhana and Devagupta, the latter was defeated and killed but as he was proceeding towards Kanauj he met Sasanka on the way. In the battle with Sasanka Rajyavardhana was defeated and killed.

The defeat and death of Rajyavardhana at the hands of Sasanka gave rise to various conflicting stories. Among these one mentioned on Bana's *Harsha Charit* and Hiuen T-Sang's narrative deserves mention. According to Bana Sasanka invited Rajyavardhana to his camp and finding him alone killed him. In Hiuen T-Sang's narrative it is mentioned that Sasanka on the advice of his ministers invited Rajyavardhana to his camp and done him to death.

It was because he was advised that so long as an honest and pious king like Rajyavardhana would be alive there would be no prospect for the greatness of the kingdom of Gauda. In the inscription of Harshavardhana it is mentioned that Rajyavardhana lost his life in the camp of his enemy in order to keep truth. From such conflicting statements it is difficult to find out the truth.

Further, that in order to tarnish the character of Sasanka who was the enemy of Rajyavardhana and Buddhism; it is possible that Bana, the Court panegyrist, and Hiuen T-Sang might have exaggerated the incident. That Sasanka behaved in a treacherous manner is not mentioned in any one of the narratives. For all this, the modern historians are reluctant to stigmatise Sasanka as a treacherous killer of Rajyavardhana.

On hearing the news of the death of Rajyavardhana, Harshavardhana as we know from *HarshaCharit*, promised to clear the earth of Gaudas, otherwise he would burn himself to death. Thereafter he proceeded with a large force against Sasanka,

but on the way he came to learn that his sister Rajyasree had fled from the prison of Devagupta and taken shelter in the Vindhya. He left the charge of his army to Bhadi, his General, and left in search of Rajyasree.

In the meantime Bhaskarvarman of Kamrup being fearful of the growing strength of Sasanka entered into a friendly alliance with Harshavardhana. Whether Harshavardhana succeeded in defeating Sasanka in any battle is not mentioned anywhere except in *Manjusreemulakalpa*, a Buddhist book, in which it is mentioned that Harshavardhana defeated Sasanka.

In this book the reference has been made in the nature of forecast. Further, the statement of Hiuen T-Sang that Sasanka oppressed the Buddhists; cut the Bodhi tree, constructed a Hindu Temple by the side of Bodh Gaya as a result of which sins he died of various diseases is also to be found in *Manjusreemulakalpa*.

It is difficult, according to modern historians, to accept these as true. These were nothing more or less than the prevalent stories among the Buddhists. There is a significant reference in the Buddhist books, that Harshavardhana did not receive proper respect in the barbarian country under Sasanka and returned.

This statement does not show that Harshavardhana was successful against Sasanka. Further, there was not a single word in Bana's *HarshaCharit* about Sasanka's defeat at the hands of Harshavardhana. This significant omission is enough to prove that Harshavardhana was not successful against Sasanka.

That Harshavardhana was not much successful against Sasanka is also proved by three inscriptions of Sasanka himself. One of these inscriptions is dated 699 A.D. which show that he was in possession of his territories till 619 A.D. In that inscription it is mentioned that a king of the Sailotbhava dynasty of South Orissa was feudatory of Sasanka. According to Dr. R. C. Majumdar, till his death in 637, Sasanka's dominions comprised Gauda, Dandabhukti, Magadha, Utkal, and Kangod. Thus, even if Harshavardhana remembered his oath of clearing earth of the Gaudas within a limited number of days he could not do any harm to Sasanka.

9.4 Extension of Sasanka's Empire

Sasanka first established himself in Gauda, and set his eyes on Magadha. Magadha at that time was under Maukhari rule, and Sasanka vowed to free it again.

None other than Shashanka could have defeated the Maukhari rulers of Magadha.

Next, he focused on extending his kingdom to Odissa, parts of Central Provinces, and Bihar. Though Sasanka remains known, and referred to, as the Lord of Gauda, his kingdom included more than just that region. By the end of his reign, his domain stretched from Vanga to Bhuvanewar while in the east, his kingdom bordered Kamarupa.

9.5 Sasanka and Buddhism

Sasanka was a worshipper of Siva. A 12th-century text states that Sasanka destroyed the Buddhist stupas of Bengal and was an oppressor of Buddhism. Sasanka is reputed to have cut the Bodhi tree where the Buddha found enlightenment, in the Mahabodhi Temple of Bodh Gaya. According to Ramesh Chandra Majumdar this account is doubtful because it was written centuries after the alleged persecution, and that it is “unsafe to accept the statements recorded in this book as historical”. According to Radhagovinda Basak there is no reason to believe that this 12th century Buddhist author had cherished any ill feeling about Sasanka, and he may have had reasons to describe the events as they occurred in the 7th century.

Even if it is agreed that he was not tolerant of other religions, his oppression of the Buddhists was not borne out by facts. Hiuen T-Sang’s account gives out this truth. For, from Hiuen T-Sang we come to know that Karnasuvarna and in other parts of Sasanka’s kingdom he saw Buddhism prevalent. If Sasanka oppressed the Buddhists, how could Buddhism be found to exist in all parts of his dominions including his capital ?

9.6 Conclusion : Estimate of Sasanka

In the history of the Bengalees and Bengal, Sasanka occupies a place of respect. It was he who for the first time mooted the idea of a Bengali Empire in the Aryavarta and his idea was largely successful during his life time. He made Gauda independent from the overlordship of the Guptas and made it a sovereign state.

He spread his authority all over Bengal including Dandabhukti, i.e., Midnapore, as also over Magadha, Utkal, Kongod, and Varanasi. He staked his claim over Kanauj and Thaneswar, but was not successful. Harshavardhana could not do him any harm during his life time. Sasanka was a diplomat of no mean ability.

He entered into friendly alliance with Devagupta of Malava against Maukharis of Kanauj. The portrayal of character of Sasanka in Buddhist books and Hiuen T-Sang's account is not the correct picture of his character. Modern researches have revealed some aspects of Sasanka's character which are at variance with those given out by the Buddhist books and Hiuen T-Sang.

9.7 Model Questions

1. Write an essay on the achievement of Sasanka in establishing an independent kingdom in Gauda.
2. Write briefly on the conflict between Sasanka and the Pushyabhutis of Thaneswar.

9.8 Suggested Readings

1. R. C. Majumdar (ed.), *History of Ancient Bengal*, Delhi, 1989.
2. Sailendra Nath Sen, *Ancient Indian History and Civilization*, Delhi, 1999.

Module IV

The Pala Empire

Unit 10 □ Condition of Bengal before the Formation of Pala Empire

Structure

10.0 Objective

10.1 Introduction

10.2 Fall of the Gauda Tantra – Anarchy

10.3 Matsyanayam – The Khalimpur Inscription

10.4 Historiography of Matsyanaya

10.5 Conclusion

10.6 Model Question

10.7 Suggested Readings

10.0 Objective

- The objective of this unit is to study the condition of Bengal between the rule of Sasanka and the rise of the Pala empire.
- This evolution of this period - as historically referred as Matsyanaya -will be discussed in this unit.
- The present unit will also analyze the historiography of Matsyanaya.

10.1 Introduction

The death of Shasanka proved to be a political disaster of the first magnitude. Not only were the dreams of a far flung Gauda empire rudely shattered but within a few years his kingdom including the capital city Karnasuvarna passed into the hands of Bhaskara Varman, the hostile king of Kamarupa. The events that led to this complete collapse are not known, and only a few facts of this obscure period in the history of Bengal may be gleaned from the documents at present available to us.

Sasanka's death loosened the bonds which united north and West Bengal, and these formed separate kingdoms in 638 CE within a few years both these kingdoms were conquered by Bhaskara Varman. The fact that Bhaskara Varman made a grant from the victorious camp at Karnasuvarna shows that he even succeeded in seizing the capital city of Sasanka.

Thus the available evidences seem to indicate that the death of Sasanka was followed by a disruption of his vast dominions and its component parts formed separate independent states. This gave the required opportunity to his lifelong enemies Bhaskara Varman and Harshavardhana who conquered respectively his former dominions in and outside Bengal.

10.2 Fall of the Gauda Tantra – Anarchy

The political disintegration of the Gauda empire after the death of Sasanka seems to be referred to in that curious Buddhist work *Arya Manjusri Mulakalpa*. The relevant passage has been translated as follows: 'after the death of Soma the Gauda political system (Gauda Tantra) was reduced to mutual distrust, raised weapons and mutual jealousy – one king for a week; another for a month; then a republican constitution – such will be the daily condition of the country on the bank of the Ganges where houses were built on the ruins of monasteries. Therefore Soma's (Sasanka) son Manava will last for 8 months and 5 days'.

The passage immediately following the above extract in the *Arya Manjusri Mulakalpa* almost undoubtedly refers to king Jayanaga of Gauda and there is equally little doubt that he is to be identified with the king of that name whose coins have been found in western Bengal and who issued a long grant from the victorious camp of Karnasuvarna, the capital of Sasanka. Although the tradition record in the *Arya Manjusri Mulakalpa* cannot be regarded by itself as historical, it is corroborated in the present instance by known facts. The general picture of anarchy, confusion and political disintegration is fully confirmed by the conquests of Harsha and Bhaskara Varman, and merely supplies the details of a presumption of which they inevitably lead. The reference to Jayanaga is also corroborated as noted above by numerous coins and inscription of a king named Jayanaga who ruled with Karnasuvarna as his capital.

10.3 Matsyanayam – The Khalimpur Inscription

The condition of Bengal in the century following the death of Sasanka and before the rise of the Palas (c 750-850 CE) has been described as matsyanyayam (matsyanyayam). In a near contemporary inscription, the Khalimpur copper plate of the 32nd year of the second Pala ruler Dharmapala, and the 12th century *Ramacharitam kavya* of Sandhyakara Nandi the anarchical condition of Bengal preceding the rise of the Pala dynasty is found mentioned as matsyanyayam.

The Sanskrit term matsyanyayam, used in ancient texts, bears special significance. In the *Arthashastra* (1.4.13-14) Kautilya or Chanakya defines the term as follows : When the law of punishment is kept in abeyance, it gives rise to such disorder as is implied in the proverb of fishes, i.e., the larger fish swallows a smaller one, for in the absence of a magistrate, the strong will swallow the weak.

Lama Taranatha, the 17th century Tibetan historian of Buddhism in India, also mentions that all of Bengal was pervaded by an unprecedented anarchy in the century before the rise of the Palas. Government was fragmented, with no king having real control over Gauda and Vanga or Samatata. Ksatriyas, Brahmanas, merchants and townsmen all were kings in their own homes. The sufferings and strife of the common people were intolerable.

The writer of the *Arya Manjusri Mulakalpa* declared that after Shashanka the state of Gauda was paralyzed and whoever was king thereafter would not be able to rule for even a year. According to the same source there was a disastrous famine in the period in the eastern region of India.

From the above it appears clear that in the century following the reign of Shashanka Bengal saw very little of stable government. The country was torn into many small kingdoms and internecine warfare among them caused the instability. In the absence of a strong force capable of enforcing law and order, a situation prevailed that has been termed as Matsyanyayam. Physical strength was the only strength, and throughout the land ran the frenzy of unbridled, unruly might. In order to put an end to this state of affair, Gopala emerged as the king of Bengal and founded the rule of the Pala dynasty.

We have no direct evidence from which to discern the social ramifications of this anarchy. But indirect deductions from the available evidence make it clear that in the absence of peace and order there was a decline in trade and commerce. The

loss of prominence of the port of Tamralipti after the 8th century CE is suggestive of this decay. Among the ruins of Mahasthana it can be seen that the temples and monasteries of the Pala period were built on the ruins of the earlier Gupta and post-Gupta eras. It would seem that the destruction belongs to the age of anarchy. The devastating famine mentioned earlier may have had a connection with the prevailing anarchy.

In the absence of a strong king, the feudal vassals, each one independent and autonomous, must have been instrumental in creating anarchy. And the sagacity of a few of them must have brought an end to the state of lawlessness; some of them coming together brought Gopala to power.

10.4 Historiography of Matsyanaya

Studies on the history of early Bengal were pursued with great interest by the Bengali scholars from the beginning of the 20th century. The partition of Bengal in 1905 gave a new dimension to the search for the cultural past of the Bengali speaking people and the sphere of history and archaeology where extend to a search for the origin of the Bengali identity. As a response to the view that from Magadha the Pala rulers extended their authority in Bengal and subdued the Bengalis, R. P. Chanda projected Gopala as the first Bengali king who was elected by the Bengali people to put an end to the anarchy and this according to him was the 'revival of Gaudarastra' which, to him, was the representative of Bangladesh, the culmination of the unified image of Bengal. In the writings of A. K. Maitreya the same image of Bengal and the attempt of view Gopala as a Bengali king are present. It was equivalent to Lama Taranatha's Vangala. To elect a king like Gopala all local chiefs are supposed to have made 'voluntary self sacrifice for the sake of common good' that, to him is the 'patriotism of the purest type'. It resulted in the establishment of a 'national government based upon the principles of federation where all feudal chiefs lived under the protection of Gaudeswara elected by them. In other words the political chaos led the people to establish an ideal type of government. Prof. R. D. Banerjee slightly differing from this wanted to view Gauda-Magadha-Vanga together as a unit that faced anarchy after Jivita Gupta II. It ended in the selection of Gopala by the subjects of Gauda. In the year of 1943, came up the History of Bengal volume I (Hindu Period) under the editorship of R. C. Majumdar from the University of Dacca. Prof. R. C. Majumdar also opined that the death of Sasanka was a political disaster that 'shattered the dream of a fur-flung Gauda empire' and loosened the

bonds that united northern and western Bengal'. This according to him is indicated in Hsuan Tsang's account referring to Pundravardhana and Karnasuvarna as separate kingdoms. However, existence of such bond under Sasanka is never indicated in any record so as Sasanka's authority over northern Bengal. Although *Arya Manjusri Mulakalpa* indicates vaguely about Sasanka's authority over northern Bengal but this is not beyond doubt. However, he was the first to study the history of Vanga separately suggesting that developments there might have been different from what was happening in Gauda. But at the same time their nature was identical as both were experiencing rapid change of rulers and repeated foreign invasions. He visualizes 'a throne of Bengal' emphasizing the same unified image. Like R. P. Chanda he too sees the election of Gopala as an instance of 'subordinating individual interests to a national cause' though admits that the selection was originally made by 'a group of leaders or independent chiefs'. Thus attempt to see Bengal as a single identity to imagine a spirit of self sacrifice and love for this 'Bengal' among the people in the 8th century CE. The establishment of a government by them that was of an ideal type and above all a suitable beginning for a line of rulers who fulfilled their dream of establishing an empire i. e. the Gauda empire are pronounced in the writings of these authors.

The term matsyanaya occurs in a single document viz the Khalimpur copper plate inscription of Dharmapala. Historians generally cite two other documents as corroborating it. These are the Buddhist text *Arya Manjusri Mulakalpa* and the account of Lama Taranatha. The general trend is either to accept or to discard the statements contained in them. However a study of the historical context in which such documents were composed would led to a better understanding and evaluation of the statements made in them.

It is the Khalimpur copper plate inscription where the Palas first represent themselves as rulers which reconstruct their genealogy describing their progenitor as Sarvavidyavadatah and the best among kings and his son Vapyata as one who destroyed his enemies thereby giving no clue about their ancestry and also indicating that it was obviously not from any dignified status. In verse no. 4 it is stated that in order to put an end to matsyanyaya the Prakritis assisted Gopala, the crest jewel of the heads of kings to take the hands of fortune. Thus it is apparent that Gopala was not a royal person and gained the throne after subduing other claimants to the throne. But whether the situation can be defined as matsyanyaya is to be ascertained because it is natural for a court poet appointed to frame the Prasasti of a new royal family to glorify his patron. However on the basis of the statements written in the

corroborative text of *Arya Manjusri Mulkalpa* it will not be an exaggeration to explain the political condition prior to the election of Gopala as an anarchy. It clearly implies that anarchy prevailed in Gauda after the death of Sasanka and the main factor leading to it was the absence of a stable administration.

10.5 Conclusion

Thus in conclusion it may be said that the period of Matsyanaya is generally viewed as a dark period which eclipsed the life of the Bengali people. The term is generally applied to the period extending from the death of Sasanka in around middle of the 7th century CE to the rise of the Pala dynasty in c. 750 CE. This condition is believed to have prevailed in the whole of Bengal in general. Absence of a stable government and repeated foreign invasions are regarded to be the main themes outlining the politics of this period. It is indeed needless to mention that this anarchy has affected the life of the common people too.

10.6 Model Question

1. Write a short note on Matsyanaya.
2. How far it is correct to explain the political scenario of Bengal after the death of Sasanka as an anarchy?

10.7 Suggested Readings

1. Nitish Sengupta, *The Land of Two Rivers*, London, 2011.
2. Pramode Lal Paul, *The Early History of Bengal*, Vol. II, Calcutta, n.d.
3. R. C. Majumdar (ed.), *History of Ancient Bengal*, Delhi, 1989.

Unit-11 □ The Origin and the Early History of the Palas

Structure

11.0 Objective

11.1 Introduction

11.2 Gopala – the first Elected Ruler of Bengal

11.3 Conclusion

11.4 Model Questions

11.5 Suggested Readings

11.0 Objective

- This objective of this unit is to study the establishment of the Pala Empire in ancient Bengal.
- The coronation of Gopala - the first elected king of the Pala dynasty-will also be discussed.

11.1 Introduction

The death of Sasanka marked the beginning of a chaotic and disrupted political situation in Bengal. Huen Tsang's account shows that Sasanka's death loosened the bonding force which united the northern and western parts of Bengal region. The Buddhist work *Aryamanjusree Mulakalpa* mentioned that after the death of Sasanka the Gauda tantra or the Gauda political system collapsed completely. Khalimpur inscription and the literary text like *Ramacarita* of Sandhyakar Nandi mention this situation as Matsyanaya. Thus in spite of our limitation for scarcity of information it may definitely be said that the overall political situation of Bengal during the post Sasanka period was very chaotic.

This period of anarchy ended around the middle of the 8th century CE when Sri Gopala was elected as the first people's king of Bengal by the 'prakriti punja'. In this

way a new dynasty had been ascended to the throne of Bengal. This new dynasty is known as the Pala dynasty.

11.2 Gopala – the first Elected Ruler of Bengal

Gopala was the first ever ruler in the history of Bengal whose selection as the ruler was made by his own subject. He was the founder of the Pala dynasty of Bengal and had ended the century long political confusion and anarchy. His ascendance to the throne of Bengal marks an epoch in the history of Bengal.

The foundation of Pala dynasty marks the beginning of a chronology may be fixed with a tolerable degree of certainty. Thus the four centuries long rule of the Pala rulers gives the advantages to the historians of being able to follow a proper order of succession of whose long line of kings is precisely known.

The century long anarchy and political disruption led to a natural reaction from the subjects of Bengal. The people suffering from miseries for such a long period spontaneously developed a political consciousness and a spirit of self sacrifice to which there is no recorded parallel in the history of Bengal. These people became conscious that only a single strong central authority can offer effective remedy against political disintegration within and from foreign invasion. They also realised that such a state of things could only be brought about by the voluntary surrender of authority to one person by the numerous petty chiefs who had been exercising independent political authority in different parts of Bengal. It should be kept in mind that the ideal of suppressing individual interest for a national cause was not common in India in the 8th century CE. Thus it will not be an exaggeration to say that the ascendance of Gopala to the throne of Bengal without any struggle was no less than a revolution. It is indeed needless to mention that the revolution was popular, spontaneous and bloodless.

Khalimpur copper plate inscription briefly mention about the ancestors of Dharmapala. Unfortunately there is no contemporary source of information about Gopala's early life and his political career. He is known only through the later literary references and genealogies recorded in various inscriptions. According to Khalimpur copper plate Gopala was the son of Vapyata who took the title of Khanditarati which means killer of enemies. His grandfather was Daita Vishnu. He was known as Sarva vidya vadata. A striking feature of the Pala epigraphic records

and genealogies is that a very less effort has given to establish any claim of high pedigree. It is quite possible that they have relatively humble origin. The support of their subject probably gave them over confidence. But when the political power of the Palas slowly decayed, at that time the Pala rulers claimed that they descended from the solar dynasty. The literary text of *Ramacharita* mentions the Pala rulers as the descendents of the solar dynasty.

There are no much references of the process of the election of Gopala. Khalimpur copper plate gives us a brief outline of this historical event. Gopala's election took place around 750 CE. Khalimpur copper plate inscription mentions '*matsyanyayamapakitumprakritibhirlakshmiyakaramgrahitah sri Gopala itikshitisa-sirsamchudamanitatsubha*'. Prof. Kielhorn translates the above as follows: 'his son was the crest jewel of the heads of kings, the glorious Gopala, whom the people made take the hand of fortune, to put an end to the practice of fishes'. In a footnote to the above, Prof. Kielhorn adds : 'Gopala was made king by the people to put an end to a lawless state of things in which everyone was the prey of his neighbour'. He also cites authority for his interpretation of the phrase 'matsyanyaya'.

Apparently it appears that Gopala was made king to put an end to the state of anarchy. But there is a controversy regarding the identity of his electors. Khalimpur copper plate inscription mentions 'Prakriti punjna' as the electors of Gopala. Apparently it appears as the whole of the subjects and it has consequently being held that Gopala was elected king who was elected by the general body of people. But this meaning seems to be over simplification. Therefore some scholars suggested that the term 'prakriti' should be taken as a technical term which means principal officers. The chapter of the election of Jalauka portrayed in the *Rajatarangini* of Kalhana mentions a group of seven officials as the prakritis. But this kind of election seems to be impossible in the absence of any strong and stable government exercising authority over the whole kingdom. As we know that the central political authority of Gauda or Vanga had seized to function for a long period and the region was divided into a number of small or medium independent principalities, therefore it is scars to think of a body of government officials placing somebody on the throne of Bengal.

In spite of this controversy and lack of supporting data it is generally believed that Gopala was elected by the people though most probably the selection was originally made by a group of leaders or independent ruling chiefs.

According to M. M. Haraprasad Shastri either Gopala or his ancestor served as military officer of a king. The reason behind this assumption is that in a commentary

of *Ashtasahasrika Prajna Paramita* composed by Haribhadra Dharmapala is described as 'raja bhatadivamsapatita'. This text was composed during the reign of Dharmapala himself. The identification of this king yet not has been properly possible. But most of the scholars identified him with the king of the same name ruling in Samatata region sometimes around late 7th century CE. Haraparasad Shastri concluded that the Pala rulers were connected in some way with the Khadga dynasty. The Khadga rulers of eastern Bengal were also the followers of Buddhism like the Pala rulers and were in power shortly before the accession of Gopala in the political history of Bengal. Some scholars also suggested that this connection may also from the female line. For them the word 'patita' means descended from the maternal line. Scholars like Akshay Kumar Maitreya, Keilhorn et al have traced some references to the royal family of Dharmapala's mother in the Khalimpur copper plate inscription. Dedda Devi, the chief queen of Gopala, is compared with the wives of the deities like Chandra, Agni, Siva, Kuvera, Indra and Vishnu. In course of the comparative description the word 'Bhadratmaja' is used immediately after Bhadra, the name of Kuvera's wife. Prof. Keilhorn while translating this verse took 'Bhadratmaja' as an epithet qualifying Deddadevi and translated it as 'a daughter' of the Bhadra king taking Bhadra as a tribal or family name.

It would thus appear that we have hardly any definite information regarding the origin of the Pala royal family. Strangely enough unlike the other medieval records, we do not find any mythological pedigree of the dynasty in most of the Pala inscriptions. In the Kamauli copper plate of Vaidya Deva who was originally the minister of the Pala king Vighraha Pala III is said to have belonged to the mythological Solar dyanasty. According to the commentary of Sandhyakar Nandi's Ramacharita, Dharmapala was 'the light of Samudra's race' (Samudra kula dipa) which means descended from the ocean. It may be noted that both the records belonged to the very end of the Pala period. Besides the membership of the Solar or Lunar families were commonly claimed for most of the royal houses of those days, and there is nothing distinctive about it. The descent from the Samudra or ocean has undoubtedly more novelty in it. A distant echo of this may be traced in an old Bengali text called Dharma Mangala composed by Ghanarama. It records that Dharmapala had no son and his queen Vallabha Devi was banished to a forest. There she had a liaison with the ocean and a son was born to her. This story gives a wrong name for Dharmapala's queen and describes him as a devout Vaishnava and devoted to the Brahmanas.

According to the Tibetan historian Taranatha Gopala was succeeded by a son whom NagarajaSagara Pala, the sovereign of the ocean, begot on his younger queen.

This is evidently another version of the origin of the Palas from samudra or ocean. These stories are too silly to be seriously considered and do not help us in the least in tracing the ancestry of the Palas. An attempt has been made to reconcile the two different traditions samudra and surya origin by holding that 'samudra kula' means 'surya kula' or solar race to which Samudra, the son of the mythological king Sagara, belonged.

As to the caste of the Pala kings the commentary on a verse of Ramacharita distinctly says that Ramapala was born of a Kshatriya king. It may be readily believed, therefore, that the Pala rulers, like most of the ruling families in medieval India, were regarded as kshatriyas. This view is corroborated by the matrimonial relations of the Pala rulers with the Rashtrakuta kings and the Kalachuri kings. Perhaps one of the reasons why no reference to the origin and caste of the Pala rulers occurs in their own records is the fact that they were Buddhists and therefore they did not care so much to adopt Brahmanical institutions or traditions. The copper plate inscriptions of the Pala rulers begin with an invocation to Lord Buddha, and many kings of the dynasty are known to have been great patrons of Buddhism.

Like the origin and the process of the election of Gopala there is also a debate regarding the location of the homeland of the Palas as well as the original kingdom of Gopala. The main reason behind this controversy is that there is no epigraphic data regarding this point. Most of the copper plate grants of different Pala rulers issued from Magadha. This naturally led many scholars to conclude that the Palas originally ruled in Magadha and subsequently conquered Bengal. On the other hand Ramacharita of Sandhyakar Nandi refers to Varendri as the original homeland of the Pala rulers. Gwalior inscription of the Pratihara ruler mentions Dharmapala as Vangapati. Badal pillar inscription mentions that Dharmapala was the first ruler of the east who gradually spread his imperial territory in other direction. These secondary evidences led some scholars to conclude that the original kingdom of the Palas must be placed in Bengal.

There is a contradiction in the evidences of Ramacharita and the Gwalior inscription. In Ramacharita Sandhyakar Nandi refers Varendri as the original land of the Pala rulers. On the other hand the Gwalior inscription mentions Vanga as the land of the Pala rulers. During the ancient period Varendra or Varendri denoted the northern part of Bengal. On the other hand Vanga denoted the eastern and south eastern part of Bengal. In spite of this contradiction it may be keep in mind that many times Vanga denoted as the name for the whole province of Bengal. Tibetan

historian Taranath's account played a very important role to solve the controversy. For him 'Gopala was born of a kshatriya family near Pundravardhana but was subsequently elected ruler of Bhangala (undoubtedly a corrupt form of Vanga of Vangala)'. Thus it can be concluded that whatever may be the limits of the original kingdom of Gopala it will not be an exaggeration to say that he became successful to consolidate his authority over the whole of Bengal.

Unlike the election episode of Gopala there is an overall scarcity of information regarding Gopala's administration or any other events during his regnal years. Most of the copper plate grants issued by Narayana Pala who was a much later descendent of Gopala mention '*jitva yah kamakariprabhavamabhibhavarhsasvatimprapasantim*'. This seems to mean that Gopala established peace in his kingdom by having defeated the attacks of the oppressors or tyrants. The expression 'kamakari' literally means those who do not acknowledge any control and act wilfully. The reference in this case is of course to the period of anarchy and political disintegration that prevailed before the accession of Gopala. However it has been suggested that 'kamakari' means 'king of Kamarupa, who is an enemy'. 'Kama' with the pleonastic suffix 'ka' standing for Kamarupa under the well known Sanskrit aphorism that part of a name may be substituted for the full name. It is unreasonable to rule out the interpretation altogether but it is to be seriously considered whether such an achievement of Gopala as the conquest of Assam or of Magadha (as noted by Taranath), would not have been more directly stated in the official records if it were a fact.

According to Taranath Gopala ruled for forty five years. But this statement cannot be accepted without corroboration. According to Arya ManjusreeMulaKalpa the period of Gopala's reign was about twenty seven years. The fact that he was called to the throne at a critical moment shows that he must have been fairly advanced in age and given proof of his prowess and ability. According to *Arya Manjusree MulaKalpa* Gopala died at the advanced age of eighty.

11.3 Conclusion

In conclusion it may be said that although not much is known about Gopala's life or his military career but it is generally believed that at the time of his death he had bequeathed a considerable kingdom to his son Dharmapala. According to *Arya Manjusree MulaKalpa* Gopala died at the age of eighty. He ruled over Bengal for about twenty seven years. It is generally assumed that Dharmapala ascended to the

throne around 770 CE. There is no proper record available about the exact boundaries of Gopala's kingdom. But there is no doubt that his son and successor Dharmapala greatly expanded the kingdom. He became successful to make it one of the most powerful empires in contemporary India.

11.4 Model Questions

1. Write a short note on the political condition before the rise of the Palas.
2. Briefly discuss on the origin and early history of the Pala dynasty.
3. Write briefly on Gopala, the founder of the Pala dynasty.

11.5 Suggested Readings

1. Pramode Lal Paul, *The Early History of Bengal*, Vol. II, Calcutta, n.d.
2. R. C. Majumdar (ed.), *History of Ancient Bengal*, Delhi, 1989.
3. Nitish Sengupta, *The Land of Two Rivers*, London, 2011.

Unit 12 □ The Pala Empire : Dharmapala and Devpala

Structure

- 12.0 Objective**
- 12.1 Introduction**
- 12.2 Dharmapala – the real founder of the empire**
- 12.3 Importance of Kannauj – Mahadayashree**
- 12.4 Tripartite Struggle during Dharmapala**
- 12.5 Dharmapala and Buddhism**
- 12.6 Estimate of Dharmapala**
- 12.7 Devapala – A perfect Successor**
- 12.8 Devapala and Buddhism**
- 12.9 Estimate of Devapala**
- 12.10 Conclusion**
- 12.11 Model Questions**
- 12.12 Suggested Readings**

12.0 Objective

- The objective of this unit is to study the expansion and consolidation of the Pala Empire after Gopala - the founder of the Pala dynasty.
- The achievements of the Dharmapala and Devapala - the second and third rulers of the Pala dynasty respectively - will also be discussed.
- The present unit will also analyze the Pala ruler's relationship with Buddhism.
- An estimate of the rule of Dharmapala and Devapala will also be discussed in this unit.

12.1 Introduction

The Pala Dynasty was originated in the region of Bengal as an imperial power during the Late Classical period. They became successful to establish their imperial control over a fairly large territory which extended even beyond the geo-political region of so-called Bengal. The empire was named after its ruling dynasty, whose rulers bore names ending with the suffix of Palau, which meant “protector”. They were followers of the Mahayana and Tantric schools of Buddhism. They were insightful diplomats and military conquerors. Their army was equipped with war elephant cavalry.

12.2 Dharmapala – the real founder of the empire

Dharmapala was the second and considered to be the greatest ruler of the Pala dynasty of Bengal. He was the son and successor of Gopala, the founder of the dynasty. Dharmapala inaugurated the period of ascendancy of the Palas. Gopala was a good administrator undoubtedly who save the peoples of Bengal region from a huge political turmoil known as Matsyanyaya. But he was too busy to save his kingdom and restore an overall peaceful condition. Thus he could not be able to extend his empire. Dharmapala ascended to the throne in a relatively peaceful condition. Therefore he could easily focus on imperial extension.

Historian differs on when Dharmapala ascended the throne. RC Majumdar estimates his reign from 770 to 810 CE. According to D.C. Sircar, it was between 775 CE and 812 CE. Soon after ascending the throne Dharmapala had to face two powerful enemies – The Gujjara-Pratiharas and the Rashtrakutas. Gujjara-Pratiharas were the rulers of Rajputana and west-central India. Rashtrakutas were one of the most powerful ruling dynasties of the Deccan. Dharmapala was contemporary of Vatsaraja of Pratihara dynasty who reigned between c. 780 CE and c. 800 CE.

12.3 Importance of Kannauj – Mahadayashree

Kannauj was an ancient city located on the Ganga trade route and was connected to the Silk route. It made Kannauj strategically and commercially very important. It was also the erstwhile capital of Harshvardhana’s empire in north India.

As far as the early medieval period is concerned, Kannauj was extremely important in India. In fact the whole period between the 8th century and the 10th century CE is referred as the Imperial Age of Kannauj by prominent historians such as RC Majumdar, Suryanath U Kamath, A. S. Altekar, and many others. This indicates the importance of Kannauj in India of that time.

It was believed that one who had control over Kannauj had control over whole of India and the neighbourhood and India of that era refers to the entire Indian subcontinent of today. The term 'Mahadayashree' was common to refer the throne of Kannauj.

After the death of Harshavardhana, a disintegrated phase was witnessed by the peoples of Kannauj. Soon Yashovarman took over the control of this region and restore peace and prosperity again. During the latter half of 8th century, Yashovarman dynasty ended and Ayudha rulers took over Kannauj. They ruled till second decade of 9th century. Vajrayudha was the first among the Ayudha rulers. He defeated Jayapida Vinayaditya of Kashmir. Indrayudha was the next ruler. During his reign Dhruva Rashtrakuta invaded Kannauj. Later Dharmapala of Bengal also defeated Indrayudha. Dharmapala placed Chakrayudha as the king of Kannauj. Later Rastrakuta ruler Govinda III defeated Dharmapala and Chankrayudha. Finally Nagabata II Pratihara defeated Chakrayudha and annexed the throne of Kannauj.

12.4 Tripartite Struggle during Dharmapala

During the 8th century CE, a struggle for control over the Kannauj took place among three major empires of India namely the Palas, the Pratiharas and the Rastrakutas. The Palas ruled the eastern parts of India while the Pratiharas controlled the western India (Avanti-Jalaor region). The Rastrakutas ruled over the Deccan region of India. The struggle for control over Kannauj among these three dynasties is known as the tripartite struggle in Indian history.

The struggle started during the reign of Vatsaraja Pratihara. He ascended the throne in 778 CE. He attacked Dharmapala, the Pala king of Bengal and carried away his state umbrella. The major causes of the struggle between the three Powers i.e, the Rashtrakutas, Pratiharas and the Palas were, first, to get control over Gujarat and Malwa where this region is important on foreign trade due to the nearness of the coast. Secondly, they wanted to acquire over Kannauj which was a symbol of prestige in the early medieval Indian politics. It was also important to establish

control over vast resources of Gangetic plains. Their desire to impress pretty kingdoms with the sense of their might and lust of war booty, a prominent source for maintaining huge army were also important factors behind the long lasting tripartite struggle.

The Pratihara ruler, Vatsaraja wanted to capture Kannauj, Indrayudha was the ruler of Kannauj at that time. He accepted Vatsaraja's supremacy. However at that time, the Pala ruler, Dharmapala and the Rashtrakuta ruler, Dhruva equally wanted to capture Kannauj. Vatsaraja defeated Dharmapala in a battle. Simultaneously, Dhruva entered North India and attack Vatsaraja and conquered him. Besides, he also attack the Pala ruler, Dharmapala and conquest Kannauj. Since he was unable to stay in North he went back to south India. This helped Dharmapala to obtain unquestionable power in north India. Dharmapala placed Indrayudh's brother, Chakrayudh on the throne of Kannauj under his domination. This diplomatic success of the Pala king found mention in the Pala records in an ornate form through the pen of the court poets. To crown all these eulogistic verses is the 12th verse of Dharmapala's own Khalimpur copper plate, which runs as follows: 'With a sign of his gracefully moved eyebrows he installed the illustrious king of Kanyakubja, who readily was accepted by the Bhoja, Matsya, Madra, Kuru, Yadu, Yavana, Avanti, Gandhara and Kira kings bowing down respectfully with their diadems trembling, and for whom his own golden coronation jar was lifted up by the delighted elders of Panchala'. Scholars taking this verse too literally have followed suit with the court poet in ascribing credit to Dharmapala for conquering all those places and becoming the 'Uttarapathasvami'. However, Dharmapala's supremacy over all these powers is not confirmed by other sources. It is likely that Dharmapala had some success and may have pushed his sphere of influence as far as Kanauj, where he successfully placed his own protégé on the throne.

Vatsaraja was succeeded by his son Nagabhatta II. He consolidated his power in nearby territories and then attack Kannauj. He defeated Chakrayudh and captured Kannauj. He even attack Dharmapala, defeated him and entered in his territory up to Munger in Bihar. The Rashtrakutas ruler Govinda III was also ambitious ruler. He with the help of Chakrayudh and Dharmapala defeated Nagabhatta II. Chakrayudh and Dharmapala accepted his suzerainty and Kannauj was taken over by Govinda III.

Govinda III soon retired to the South which again created a ground for the Pratiharas and the Palas fight against each other for capturing Kannauj. Probably, thereafter Kannauj was occupied by Nagabhatta II.

12.5 Dharmapala and Buddhism

Dharmapala was personally a follower of Mahayanism. Therefore Buddhism received great royal patronage during his reign. He revived the Nalanda University and founded the Vikramshila University which later evolved into a great learning centre of Buddhism. He built the great Somapura Mahavihara in Paharpur, Naogaon District of present day Bangladesh. Buddhist scholar Taranath also credits him with establishing 50 religious institutions and patronizing the Buddhist author Hariibhadra. Buton Rinchen Drub credits Dharmapala with building the monastery at Uddandapura (Odantapuri), although other Tibetan accounts such as that of Taranatha, state that it was magically built and then entrusted to Devapala.

In spite of his faith for Buddha, he had no hostility with the followers of the Brahmanical religion. Inscriptional evidences show that he granted several lands for the temples of Brahmanical gods and he followed the scriptural rules of caste within his empire.

12.6 Estimate of Dharmapala

Dharmapala was undoubtedly a great ruler and a good administrator. It is quite just to the assumption of his full imperial title '*Parameshwara Parambhattaraka Maharajadhiraja*'. His political career was remarkable. When he ascended to the throne he had only a small kingdom established by his father. But his prowess and diplomatic skill made him successful to establish a vast empire in northern India. R. C. Majumdar correctly observes that, 'his undaunted spirit triumphed over all obstacles, and he launched Bengal into a career of imperial glory and military renown to which there has been no parallel before or since'.

12.7 Devapala – A perfect Successor

Devapala was the third ruler of the Pala dynasty. Devapala was successful to continue the period of ascendancy of the dynasty unabatedly. Son and successor of Dharmapala, Devapala enjoyed a long reign. He ascended to the throne in around 810 CE after his father's death and continued his rule up to around 850 CE. Like his father Dharmapala Devapala also assumed the imperial title of '*Parameshwara*

Parambhattaraka Maharajadhiraja'. His assumption of this title indicates his prowess and other imperial qualities like his father. The contemporary and later inscriptional and literary sources clearly indicate that Devapala was not only successful to maintain his father's empire intact but also was successful to extend its boundaries further. Thus it will not be an exaggeration to say that he was the perfect successor of his father Dharmapala.

Devapala had encompassed almost entire of North India. Devapala was a worthy and competent son. By a policy of blood and iron, Devapala had retained the vast kingdom he had inherited from his parentage and also made some additions to the vast Empire of his father. The Badal Pillar Inscription describes him as the paramount lord of the entire northern India, extending from the Himalayas to the Vindhya and from eastern to the Western Seas. The prolonged period of his reign was marked with a sequence of military campaigns against the adversaries like Pragjyotishas, Utkalas, Huns, Gurjaras and the Dravidians.

The Badal Pillar Inscription of Narayana Pala depicts that Devapala's Brahmin minister Darbha Pani and the latter's grandson Kedara Mishra were helpful in the expansion of Devapala's kingdom. Badal Pillar inscription also depicts how Darbha Pani had used his diplomacy to make Devapala the lord paramount of entire north India. Devapala had conquered the Utkalas, Huns and the Gurjaras. He made significant additions to his father's Empire by conquering the frontier states. He had also conquered the violent tribes Khasas, Latas and had occupied their kingdoms. In the east, kings of Pragjyotishas and Kamarupa became his vassal. In the south, king of Utkala was routed in a battle and the province was overrun by Jaya Pala, brother and general of Devapala. Siva Kara, the king of Utkala (present day Odisha) also became his vassal. It is indeed needless to mention that the version of the Badal Pillar Inscription is highly exaggerated.

Devapala launched two military campaigns under his cousin and his general Jayapala, who was the son of Dharmapala's younger brother Vakpala. These expeditions resulted in the invasion of Pragjyotisha (present-day Assam) where the king submitted without giving a fight. The king of Utkala (present-day Odisha) also did not able to fight and therefore he fled from his capital city. Thus Orissa also came under Devapala's empire.

There is a debate among the scholars regarding the location of Kamboja mentioned in the Badal Pillar inscription. While an ancient country with the name

Kamboja was located in what is now Afghanistan, there is no evidence that Devapala's empire extended that far. Kamboja, in this inscription, could refer to the Kamboja tribe that had entered North India. The Monghyr copper plate indicates that the Palas recruited their war horses from the Kambojas, and there might have been a Kamboja cavalry in the Pala armed forces. Viradeva, a scholar appointed by him as the abbot of Nalanda, is believed to be a native of Nagarahara (identified with modern-day Jalalabad). This has led some scholars to speculate if Devapala indeed launched a military expedition to the present-day Afghanistan, during which he met Viradeva. But some historians believe that Devapala defeated the Arab rulers of the North West. The Hunas probably refers to a principality in North-West India.

There is no doubt that the term "Gurjaras" mentioned in the Badal Pillar inscription refers to the Gurjara-Pratiharas. They were the old enemies of the Pala rulers. During Devapala's reign Pratiharas were led by MihiraBhoja. Like his father, Devapala also appears to have enjoyed a brief respite from the Pratiharas' hostile activities during the first part of his reign. Although a Jain text mentions that the Pratihara king Nagabhatta II recovered his power and occupied Kannauj but most of the scholars find this doubtful. Even if he did so it was probably not long before his death in around 833 CE. Nagabhatta II was succeeded by his son Ramabhadra whose reign marked by various inglorious events which even ravaged his own dominions for certain time. When Mihir Bhoja ascended to the throne he became able to infuse a fresh energy and strength. Barah and Daulatpura copper plate inscriptions mention about his success to recover some of the areas lost during his father's reign. But this success was short lived. Around the 6th decade of the 9th century CE Mihir Bhoja was defeated by the Rashtrakuta king. According to the Badal Pillar inscription the pride of the lord of Gurjaras was curbed by Devapala. His minister in chief Kedara Mishra played the most important role in this regard. Thus during the long reign of Devapala in spite of a short period of trouble Pratiharas were kept in check.

The term "Dravida" is generally believed to be a reference to the Rashtrakutas. They were also hereditary enemies of the Pala dynasty. At the time of Devapala, the Rashtrakuta force was led by Amoghavarsha. Although there is not much elaborate description of this hostility but on the basis of circumstantial evidences it will not be incorrect to assume that Devapala was more successful than his father.

According to Ramesh Chandra Majumdar the term Dravida does not indicate the Rashtrakutas as it usually not applied to denote the Deccan plateau which formed the Rashtrakuta dominion. He therefore suggests that it may refer to the Pandyan king

Sri Mara Sri Vallabha. However, there is no definitive record of any expedition of Devapala to the extreme south. In any case, his victory in the south could only have been a temporary one, and his dominion lay mainly in the north.

Devapala too like his father Dharmapala did not have exercised any direct administrative control over any territory outside Bengal and Bihar. Rest of the imperial territories were most probably governed by local rulers who acknowledged the suzerainty of the Pala ruler.

12.8 Devapala and Buddhism

Devapala was a dedicated follower and a staunch patron of Buddhism. He is said to have sanctioned the construction of many temples and monasteries in Magadha. He maintained the famous Buddhist monastery at Uddandapura (Odantapuri). Buton Rinchen Drub credits his father Dharmapala for building the monastery, although other Tibetan accounts such as that of Taranatha, state that it was magically built and then entrusted to Devapala. Balaputradeva, the Sailendra king of Java, sent an ambassador to him, asking for a grant of five villages for the construction of a monastery at Nalanda. The request was granted by Devapala. He also patronized the Vikramashila University and the Nalanda University. The Buddhist poet Vajradatta (the author of Lokeshvarashataka), was a member of Devapala's court.

12.9 Estimate of Devapala

Devapala was also a great patron of literature, education and culture apart from being a great conqueror. During his reign, Bengal had accomplished prosperity in every field. Devapala was practically regarded the most powerful monarch of Northern India during the first half of ninth century. He had rounded off the Pala Empire in the east and southeast (Kamarupa and Utkala) and kept a constant check on further uprising of the Pratihara and Rashtrakuta powers. He led his forces to Vindhyas in the south and the Indus to the west. He was powerful enough to interfere in the politics of the Tamil Nadu join confederacy against the Pandya King. Sailendra king Balaputradeva of Java and Sumatra had sent an envoy to his kingdom by seeking the grant of five villages to build up a monastery in Nalanda. During his reign Nalanda had transformed into the chief seat of Buddhist learning in ancient India. People from different parts of India and even from abroad came to Nalanda

University in order to learn Buddhist literature. A galaxy of scholars had flourished during his reign. Bengal had fulfilled unprecedented progress during his reign.

12.10 Conclusion

The glory and brilliance of the Pala empire did not long survive the death of Devapala. The rule of his successors was marked by a steady process of decline and political disintegration which reduced the Palas almost to an insignificant regional political power in northern India.

12.11 Model Questions

1. Write an essay on the achievement of Dharmapala.
2. Write an essay on the achievement of Devapala.
3. Write an essay on Tripartite Struggle under the Pala kings Dharmapala and Devapala.

12.12 Suggested Readings

1. Nitish Sengupta, *The Land of Two Rivers*, London, 2011.
2. Pramode Lal Paul, *The Early History of Bengal*, Vol. II, Calcutta, n.d.
3. R. C. Majumdar (ed.), *History of Ancient Bengal*, Delhi, 1989.

Unit-13 □ The Decline and the Fall of Pala Empire

Structure

13.0 Objective

13.1 Introduction

13.2 Vigrahapala I

13.3 Narayana Pala

13.4 Disintegration of Pala Kingdom

13.5 Conclusion

13.6 Model Questions

13.7 Suggested Readings

13.0 Objective

- The objective of the present unit is also to study the decline and fall of the Pala Empire after the rule of Devapala.
- The rule of Vigrahapala I and Narayana Pala will be discussed.
- The process of disintegration and eventual fall of the Pala Empire will come under the analysis.
- The factors behind the fall of the Empire will be elaborated.

13.1 Introduction

The long reign of the Pala Emperors marked an important period in the history of Bengal. Dharmapala and Devapala became able to establish Bengal in a high position among the important powers in the history of ancient India. But this glory did not last for a long time. After the death of Devapala the glory of the Pala Empire was slowly become doomed. He was succeeded by Vigraha Pala I. His reign was otherwise peaceful. This period did not witness any important event. His son Narayana Pala had ascended to the throne around 854 CE. His excessive love for peace and religiosity threw his empire into a serious problem. Thus during the rule of Devapala's successors a steady process of decline and disintegration can clearly

be traced. This way the Pala rulers lost their glory and became an insignificant political power in north India.

13.2 Vigrahapala I

After the death of Devapala Vigrahapala I ascended to the throne of Bengal in around 850 C.E. There is a debate among the scholars regarding the relationship between the Devapala and Vigrahapala I as well as regarding the name of the successor of Devapala. Some scholars believe that Vigrahapala I was the son of Devapala. But most of the recent scholars observe that he was probably the nephew of Devapala. These scholars used the genealogy preserved in the grants of Narayana Pala and his subsequent kings. According to this genealogy Dharmapala had a younger brother named Vakpala. His son Jaypala held the position of the great General at the court of Devapala. Vigrahapala I was most probably the son of Jaypala. But there is no specific reference about his identity. Infact the theory of the absence of any heir of Devpaladoesnot appears to be very likely. According to Monghyr copper plate Devapala had a son named Rajya Pala who held the position of the crown prince in the 33rd regnal year of Devapala. It is quite possible that Rajya Pala might have died before the death of Devapala. According to Badal Piller inscription Devapala was succeeded by Sura Pala. Probably Sura Pala was another name of Vigrahapala I.

Very few information are known about the reign of Vigrahapala I. According to Badal Piller inscription Sura Pala or Vigrahapala I had destroyed his enemies. Kedar Mishra was his chief minister. He served as the chief minister and chief mentor since Devapala's reign. Vigrahapala I was otherwise pacifist and religious minded. He had a very short ruling time (only 4 years) around 854 CE he abdicated the throne in favor of his son Narayana Pala.

13.3 Narayana Pala

Narayana Pala had succeeded his father's empire in around 854 CE. His reign was significant because of the invasions by the Rashtrakutas and the Pratiharas. Badal Piller inscription and Bhagalpur Copper plate both are silent about Narayan Palas military achievement. He ruled for a long period of time (about 54 year). But no evidence of any military victory can be found during this period.

Narayana Pala had compelled to face the invading army of the Rashtrakutas in

860 CE. Most probably he was thoroughly defeated. He also could not escape the invasion of the army of the Pratiharas. Pratihara king Bhoj I and his son Mahendra Pala succeeded in seizing Magadha from Narayana Pala. The Paharpura Pillar inscription mentions this conquest. The Sirur inscription of the Rashtrakutas mentions that the rulers of Anga, Vanga and Magadha payed homage to the Rashtrakuta king Amaghavarsha. It is not very clear that these three names are of different kingdoms or have in common ruler. Probably the sudden collapse of the Pala empire naturally leads to the presumption of a catastrophe of this kind and probably as internal disruption had also been started to take place during this time.

The Rashtrakuta king Amaghavarsha proceeded along the eastern coast. After the conquest of Vengi the Rashtrakuta army invaded the Pala kingdom from its southern side. Although it was an occasional military raid and had no permanent effect but it exposed the weak condition of the Pala rulers. Thus the political prestige of the Palas hampered severely. Taking the advantages of the weak condition of the Pala kingdom the rulers of the neighboring kingdom of Kamarupa and the rulers of the Sailadvaba dynasty of Odisha threw of their allegiance to the Pala ruler and declared themselves as independent rulers.

The defeat of Narayana Pala against the Rastrakutas encouraged the Pratihara king Bhoj I to wrest the empire of Northern India from the Pala rulers. He destroyed the remnants of the political suzerainty in the west and proceeded to the east. He subjugated extensive territories in Bundelkhand and Uttar Pradesh. He had not to encounter any opposition from the Pala kings until he reached almost the borders of Magadha as a result of the growing weakness of the Pala rulers by this time.

According to Kalha Plate inscription Pratihara king Bhoj I got support from Kalchuri king Kokkalla I. In reward Bhoj I granted him freedom from any fear of Pratihara attack and he could freely plunder the treasure of various kingdoms including Vanga. Bhoj I also got the support from the Guhilat king Guhila II. According to the contemporary epigraphic record Guhila II had defeated the Gauda king. In this way Bhoj I became successful to organize of formidable confederacy against the Pala rulers. Kalchuri kings of Gorakhpur, Chandella rulers of Jejakabhukti or Bundelkhand acknowledge his suzerainty and became important parts of the anti-Pala confederacy.

It is difficult to give a satisfactory explanation of the phenomenal success of the Pratihara king and the complete collapse of the Pala rulers during the latter half of the 9th century C.E. The personal efficiency of Bhoj I especially his organizing skill played very important role in this regard. On the other hand absence of efficient Pala

rulers like Devpala played an important role also. The failure of the existing Pala king undoubtedly demonstrates their personal incapacity of foresight and diplomacy. There are some other important factors also. Devpala had subjugated Assam and Odisha during his reign. But by the latter half of 9th century CE these two neighboring kingdoms became again powerful. The rise to power of these two dependent principalities might have been either the cause or the effect of the weakness of the Pala kings.

Narayan Pala died about 908 C.E. He was succeeded by his son Rajya Pala. During the reign of Narayana Pala a matrimonial alliance was created between the Pala family and the Rashtrakuta family. Rashtrakuta king Tunga's daughter was given marriage to Narayana Pala's son Rajya Pala. This matrimonial alliance at least temporarily made a cessation of hostilities between these two dynasties. Thus when Rajya Pala ascended to the throne he got the support of the Rashtrakuta king. In this way he ruled more or less peacefully for at least about 32 years. He is generally credited with works of public utility like the constructions of temples tanks, roads, roadway shelters etc. The most important source of information of his reign is the Bargaon inscription. Rajya Pala died around 940 CE and was succeeded by his son Gopala II.

Gopala II ruled for about 20 years. During his reign the Chandella king and the Kalchuri king emerged in lands formerly were in possession of the Pratihara rulers. The Kamboj tribes also established themselves in the north of Bengal. These events pushed Gopala II to the southern part of Bihar and the western part of Bengal. According to the contemporary epigraphic record he was succeeded by Vigrahapala II in around 960 C.E.

Vigraha Pala II had ruled for about 22 years. During his reign the Pala empire was reduced to Bihar. From the east of Bengal the Chandra king Kalyan Chandra conquered Gauda and Kamarup. These conquests were fatal blows which severely weakened the Komboja kingdom as well as the Pala kingdom. It helped to lay the ground work for the Pala resurgence. This happened under Mahipala II, the successor of Vigraha Pala II.

Vigraha Pala II was succeeded by his son Mahipala II in around 988 CE. During his reign resurgence in fortunes for the Pala empire took place. Mahipala II tried to recover the past glory of the Pala Empire. To some extent he was successful even though his rule was temporarily hampered by the northern expedition of the Chola king Rajendra I. The northern expedition of the great Chola emperor was led by one of his Generals and lasted about two years from 1021 to 1023 CE. Its object was to

bring by force of arms the sacred waters of the Ganges, in order to sanctify his own land. The Chola campaign as professor K. A NilakanthaSastri has rightly observed “could hardly have been more than a hurried raid across a vast stretch of country”.

Towards the close of his reign, Mahipala II came into conflict with the powerful Kalachuri ruler Gangeyadeva. The Kalachuri epigraphic records claim that the latter defeated the ruler of Anga, which can only denote Mahipala II.

Mahipala II has been criticized by some writers for not having joined the Hindu confederacy organized by the Shahi kings of the Punjab against sultan Mahmud of Ghazni. Some have attributed his inactivity to asceticism, and others to intolerance of Hinduism and jealousy to other Hindu kings. It is difficult to subscribe to these views. When Mahipala II ascended to the throne, the Pala power had sunk to the lowest depths, and the Pala kings had no footing in their own homeland. It must have taxed the whole energy and strength of Mahipala II to recover the paternal territories and to ward off formidable invasions of Rajendra Chola and Gangeya Deva. It reflects the greatest credit upon his ability and military genius that he succeeded in reestablishing in authority over a great part of Bengal, and probably also extended his conquest up to Benares.

On the whole, the achievements of Mahipala II must be regarded as highly remarkable, and he ranked as the greatest Pala emperor after Devapala. He not only saved the Pala kingdom from impending ruin, but probably also revived to some extent the old imperial dreams. His success in the limited field that he selected for his activities is a sure measure of his prowess and statesmanship, and it is neither just nor rational to regret that he had not done more. The revival of the Pala power was also reflected in the restoration of the religious building in Benares (including Saranath) and Nalanda which had evidently suffered much during the recent collapse of the Pala power.

It is perhaps not without significance, that of all the Pala emperors, the name of Mahipala II alone figures in popular ballads still current in Bengal. Bengal has forgotten the names of its great emperor Dharmapala, and Devapala, but cherished the memory of the king who saved it at a critical juncture.

13.4 Disintegration of Pala Kingdom

After the death of Mahipala II the Pala kingdom gradually disintegrated. Mahipala II was succeeded by Nayapala whose reign witnessed massive threat from the Kalachuri king Karnadeva. The Pala kings even after the reign of Nayapala

constantly engaged in hostility with the Kalachuri rulers. Nayapal was succeeded by his son Vigrahapala III who had three sons namely Mahipala III, Surapala II and Ramapala. During the reign of RamapalaKaivartas of Varendri region revolted against the Pala kings under the leadership of Divya. Ramapal became successful to suppress the revolt and revive the power of the Palas. But the Disintegration and decline of the Pala kingdom was just the matter of time.

Ramapala had four sons viz. Vittapala, Rajyapala, Kumarapala and Madanpala. Ramapala was succeeded by Kumarpala. But according to some epigraphic record a parallel rule was done by Madanpal. It is yet not been very clear that when and how these two Pala kings ascended to the throne. Kumarapala was succeeded by his infant son Gopal III.

The period cover by the three rulers Kumarapala, Gopal III and Madanpala witnessed the final collapse of the Pala kingdom. The circumstances leading to this final decline are not yet been fully known to us.

13.5 Conclusion

Thus towards the middle of the 11th century CE the fabric of the Pala sovereignty was crumbling to dust. Eastern Bengal, west Bengal and southern Bengal had definitely passed from their hands and their suzerainty over Magadha was reduced to a mere name. A new power, the Varmans, occupied Eastern Bengal, and a copper plate of Ratnapala shows that even Kamarupa was hurling defiance at the king of Gauda at the beginning or middle of the 11th century CE.

13.6 Model Questions

1. Briefly discuss the political condition of Bengal during the decline of the Pala rule.
2. Write a short note on Kaivarta rebellion.

13.7 Suggested Readings

1. Nitish Sengupta, *The Land of Two Rivers*, London, 2011.
2. Pramode Lal Paul, *The Early History of Bengal*, Vol. II, Calcutta, n.d.
3. R. C. Majumdar (ed.), *History of Ancient Bengal*, Delhi, 1989.

Unit-14 □ Independent kingdoms during the Pala Period – the Chandras and the Varmanas

Structure

14.0 Objective

14.1 Introduction

14.2 The Chandra rulers

14.3 The Varmana rulers

14.4 Conclusion

14.5 Model Questions

14.6 Suggested Readings

14.0 Objective

- The objective of the present unit is to study the growth of independent kingdoms during the Pala rule.
- Two smaller kingdoms will be studied here :
 - The Chandra rule
 - The Varmana rule

14.1: Introduction

The Chandra and the Varmana dynasties were the two important regional ruling dynasties who flourished in Bengal and Bihar during the period of the Pala supremacy. During the Pala rule several independent and semi independent powers flourished around and within the Pala territory. Although the relationship between these independent or semi independent powers and the Pala rulers are not clearly known but it may be assumed that they were otherwise in a peaceful relationship.

14.2 The Chandra rulers

The Chandra dynasty was the ruling dynasty of Samatata region of Bengal. Most probably the territory of the Chandras includes Arakan region also. The most important sources of information about the Chandra dynasty are various inscriptions and copper plate grants issued by the Chandra rulers such as Bharella inscription of Layaha Chandra, Rampur copper plate inscription of Shri Chandra, Edilpur copper plate inscription of Shri Chandra, Dhulia copper plate inscription of Shri Chandra and Kedarpur copper plate inscription of Shri Chandra etc. Tibetan historian Taranath in his the *History of Buddhism* mentions about the Chandra dynasty. Probably the Chandra rulers were little earlier ruling dynasty than the Pala rulers. According to Taranath the Chandra rulers had ruled from sometimes around the 6th century CE. Up to around the 8th century CE they were in power. The traditional account of the nine Chandra kings of Arakan ruling from c. 788 CE to c. 957 CE is preserved in the later chronicles. The Inscription found on the platform of the Shittaung temple at Morahaung is also an important source of information about the rule of the Chandra kings. According to this inscription though Ananda Chandra was one of the most famous rulers of this dynasty but he was not the founder of this rule. The names of eighteen predecessor of him are given in this inscription. According to this genealogy the founder king of this dynasty is Bala Chandra. This name is common with Taranath's account. According to Prof. Hirananda Sastri the oldest inscription is written in characters resembling those of the late Gupta script. The inscription recording the names of the Chandra kings mentioned above is said to be 'many centuries older' than the temple which was built in the 16th century CE. The name Priti Chandra is found both on the coins as well as in the inscriptions. According to Prof. Phayre the name engraved in most of the coins is 'Vamma Chandra'. Most of the scholars identified him with Dhamma Chandra. The other name that can be read on the coins is Vira Chandra. The Alphabets on these coins are to be referred to the 7th century or 8th century CE if not earlier.

Although the exact line of the Chandra kings are not very clear to us but it is generally believed that Layaha Chandra Deva was the earliest king of this line. The Bharella inscription mentions about Layaha Chandra Deva. On the basis of this inscription Dr. N. K. Bhattashali infers that the kingdom of Layaha Chandra Deva definitely located in the territory near Comilla of present day Bangladesh. The epigraphic records mention about the name of various kings from which a genealogical

table may be drawn. The dynasty was most probably founded by Purna Chandra Deva. He was succeeded by Suvarna Chandra Deva. Suvarna Chandra's successor Trailokya Chandra Deva took the imperial title of Maharajadhiraja. It indicates that he may be successful to extend his control over other territories. Another name Sri Kanchana is also available in one inscription whose identity is yet not been very clear to us. It is quite possible that he was a parallel ruler during the reign of Trailokya Chandra Deva. Some scholars believe that Sri Kanchana and Trailokya Chandra Deva were same person. Trailokya Chandra Deva was succeeded by Shri Chandra Deva. Shri Chandra Deva also used the imperial title of the 'Maharajadhiraja'.

Purna Chandra Deva was probably an independent king. His forefathers are said to be rulers of Rohitagiri. Most probably Purna Chandra Deva also ruled there. This presumption is strengthened by the fact that Traikyo Chandra Deva who was the grandson of Purna Chandra Deva is said to have become king of Chandra Dvipa. It would thus appear that Purna Chandra and his son Suvarna Chandra Deva were both kings of Rohitagiri. Most of the scholars generally identified Rohitagiri with Rohtasgarh in the Shahabad district of Bihar. But this identification is by no means certain. Dr. N. K. Bhattashali has suggested Rohitagiri may be a Sanskritised form of Lal-Mati and refer to the Lalmai hills near Comilla of present day Bangladesh. There is not sufficient reason to conclude that the Chandra rulers came from outside Bengal and in view of the traditions of the long line of Chandra kings in Bhangala or eastern Bengal it is more reasonable to hold that Rohitagiri the seat of the ancestral dominion of the Chandra kings was somewhere in eastern Bengal and most probably near Comilla of present day Bangladesh.

Both Suvarna Chandra and his father were presumably petty local rulers but Suvarna Chandra's son Trailokya Chandra Deva laid the foundations of the greatness of his family. Trailokya Chandra added Chandra Dvipa and Harikela to his paternal dominions and felt justified in assuming the title of Maharajadhiraja. His son Shri Chandra who assumed the full imperial titles Parama Saugata, Paramesvara, Parama Bhattaraka, and also Maharajadhiraja presumably inherited his father's dominions and possibly added to them.

The data furnished by the inscriptions enable us to form a rough idea of the extent of the kingdom of Shri Chandra. Chandra Dvipa and Harikela over which he ruled may be regarded as covering approximately the whole of eastern Bengal and the coastal regions of southern Bengal.

Another king with name ending in –Chandra namely Govinda Chandra of Vangala Desha is known from the accounts of Rajendra Chola's invasion of Bengal. That Govinda Chandra ruled also in eastern Bengal is proved by two inscriptions dated in his 12th and 23rd year recently discovered in Vikrampur within the district of Dacca of present day Bangladesh. It would thus follow that Govinda Chandra Deva practically ruled over the whole of the dominions of Shri Chandra. As Rajendra Chola's invasion took place about 1021 CE it is very probable that Govinda Chandra Deva immediately succeeded Shri Chandra Deva.

A study of the Kalachuri records shows that the Chandra kingdom had to bear the brunt of the invasions of the valorous Kalachuri kings. Kokkalla claims to have raided the treasuries of Vanga and his great grandson Lakshmanaraja is credited with the conquest of Vangala. It is doubtful whether the Chandra rulers had founded their kingdom at the time of Kokkalla's conquest but it is not unlikely that they took advantage of this political catastrophe to consolidate their rule in Bengal. It is very likely that the Chandra kingdom was finally destroyed by the invasions of Karna Deva.

14.3 The Varmana rulers

The Varman rulers ruled in south-eastern Bengal towards the end of the 11th and first half of the 12th century CE. The history of the Varmans is known from three copperplates and the Bhuvanesvara inscription of Bhatta Bhavadeva. The Varman kings claim their descent from the Yadava dynasty ruling over Simhapura, which has been identified with modern Singapuram in Kalinga (northern Orissa) between Chicacole and Narasannapeta.

The kingdom of Simhapura in Kalinga is known to have existed as early as the 5th century CE and as late as the 12th century CE. The Varmans most probably came to Bengal in the train of Kalachuri Karna's invasion of Vanga. Karna seems to have invaded southeastern Bengal from Orissa, probably following the same route as Rajendra Chola's army. It is quite likely that the Varmans accompanied Karna, stayed in Bengal, and at an opportune moment carved out an independent kingdom for them.

The account of Jatavarman's military conquests, as given in the Belava plate of Bhojavarman, leaves little doubt that he was responsible for the foundation of the rule of his dynasty. Vajravarman, father of Jatavarman, is only eulogised as a brave

warrior, a poet and a scholar. The reference to Jatavarman's marriage with Virashri, daughter of Karna, and to Divya, who wrested northern Bengal from the Palas, help us in fixing the date of Jatavarman's rise to power sometime in between 1050 and 1075 CE. Jatavarman's marriage with Karna's daughter was significant and was perhaps a great factor in the rise of the political fortunes of the Varman family. Karna's attack on Vanga must have dealt the last blow to the Chandra empire and the Varmans captured power soon after from Govinda Chandra or his successor. Jatavarman must have risen to independence simultaneously or just before Divya, against whom he is mentioned to have waged wars.

Jatavarman's assault on Anga, as mentioned in the Belava plate, must have involved him in a struggle with the Pala ruler Ramapala. The unsettled condition of the Pala empire during the early years of Ramapala may have tempted Jatavarman to measure swords with the Palas also. His other two adversaries, Govardhana and the king of Kamarupa, cannot be identified. It is also a problem to determine his successor. But it is assumed on good grounds that Harivarman succeeded him and was followed by his brother Samalavarman. Harivarmadeva, under whom Bhatta Bhavadeva of the Bhuvanesvara Prashasti served as the minister of war and peace, was possibly the same as Harivarman of the Varman dynasty. Two Buddhist manuscripts, copied respectively in the 19th and the 39th regnal years, preserve the name of Harivarman and on the basis of the colophon of the second manuscript it can be assumed that Harivarman had a long reign of 46 years. It conforms to the information of the Bhuvanesvara inscription, where it is recorded that he ruled for a long time.

Harivaman, having seen Ramapala's success in recovering northern Bengal, propitiated Ramapala in order to avoid a Pala attack on his territory. It is doubtful whether Harivarman extended his rule towards Orissa. There is reference to a son of Harivarman both in the Bhuvanesvara inscription and Vajrayogini plate, but hardly anything is known about him.

Samalavarman, another son of Jatavarman, was the next king. His name figures prominently in the genealogical accounts of the Vaidik Brahmins, who are said to have migrated to Bengal from Madhyadesha during his reign. There was matrimonial connection between the Varmans and the Sri Lankan king Vijayabahu I; in all probability Trailokyasundari, daughter of Samalavarman, was married to the Lankan king.

14.4 Conclusion

Bhojavarman, son of Samalavarman, was the last known king of the dynasty and the Belava plate was issued in his fifth regnal year from the Jayaskandhavara situated at Vikramapura. The Varman rulers were Vaisnavas, but they also seem to have patronised Buddhism. Samalavarman's Vajrayogini plate was issued to grant land either to a temple of Prajnaparamita or to a Buddhist devotee named Bhimadeva as a reward for his reading the Prajnaparamita.

Four Varman kings of southeastern Bengal are known to have ruled for about 60/70 years. The Senas ousted them during or shortly after the reign of Bhojavarman.

14.5 Model Questions

1. Write an essay on the Chandra dynasty of Bengal.
2. Write briefly on the achievements of the Varmana dynasty of Bengal.

14.6 Suggested Readings

1. Nitish Sengupta, *The Land of Two Rivers*, London, 2011.
2. Pramode Lal Paul, *The Early History of Bengal*, Vol. II, Calcutta, n.d.
3. R. C. Majumdar (ed.), *History of Ancient Bengal*, Delhi, 1989.

Module V

The Senas

Unit-15 □ The Origin of Sena Kings

Structure

15.0 Objective

15.1 Introduction

15.2 The Origins of the Senas

15.3 Conclusion

15.5 Suggested Readings

15.0 Objective

- The objective of the present unit is to study the establishment of the Sena rule in Bengal after the fall of the Pala Empire.
- The origins of the Sena rulers will be traced in this unit.
- The opinions of the different historians will also be elaborated here.

15.1 Introduction

After the decline of the Pala empire in Bengal the Sena family begins their rule in Bengal. According to the genealogy of the Sena kings they originally belonged to Karnataka in South India. According to Rajavali the family line begins with Dhisena who was the grandson (from daughter's line) of king Jagata Pala of Radha region. Dhisena became king of Radha, Vanga, Gauda and Varendra. As he gained the empire without contest he became famous as Vijaya Sena. He made his eldest son SukaSena ruler of Radha region. Suka Sena ruled for three years and was succeeded by his younger brother VallalaSena who ruled for twelve years presumably at Radha region. VallalaSena succeeded by his son Lakshmana Sena in the throne of Bengal.

15.2 The Origins of the Senas

According to Deopada inscription of Vijaya Sena written by Umapati Dhara the earliest known figure of the Sena family is Vira Sena. The Sena family were the

rulers of the southern region. Umapati Dhara mentions them 'Dakshinatya Kshaunindra'. Prof N. G. Majumdar translate this phrase as the kings of the Deccan. According to Madhainagara copper plate inscription Vira Sena was not the founding figure of the family though he was the first prominent one of the Sena family. Madhainagar copper plate inscription regards Samanta Sena as the earliest figure of the Sena family. It states that 'in the family of Vira Sena which has become illustrious through the legends recorded in the Purana literature was born Samanta Sena the head garland of the clan of the Karnata Kshatriyas'. Deopada inscription clearly mentions about the Karnata origin of the Sena rulers. It mentions that Samanta Sena slaughtered the enemies who hampered the wealth of Karnata. According to Prof. D. C. Ganguly it does not indicate that the fight between Samanta Sena and the despoiler of the 'Lakshmi' (the goddess of wealth) of the Karnata country took place in the Karnata country. It simply means that Samanta Sena vanquished a king or a free booty collector who had already plundered the Karnata country. Later he suggests that possibly Rajendra Chola who had already defeated the Karnata king was repulsed by Samanta Sena somewhere in northern Radha in which the latter's kingdom was situated. But Dr. D. C. Ganguly overlooks the very significant statement of poet Umapati Dhara, the writer of the Deopada inscription, that Samanta Sena slaughtered the hostile soldiers to such an extent that the lord of Goblins did not leave the southern quarter. This statement undoubtedly implies that the dead bodies of the hostile soldiers lay in the south and therefore the battle also must have been waged in that region. The same inference may be made from the other statement of Umapati Dhara in the above mentioned inscription that war ballads were sung in honour of Samanta Sena near Setu Bandh region of Rameswaram. This kind of reference generally indicates a region near the battle field. Prof. G. M. Sarkar holds a diametrically opposite view to that of Dr. D. C. Ganguly. Prof. G. M. Sarkar mentions that 'Samanta Sena's activity was confined only to the southern region'. Further he assumed that Samanta Sena was in no way connected with any part of Bengal.

Thus there is no doubt that the origin or the home land of the Sena rulers was in Karnata region. The region may be identified with present day Mysore region. The term 'Brahma Kshatrya' probably indicates that the Sena rulers were originally Brahmin by cast but in spite of that they had served as the ruler which is the prescribed profession for the kshatriyas. But it is yet not been very clear to us that how the Sena rulers migrated from their homeland and settled in western part of

Bengal. According to Deopada inscription Samanta Sena after his martial exploits he spent his last days in the sacred hermitages situated in forests on the banks of the Ganges. As Samanta Sena's descendants ruled in Bengal it is therefore very natural to conclude from the above mentioned statement that he was the first of the Karnata originated Sena family to migrate from the south and settled in Bengal. But an opposite view is found in Naihati copper plate inscription which clearly indicates that the Sena family had settled in western part of Bengal even before the birth of Samanta Sena. It is indeed needless to mention that this contradiction creates the scope of historians' debate.

Dr. R. C. Majumdar tried to reconcile this ambiguity and suggested that most probably the Sena family from Karnata region had settled in western part of Bengal but kept itself in touch with their motherland. According to him one of its members, Samanta Sena, spent his early life in Karnata region and also had shown his distinguishing ability in various wars which took place in southern part of India. He betook himself in old age to the family seat in Bengal. Evidently his exploits made the family so powerful that his son was able to carve out a kingdom in Bengal. Hemanta Sena was the son of Samanta Sena and was the first member of the Sena family for whom royal epithets are given in the family records. It is true that Samanta Sena's predecessors are referred to as princes who ruled over the surface of the earth, but beyond these vague general phrases there is nothing to indicate that they really held the rank of independent king.

Although it is believed that the term 'Brahma Kshatriya' denotes those people who exchanged their priestly status for martial pursuits but some scholars give more clarification of the term. Samanta Sena is called 'Brahma Vadi' in Deopada inscription. Madhainagar copper plate inscription mentions about the events where Sena princes are set to have made preparation for sacrifices befitting a conquest of the three worlds and thereby checked the priests serving in the seasonal 'soma' sacrifices of the gods. Prof. N. G. Majumdar remarks that here probably it is indicated that Samanta Sena was as much Brahmin as Kshatriya. Winternitz mentions about a Jain teacher named Kanaka Sena who wrote *Yashadhara Charita*. He assumed that this line of Jain teachers belong to Sena family as the names of these teachers all end in -Sena. They settled in the Dharwar district which was the heart of the Karnata region. According to Jain records almost 11 members of this family flourished between c. 850 CE and c. 1050 CE. Jain records mention about one Vira Sena, a name which is also recorded as that of an ancestor of the Sena kings in the Deopada

inscription. The evidences indicate that the Sena rulers of Bengal were somehow related with this Karnata family of Jain teachers. This theory has high probability. But in spite of that it leaves open the question whether the priestly family took to kshatriya profession before or after its migration to Bengal.

Another important question in this regard is how would the family of the Sena rulers came to settle in Bengal. Since there is not any proper data regarding this question it is extremely difficult to make any clear answer of this. The Pala epigraphic records mention that they employed foreigners who were numerous enough to be specifically mentioned in the inscriptions. It is not impossible that some Karnata officials gradually acquired sufficient power to set up as an independent king when the central authority became weak. This hypothesis is supported by the statement in the Naihati copper plate inscription that the Sena rulers were settled in Radha region for a long time before Samanta Sena.

The Sena rulers might also have come in the wake of some foreign invasions and established independent principalities in conquered territories. The Karnata prince Vikramaditya led a victorious expedition against Bengal and succeeded by others. His feudatory chief Acha is represented to have made 'the kings of Kalinga, Vanga, Maru, Gurjara, Malwa, Chera and Chola subject to his sovereign. Two inscriptions dated 1121 CE and 1124 CE respectively also refer to the conquest of Anga, Vanga, Kalinga, Gauda, Magadha and Nepal by Vikramaditya. It is interesting to note that about the same time when the Sena rulers were establishing their supremacy in Bengal another Karnata chief Nanya Deva was doing the same in Bihar and Nepal.

15.3 Conclusion

It has been suggested on the other hand that the Karnata chiefs in Bengal and Bihar were the remnants either of Rajendra Chola's army or of the Karnata allies of the king of Kalachuri dynasty Karna Deva. But there is nothing to show that the Karnatas formed part of Rajendra Chola's army. Even assuming that they did it is very unlikely that the Karnata chiefs would be preferred to Cholas in the selection of generals or governors who were left behind by the victorious Chola army to rule over conquered countries. As regards the latter view Karna Deva's alliance with the Karnatas was of a temporary character. On the whole the most reasonable view seems to be to connect the rise of the Sena rulers in Bengal and Nanya Deva in Bihar

with Chalukya invasions of northern India during the rule of Someswara I and Vikramaditya VI in the second half of the 11th century CE and the early years of the next century.

15.4 Model Questions

1. Write an essay on the origin of the Sena dynasty of Bengal. How far it is correct to say that the Senas migrated from outside Bengal ?

15.5 Suggested Readings

1. Nitish Sengupta, *The Land of Two Rivers*, London, 2011.
2. Pramode Lal Paul, *The Early History of Bengal*, Vol. II, Calcutta, n.d.
3. R. C. Majumdar (ed.), *History of Ancient Bengal*, Delhi, 1989.

Unit-16 □ The Sena Kings – Samanta Sena to Lakshmana Sena

Structure

16.0 Objective

16.1 Introduction

16.2 The Early Sena – Samanta Sena and Hemanta Sena

16.3 The reign of Vijaya Sena

16.4 VallalaSena

16.5 LaksmanaSena

16.6 Conclusion

16.7 Model Questions

16.8 Suggested Readings

16.0 Objective

- The objective of the present unit is to study the development, expansion, consolidation, decline and erosion of the Sena rule in Bengal.
- The major Sena rulers will be discussed as follows :
 - Samantasena
 - Hemantasena
 - Vijayasena
 - Vallalasena
 - Laksmanasena

16.1 Introduction

After the decline of the Pala empire Bengal witnessed again a disrupted political scenario. The situation changed around the end of the 11th century when Vijayasena

seized power from the Pala rulers taking advantage of their weakness. Thus the journey of a new empire began in Bengal. This dynasty is known as the Sena dynasty of Bengal. Although the Sena rulers got success in the land of Bengal but the dynasty did not originate in Bengal. They came from Karnata of southern India. The reason and the process of this migration are yet not been clear to us. According to R. C. Majumdar, 'the Senas might also have come in the wake of some foreign invasions, and established independent principalities in conquered territories in very much the same way as the Mahratta chiefs like Holkar and Sindhia did in Northern India during the 18th century CE'.

16.2 The Early Sena – Samanta Sena and Hemanta Sena

The early history of the Sena dynasty is not clear and therefore much controversial. Deopara inscription of Vijaya Sena mentions the names of Samanta Sena and Hemanta Sena as the ruling king's ancestors. Most of the scholars assume that the migration of the Sena family from Karnata region to Gangetic Bengal was done during the time of Samanta Sena. But Naihati copper plate mentions that Samanta Sena was born in the family which ruled over Rarh region. This certainly indicates that the Sena family had settled in Bengal before the birth of Samanta Sena. R. C. Majumdar had tried to reconcile these contradictions by assuming that although Sena family had migrated from south India and settled in western part of Bengal but kept itself in touch with its motherland.

In spite of this controversy and confusion regarding the early history of the Sena rulers it is generally believed that the origin of the Sena family as ruler begins with Samanta Sena though he never assumed any royal title and there is no evidence in our hands which may prove that he founded a new kingdom in Bengal. Samanta Sena had a son named Hemanta Sena. Around the last quarter of the 11th century CE Hemanta Sena became the ruling chief of an independent principality Rarha region. Probably the disruption of Pala kingdom enabled him to establish his independent principality. Any data regarding his reign yet not has been found. Barrackpore copper plate inscription of Vijay Sena refers Hemanta Sena as Maharajadhiraja. Deopara inscription of Vijay Sena mentions the name of Yasodevi as the Maharani or chief queen of Hemanta Sena. Although these two epigraphic records indicate Hemanta Sena as independent ruler but there is no information yet has been found regarding the condition of his reign.

16.3 The reign of Vijaya Sena

The first most prominent ruler of the Sena dynasty was undoubtedly Vijaya Sena. He succeeded the throne of his father Hemanta Sena. It is generally believed that he enjoyed a long reign of more than 60 years. Most probably he ascended to the throne in c. 1095 CE. He was in power up to c. 1158 CE. He built an empire on the ruins of that of the Pala empire, gaining control of all Bengal and northern Bihar. In spite of having such a long reign it is very unfortunate that only two epigraphic records we have as the sources of information which mention about his reign. These two records are Barrackpore copper plate grant and Deopara inscription.

Most of the scholars believe that Vijaya Sena started his political career as a feudal lord. But later he led the foundation of the Sena empire by conquering almost the whole of Bengal. He defeated the various vassal chiefs of Rarh region and also conquered eastern part of Bengal from the Varman rulers. He also conquered some parts of northern Bengal from the Pala rulers. In spite of these successes the circumstances under which he got these successes yet not been clear to us. In fact there is not much information in our hands regarding the first twenty five years of his rule. Assuming that he had ascended the throne in around 1095 CE, the part played by him in the contemporary politics during the early years of his reign is extremely obscure. Most probably he was in ally with the Pala ruler Ramapala during the Kaivarta Rebellion. The Ramacharita of Sandhyakar Nandi mentions the name of one Vijayaraja of Nidravali as one of the allied feudatory chiefs of Ramapala. It is generally believed that Vijayaraja of Ramacharita is no other than Vijaya Sena. Therefore it may be said that he was the contemporary of Ramapala and was in throne of south Rarh when Ramapala purchased the help of various independent chiefs of Rarh region by lavish gifts like money and lands to get success in his campaign against Bhima. This also proves that south Rarh was in the occupation of the Sena family in the 11th century.

According to Deopara inscription he married Vilash Devi. She was a princess of the Sura family who were the ruling chiefs of the southern part of Rarh region. As a result of this matrimonial union, Rahr came under the direct rule of him. The matrimonial alliance with the Sura family also enabled him to attain political greatness. It is probable that he was helped by the invasion of the Karnatas under the leadership of Acha in establishing his supremacy over Vanga. It may be guessed on

general grounds but this cannot be established by any positive evidence. He might have entered into an alliance with Ananta Varman ChodaGanga and profited by it in establishing his supremacy in Rarh. The Vallalacharita of Ananda Bhatta mentions him as the 'Chodaganga-sakhah' which means the friend of the Chodagangas.

The Deopara inscription refers that he had to fight with various independent chiefs such as Nanya, Vira, Raghava, Vardhana, and the kings of Gauda, Kamarupa and Kalinga. Of these Vardhana may be identified with Dvorapa Vardhana, the ruler of Kausambi and Vira with Viraguna of Kotatavi, two of the allied chiefs who had joined Ramapala's camp. Raghava and the king of Kalinga probably refer to the same person.

The most notables among his adversaries were Nanya and the lord of Gauda. Nanya is undoubtedly the Karnata chief who had conquered Mithila in around 1097 CE. According to Bharata's *Natyasutra*, Nanya had broken the powers of Vanga and Gauda. It is reasonable to hold therefore that Nanyadeva after he had consolidate his dominion in northern Bihar turned his attention towards Bengal which was going through a process of disintegration at that time. He might have obtained some successes at first both against the Pala king of Gauda and the Sena king Vijaya Sena of Vanga but was ultimately defeated by the latter and fell on his own dominion in Mithila.

It is learnt from the Pala epigraphic records that Madanapala's authority over north Bengal continued up to the 8th year of his reign, which falls in 1152–53 AD. Most probably Vijaya Sena established his own supremacy in North and North Western Bengal by ousting the Palas sometimes after c. 1152–53 CE. It is recorded in the Deopara inscription that he erected the magnificent temple of Pradyumneshvar at the find-place of the inscription, about 7 miles to the west of Rajshahi town of present day Bangladesh. It is to be remembered here that no Pala record has yet been discovered in Bengal after Madanapala's 8th year of reign. Therefore it will not be wrong to assume that Vijaya Sena had ousted the Pala ruler from the throne of Bengal. It is also recorded in the Deopara inscription that Vijaya Sena's fleet advanced towards the west along the course of the Ganges. It seems that the Gahadvalas, who by this time had occupied parts of Bihar, were his target. However it is not clear from the inscription whether his naval expedition was successful or not. Vijaya Sena is said to have extended his hold over Vanga (south eastern Bengal) also. His Barrackpur copper plate was issued from Vikramapura located in present day

Bangladesh which was the capital of the Varmana rulers who are found to have ruled in this area from the last quarter of the 11th century to the mid of the 12th century CE. So it seems probable that Vijaya Sena ousted the Varmana rulers from south eastern Bengal in the mid of the 12th century CE.

Thus by the middle of the 12th century CE Vijaya Sena supplanted the Varmanas, ousted the Palas and succeeded in establishing the rule of his own dynasty over the whole of Bengal. He seems to have consolidated his empire in Bengal by defeating other enemies. He assumed the imperial titles of Paramaheshvara Parambhattacharak Maharajadhiraj. He also took the proud title of Ariraj-Vrsabha-Shankara.

16.4 Vallala Sena

After a long reign of about 60 years Vijaya Sena died around 1158 CE and was succeeded by his son Vallala Sena. Two epigraphs of the time of Vallala Sena have so far been discovered. One is Naihati copper plate and the second is Sanokhar Image Inscription. They do not contain any record of his victory. He, however, had some military achievements to his credit. It is stated in the Adbhutasagara that he was engaged in warfare with the king of Gauda who is identified with Govindapala of the Pala dynasty. This information is also corroborated by the Vallalacharita of Anandabhata which was composed in c. 1510 CE. It is likely that Vallala Sena might have given the final blow to the Palas in Magadha. It is stated in the Adbhutasagara that during the lifetime of his father, Vallala Sena conquered Mithila. It is not unlikely that Vallala Sena accompanied his father Vijaya Sena in his campaign in Mithila. However, the annexation of Mithila to the Sena Empire cannot be properly ascertained and the successors of Nanyadeva, against whom Vijaya Sena fought, ruled Mithila for a long time.

It is believed that Vallala Sena with a view to reorganising the social system introduced the system of Kulinism. Knowledge regarding the early history of Kulinism is based on the texts known as Kulagranthas or Kulajishastras. Indeed these texts composed five or six centuries after Vallala Sena's reign, are 'full of irregularities and contain many conflicting ideas'. So the authenticity of the information furnished by the texts can be questioned. Moreover none of the Sena epigraphic records refer to Kulinism. It is known that Kulinism was the strongest force among the Bengali Brahmins in the 18th and 19th centuries CE. Hence it is quite probable, as held by

many scholars, that the advocates of Kulinism tried to give a historical basis to it and hence claimed its origin from the time of the Hindu king, Vallala Sena.

It is evident from the Sena epigraphic records and tradition that Vallala Sena was a great scholar and renowned author. He wrote the *Danasagara* in c. 1168 CE and started writing the *Adbhutasagara* in c. 1169, but could not finish it. Like his father, he was also a worshipper of Shiva. He assumed the epithet of Ariraja-Nihshanka-Shankara along with other imperial titles. He married Ramadevi, the Chalukya princess. This marriage refers to the contact of the Senas with their ancestral homeland.

He is the best-known Sena ruler who had ruled for about 18 years and consolidated the kingdom. According to a tradition in Bengal, Ballala Sena's kingdom consisted of five provinces, viz., Vanga, Varendra, Rarh, Bagdi and Mithila. The first three provinces comprise Bengal proper, while the last corresponds to North Bihar. The province of Bagdi is generally identified by the scholars with a portion of the present day Presidency Division in Bengal including the Sundarbans. According to R. C. Majumdar it should be identified with the Mahal of Bagdi in northern Midnapore mentioned in *Ain-i-Akbari* and also shown in Rennell's *Atlas*. This land was the border between Rarh and Utkala.

It is learnt from the *Adbhutasagara* that in his old age Vallala Sena left the responsibility of the government to his son Laksmana Sena and spent his last days, along with his wife, in retirement on the bank of the Ganges at a locality near Triveni.

16.5 Laksmana Sena

The last important ruler of the Sena dynasty was Laksmana Sena. He succeeded his father Vallala Sena and ascended to the throne of Bengal in around 1179 CE. He was quite old when he ascended to the throne.

In spite of an old age he started his political career brilliantly. It is evident from the records of his reign that before he came to power he defeated the king of Gauda and Varanasi or Kashi and made expeditions against Kamarupa and Kalinga. It is quite probable that the above victories were achieved by Laksmana Sena in his youth and possibly during the reign of his grandfather Vijaya Sena, who was engaged in warfare against the kings of Gauda, Kalinga, Kamarupa and also most probably

against the king of Kasi of the Gahadaval dynasty. It appears from the epigraphs of Laksmana Sena that he was the first king among the Senas to assume the title of Gaudeshvara. This title is, however, absent in the plates of both Vijaya Sena and Vallala Sena. From this fact, it has been argued that it was Laksmana Sena who finally subdued Gauda and assumed for himself the title of Gaudeshvara. But this argument is very weak because there can hardly be any doubt regarding the establishment of the Sena rule over the whole of Bengal during the reign of Vijaya Sena. The Sena records do not refer to any incident in the intervening period that necessitated the re-conquest of Gauda by Laksmana Sena. Moreover the occupation of northern Bengal by the Senas during the reigns of Vijaya Sena and Vallala Sena has been proved beyond any doubt.

It is recorded in the copper plates of his sons that Laksmana Sena built monuments indicating his victory in Puri, Varanasi and Prayag. However it is very difficult to conclude from the high sounding praise in the records of the sons of Laksmana Sena that his monuments refer to the expansion of the Sena power over those areas during his reign. His court poets Umapati Dhara and Sharana described the expeditions of an anonymous king who conquered Pragjyotisha, Gauda, Kalinga, Kashi and Magadha and Chedi and Mlechchharaja. Probably this eulogy can be attributed to Laksmana Sena, for all these except Chedi and Mlechchhas. It is evident from the Akaltara inscription that Vallabharaja, a feudatory of the Kalachuri or Chedi king of Ratnapura defeated the king of Gauda. On the other hand, Laksmana Sena claimed victory over him. Although the conflict between the two is more or less certain, the result is not.

There is no doubt that Laksmana Sena came to the throne at a fairly old age. His reign was famous for remarkable literary activity. He himself wrote many Sanskrit poems, some of which are preserved in the anthology *Saduktikarnamrita* and completed the *Adbhutasagara*, which was started by his father. His court was an assembly of several renowned poets like Jayadeva, the author of the *Gita Govindam*; Sarana; Dhoyi, the composer of the *Pavanaduta* and probably also Govardhana. His friend Shridhara Dasa, son of Vatu Dasa compiled the *Saduktikarnamrta*, an anthology of Sanskrit verses, during his reign. His chief minister and chief judge was Halayudha Mishra, who wrote the *Brahmanasarvasva*. Umapati Dhara, the author of the eulogy of Deopara inscription is referred to have been a minister and one of the several court poets of Laksmana Sena.

It is known that Laksamana Sena was a staunch Vaisnava, while his father and

grandfather are known to have been devout Shaiva. He took the title of Paramavaisnava or Paramanarasingha. Nothing definite is known regarding his change of faith. Laksmana Sena was famous for his exceptional qualities and proverbial generosity. Indeed his generosity even attracted the attention of Minhaj-us-Siraj, the author of the *Tabaqat I Nasiri*, who designated him as a 'great Rae' of Bengal and compared him with Sultan Qutb Uddin. He, however, became too weak to run the administration of his kingdom towards the close of his reign. During this time there were signs of disruption and disintegration within his kingdom. Contemporary epigraphic records refer to the emergence of a number of independent chiefs in different parts of the Sena kingdom, which paved the way for its decline.

However, the final blow to the Sena kingdom came from Muhammad Bakhtyar Khalji, the Turkish invader. Indeed when the whole of northern India gradually came under the sway of the Muslims it was quite natural that they would try their arms eastward.

Bakhtyar Khalji first stormed Bihar and then invaded Nadia in 1205 CE and compelled Laksmana Sena to flee to eastern Bengal. The Turkish invader gradually captured western and northern Bengal and laid the foundation of Muslim rule in Bengal. At that time Laksmana Sena was an octogenarian. Hence it is likely that the old king could hardly offer any serious resistance to the invasion. Bakhtyar marched against Bengal with a band of well-trained horsemen. He was at first treated in Nadia as a horse-dealer. The old Sena king, who was then at his dinner, was completely taken by surprise. When Bakhtiyar captured Nadia, Laksmana Sena withdrew to south eastern Bengal, where his sons continued the rule of the Senas for some time. His presence in south eastern Bengal is proved by his Bhowal copper plate grant issued in his 27th year to grant land in an area not far away from Dacca of present day Bangladesh. He died sometimes around 1206 CE.

16.6 Conclusion

Although Laksmana Sena began with a brilliant successful career of conquest but his reign ended in a sea of troubles that overwhelmed him and his kingdom. At Laksmana Sena's accession the Sena rulers became the paramount over the whole of Bengal, and their greatness found expression in the numerous literary works that were produced during his reign. But towards the end of his reign the Sena power declined and the rule of his successors was limited to parts of south eastern Bengal, where emerged other local rulers.

16.7 Model Questions

1. Write briefly on the military achievements of Vijaya Sena.
2. Write an essay on Vallala Sena emphasising on his Kulinism.
3. Write briefly on Lakshmana Sena.
4. Write a short note on Kulinism.

16.8 Suggested Readings

1. Nitish Sengupta, *The Land of Two Rivers*, London, 2011.
2. Pramode Lal Paul, *The Early History of Bengal, Vol. II*, Calcutta, n.d.
3. R. C. Majumdar (ed.), *History of Ancient Bengal*, Delhi, 1989.

Unit-17 □ The Successors of Lakshmana Sena

Structure

17.0 Objective

17.1 Introduction

17.2 The Successors of Lakshmana Sena

17.3 Later Sena rulers

17.4 End of the Sena era

17.5 Contribution of the Sena rulers

17.6 Model Questions

17.7 Suggested Readings

17.0 Objective

- The objective of the present unit is to study the post-Laksmanasena Sena rule in Bengal.
 - Two major aspects will be discussed :
 - The rule of the later Sena rulers
 - The end of the Sena rule in Bengal
 - The contribution of the Sena rule in the history of Bengal will also be discussed.
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17.1 Introduction

Lakshmana Sena generally regarded as the last important emperor of the Sena dynasty. During his reign Bengal witnessed the invasion of the Turks led by Bakhtiyar Khalji. In spite of his defeat in the battle with the Turks Lakshmana Sena did not loss much prestige. Minhaz us Siraj in his *Tabaqat i Nasiri* mentioned Lakshmana Sena as the great Rae of Bengal. He even compared him with Sultan Qutubuddin.

17.2 The Successors of Lakshmana Sena

Lakshmana Sena had two sons. Visvarupa Sena was his eldest son and immediate successor. It is not very clear to us that when Visvarupa Sena ascended to the throne of Bengal. Lakshmana Sena definitely continued to rule in eastern Bengal even after the raid on Nadia for at least three or four more years. Two land grants have been found which were issued by Lakshmana Sena some years after the conquest of Muhammad Bin Bakhtiyar Khalji. These epigraphic records indirectly prove that Lakshmana Sena died sometimes after 1205 CE. On contrary Minhaj Us Siraj in his *Tabaqat I Nasiri* mentions that Lakshmana Sena died shortly after the raid on Nadia. But the *Sadukti Karnamrita* refers to Lakshmana Sena as the ruling king even after 1205 CE. Thus the date of the ascendance of Visvarupa Sena to the throne of Bengal is yet not been clear to us.

There is not much information about Visvarupa Sena's reign. Two copper plate grants issued by him have been discovered. The first one is Madanpara copper plate inscription and the second one is Madhyapara copper plate inscription. According to the contemporary epigraphic records the Madanpara copper plate grant had been issued in the 14th regnal year of the ruling king. The second one i.e. the Madhyapara copper plate grant had been issued sometimes later. Unfortunately these regnal year dates yet not been properly calibrated with the normal calendar date.

Visvarupa Sena was succeeded by his younger brother Keshava Sena. He also issued a copper plate grant in his third regnal year. Some scholars believe that Lakshmana Sena was succeeded by Keshava Sena instead of Visvarupa Sena. Prof. R. D. Banerjee strongly oppose this view. He came to this conclusion on the ground that the grant of Keshava Sena contained all the verse found in the Madanpara copper plate grant of Visvarupa Sena and some additional verses. On the other hand the Madhyapara copper plate grant of Visvarupa Sena which has since been discovered contains these additional verses. The real ground for regarding Visvarupa Sena as the elder brother and predecessor of Keshava Sena is the 10th verse of the Edilpur copper plate grant. R.C. Majumdar completely agreed with Prof. N. G. Majumdar's interpretation of this verse according to which it contains a reference to king Visvarupa Sena, and he must, therefore, have preceded Keshava Sena who issued the Edilpur copper plate grant.

Like there date of ascendance to the throne their territory on which they able to

establish their control is also a matter of debate. Most probably they ruled over parts of eastern and southern Bengal. The Madanpara and Madhyapara copper plate inscription referred to grants of land in Vikrampura of present day Bangladesh. The copper plate grant issued by Kesava Sena refers about the marshy lands of southern Bengal. These epigraphic records indicate Sena control over the eastern and southern parts of Bengal. Both of the kings maintained the tradition of obtaining imperial titles. Visvarupa Sen obtained the title of 'Ariraja Vrishabhanka Sankara Gaudesvara', and Kesava Sena also obtain 'Ariraja Asahya Sankara Gaudesvara'.

The great Sena rulers were the followers of Saivism. But Visvarupa Sena and Kesava Sena probably transferred their allegiance to the Saurya sect. The epithet Saurya applied to these kings clearly indicate that they were sun worshippers. The epigraphic records although describe about the military prowess of these two kings but that descriptions are in very general terms. No details offered in any of the epigraphic record. In a common verse contained in every epigraphic record of these two kings. Both of them are described as the 'destroyer of the Yavanas'. Most probably this verse refers to the struggle between the Sena rulers and the Muslim chiefs. The Muslim chiefs after the defeat of Lakshmana Sena were able to establish their control over a portion of northern and western Bengal. *Tabaqat I Nasiri* of Minhaj us Siraj indirectly supports the view regarding the struggle between the Sena rulers and the Muslim chiefs. It states that the Muslim chiefs ruled over 'the territory of Lakhanauti'. While 'Bang' i.e. Vanga or eastern and southern Bengal was ruled by the descendants of Lakshmana Sena even when that work was composed. Thus we may safely infer from the Hindu and Muslim evidences that for nearly half a century Bang could not be subdued by the Muslim rulers of Lakhanauti and though they might have occasionally gained some successes against it and levied tribute. They sometimes also met with failure and the Sena rulers could justly claim victory against them.

These two kings collectively ruled at least for about a quarter of a century. Most of the scholars believe that they have ruled at least till 1230 CE. There is no proper record regarding the successor of these two kings. But according to *Tabaqat I Nasiri* the descendants of Lakshmana Sena ruled in Bengal (Bang) at least up to 1245 CE and probably up to 1260 CE. It is almost certain that Visvarupa Sena and Kesava Sena were succeeded by other members of the family. Nothing is however definitely known about them.

17.3 Later Sena rulers

Traditions have preserved the names various kings who succeeded Lakshmana Sena. 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. Lakshmana Sena after his defeat ruled as suzerain for about ten years and his successors ruled as suzerains of Delhi and subordinate rulers in Radha region. This is clearly shown in the genealogical table given in the text of *Rajavali*. The table mentions 10 names as the suzerains of Delhi. They are (1) Kesava Sena, (2) Madhava Sena, (3) Sura Sena, (4) Bhima Sena, (5) Kartika Sena, (6) Hari Sena, (7) Satrughana Sena, (8) Narayana Sena, (9) Lakshmana Sena II, and (10) Damodar Sena. According to this text Madhava Sena ruled in Radha region when his father Kesava Sena had accepted the suzerainty of Delhi. After his father's death Madhava Sena became the suzerain of Delhi and his younger brother ascended to the throne of Radha region under his elder brother's suzerainty. In this text the name of Jaya Sena is mentioned as the son of Narayana Sena. Jaya Sena also served as the ruler of Radha region when Lakshmana Sena II succeeded Narayana Sena as the suzerain of Delhi. The relationship between Jaya Sena and Lakshmana Sena II is yet not been clear to us. Damodar Sena was the last member of the Sena family who served as the suzerain of Delhi. He was dethroned by the Chauhan ruler Dvipa Simha.

An account like this does not deserve serious consideration even though it may contain some names whose identities were historical. *Ain I Akbari* of Abul Fazl also mentions some names of the later Sena rulers. But Abul Fazl also presumably depended upon a text like the *Rajavali*. In *Ain I Akbari* Abul Fazl mentions the names of Madhu Sena and Sada Sena. Sada Sena is evidently same as the king of Radha region mentioned in the genealogical table given in the *Rajavali*. Madhu Sena is probably identical with Madhava Sena of the *Rajavali* text. *Ain I Akbari* also mentions the names of one Keshu Sena and one Raja Naujah. Most probably these two names represent Keshava Sena and Narayana Sena.

The account of Taranath mentions about four Sena kings who together ruled for about 80 years. They were (1) Lava Sena, (2) Kasa Sena, (3) Manita Sena, and (4) Rathika Sena. These four kings were followed by the four kings who according to Taranath were minor Sena kings. They were (1) Lava Sena II, (2) Buddha Sena, (3) Harita Sena, and (4) Pratita Sena. Taranath mentions them as the subordinate rulers under the Turushka rulers. It is unfortunate that none of the above mentioned

names can be safely regarded as a member of the Sena royal family ruling in Vanga after the death of Lakshmana Sena.

An echo of the final conquest of the Sena territory in eastern Bengal by the Muslims is perhaps preserved in the tradition about Vallala Sena's fight with Vaya Dumna. It has been taken to refer to Vallala Sena II who is mentioned as having ruled in 1312 CE in a text called *Vipra Kalpa Latika*. But the account especially the date and genealogy contained in this book can hardly be relied upon. In 1809 Dr. James Buchanan heard the same story but that not referred to Vallala Sena. This story referred Susena instead of Vallala Sena. Most probably Susena was the last king of the Sena dynasty. In any case it is difficult to derive any historical conclusion from stories of this kind.

17.4 End of the Sena era

Thus it is not very clear to us that how and when the Sena rule finally ended. It is indeed needless to mention that the invasion of Muhammad Bin Bakhtiyar Khalji had greatly weakened the kingdom. However, the later Sena rulers became able to sustain their rule up to at least mid of the 13th century CE. On the basis of some epigraphic and textual records it is generally believed that in the third quarter of the 13th century CE, the Deva rulers supplanted the Sena rulers from their hold over Vikramapura. By the end of the century whole of Bengal came under the control of the Muslims.

17.5 Contribution of the Sena rulers

The rule of the Senas in Bengal is usually connected with the emergence of orthodox Hinduism in a Hindu-Buddhist society which for long had enjoyed the peaceful coexistence of the two religions resulting in an atmosphere of amalgam of the two. The onslaught on the Buddhists in Bengal is believed to have started in this period, which resulted in large scale Buddhist migration to the neighboring countries. The Sena period witnessed the development of Sanskrit literature. Vallala Sena and Laksmana Sena were royal authors of Sanskrit texts, *Dana Sagara* and *Adbhuta Sagara*. Jayadeva, Umapati Dhara, Sharana, Dhoyi, Shridhara Dasa, Halayudha Mishra and Govardhana were literary luminaries of the period. Sculptural art developed under the patronage of the Sena kings and courtiers.

17.6 Model Questions

1. Write briefly on the political condition of Bengal after Lakshmana Sena.
2. Estimate the contribution of the Sena dynasty in the history of ancient Bengal.

17.7 Suggested Readings

1. Nitish Sengupta, *The Land of Two Rivers*, London, 2011.
2. Pramode Lal Paul, *The Early History of Bengal, Vol. II*, Calcutta, n.d.
3. R. C. Majumdar (ed.), *History of Ancient Bengal*, Delhi, 1989.

Module VI

**Administration, Economy,
Society**

Unit 18 □ Overview of the Administration : Basic Features and Evolution

Structure

- 18.0 Objective**
- 18.1 Introduction**
- 18.2 Administration in Pre Gupta period**
- 18.3 Gupta and Post-Gupta Period**
- 18.4 Administration under the Pala and Sena rulers**
- 18.5 Conclusion**
- 18.5 Model Questions**
- 18.7 Suggested Readings**

18.0 Objective

- The objective of the Present unit is to study the evolution of administrative structure in ancient Bengal.
- The theme will be discussed from three different perspectives :
 - The pre-Gupta administrative structure
 - The Gupta and Post-Gupta administrative structure
 - The administration during the Pala and Sena rule in Bengal

18.1 Introduction

In ancient times, the land of 'Bangla' comprised the territories of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. The Bengali-speaking people were the majority in that land. Its domination extended from Kamrup (Assam), Pataliputra (Patna) and Bhubaneswar (Orissa) up to the border with Eran of central India. It is indeed a tough task to draw an outline of the political theory and the administrative system that prevailed in Bengal until it

became a part of the Gupta empire as there is no reliable sources of information. Administration in Bengal never remained the same always. Every new conquest was followed by new mode of administration. A few isolated data regarding the administrative system may be traced from detail study of the classical accounts and scattered references in ancient Indian literature.

18.2 Administration in Pre Gupta period

We do not have any definite information regarding the administrative system of Bengal during the pre-Mauryan period. A rough outline may be drawn from the evidence of a few stories and legends preserved in later literature and from the classical accounts; we know that monarchy was the prevailing form of government. The Greek and Latin writers refer to the existence of a very powerful state in Bengal, known as Gangaridai (the people of the Ganges region) in the latter half of the 4th century BCE, which was militarily powerful. The description of the kingdom of Gangaridai with its disciplined as well as superior military power seems to indicate a highly developed form of state organisation. Besides the kingdom of Gangaridai, a number of principalities seem to have existed in contemporary Bengal, exercising local authority only in their respective areas. It is very difficult to ascertain their relation with Gangaridai. It is stated in the *Mahabharata* that those powers didn't lack general political consciousness amongst themselves against their common enemies and sometimes they established a strong monarchy through the combination of a number of smaller kingdoms. They also maintained diplomatic relations with foreign rulers.

Most probably Bengal formed an integral part of the powerful Mauryan Empire, which was marked by a strong, well regulated but enlightened system of administration. Though we possess precise knowledge regarding the Mauryan administration in general, unfortunately we do not have sufficient information regarding their administration in Bengal. Nor do we possess any definite knowledge of the administrative system under independent states that flourished in Bengal for about five hundred years following the downfall of the Mauryans. However we may assume that the system of provincial administration developed by the Mauryans was prevailing in Bengal.

From the Mahasthan inscription (belonging to the 3rd century BCE), we know that the city of Pundra Nagara was probably the administrative seat of a Mahamatra

during the period of the Mauryas. The inscription made mention as to whether Bengal was governed as a province of the Maurya empire or was under the direct administration of the emperor himself. The contents of the inscription clearly indicate the existence of a well-organised administration.

The end of the Maurya dynasty in the beginning of the 2nd century BCE was, however, followed by political disintegration. For a period of about five hundred years there was paramount sovereign in northern India. The inscriptions, belonging to the post-Mauryan period, record either local dynasties or rulers, or imperial families who ruled over dominions which included portions of Bengal. Indeed with the foundation of Gupta rule in the beginning of the 4th century CE, the scenario changed and a new era of imperial peace and prosperity was ushered in committed to the welfare of the people, which is the cardinal tone of the Mauryan administration.

Among the local dynasties or rulers who ruled in areas within Bengal, the Varmanas of the early 4th century CE, and the Khadgas of Samatata (7th century CE) were prominent. We also find the names of the local chiefs of Vanga region such as Gopachandra, Dharmaditya and Samacharadeva; Jayanaga of Karnasuvarna and Vainyagupta of Tippera.

18.3 Gupta and Post-Gupta Period

In the prevalent form of government, early in the 4th century CE, the king held the supreme position. He assumed the title of Maharaja. Singha Varman and his son Chandra Varman of Puskarana or present day Pokharna in Bankura district enjoyed the title of Maharaja. The name of Chandra Varman is referred to in the Allahabad Prashasti of Samudra Gupta as one of the powerful rulers of Aryavarta. The Gupta sovereigns used, as recorded in the Damodarpur Copper plate inscriptions dated c. 444 CE, c. 448 CE, c. 482 CE and c. 476-495 CE the titles *Paramadaivata Paramabhattacharaka Maharajadhiraja*. The Gupta emperors are said to have directly administered the whole of Bengal, which formed an integral part of their empire.

Among the local rulers of Bengal, Gopa Chandra, Dharmaditya and Samachara Deva (c. 6th century CE) and Jaya Naga (c. 6th century CE) assumed the title of Maharajadhiraja. Shasanka also used the same title. There had been several feudal chiefs who assumed the title of Maharaja. In the Gunaighar Copperplate inscription dated Gupta Era 188, it is stated that under Maharaja Vainya Gupta there were two

feudatory chiefs, Maharaja Rudra Datta and Maharaja Mahasamanta Vijaya Sena, who assumed the same title as their suzerain. The use of titles like Mahasamanta and Maharaja by some feudatories definitely indicates that portions of territory were under their control. In the same inscription, Vijaya Sena is said to have borne various epithets like Dutaka, Mahapratihara, Mahapilupati, Panchadhikaraparika, Patyuparika and Purapaloparika. The use of such titles, however, clearly reminds us of the important position occupied by a feudal chief in the state functions. Indeed it will be unreasonable to assume that in the administration of some parts of the independent kingdoms the feudal chiefs enjoyed autonomy. For example, Maharaja Vijaya Sena, as recorded in the Mallasarul Copper plate inscription, is found to have used his own seal and issued directives to his officials.

The imperial territory of Bengal, administered by the Gupta emperors, was divided into some well-defined units like bhukti, visaya, mandala, vithi and grama etc. Each of the units seems to have an adhikarana or office of its own at its headquarters known as adhisthana. Bhukti, corresponding to a modern division, was the largest unit of administration, and was governed by a deputy of the king. From contemporary epigraphic records we know the names of such bhuktis as Pundravardhana and Vardhamana, corresponding to the whole of north Bengal and the southern part of ancient Radha region respectively. In the Gupta inscriptions we also find mention of an unnamed bhukti with its headquarters at Navyavakashika, which included Suvarnavithi. The bhukti used to be governed by an officer of governor rank appointed directly by the emperor. In the Damodarpur Copper plate inscription of the Gupta sovereigns, the governor of Pundravardhanabhukti is described as 'tatpadaparigrhita' in relation to the king under whom he might have served. The title of this high official was Uparika during the time of Kumara Gupta I while Maharaja was added to it during the reign of Budha Gupta. From the reference to Uparika Maharaja Maharajaputra deva bhattaraka in the Damodarpur Copperplate inscription dated c. 543 CE. it may be inferred that sometimes either a prince or a member of the imperial family was appointed as the governor of the Pundravardhanabhukti. However, we have very little information regarding the way in which a provincial governor carried on his administration. It is learnt from the Paharpur Copper plate inscription of the Gupta year 159 or c. 479 CE that the bhukti of Pundravardhana had its adhikarana (headquarters) at the town of Pundravardhana. It may be mentioned here that the provincial governor was responsible directly to the king because his appointment was subject to the choice or approval of the latter.

Next to the bhukti was the visaya, the second largest administrative unit, which played a significant role in the administration. The visayas correspond to the modern districts. The officer in charge of a visaya was known as Kumaramatya and Ayuktaka in the earlier and later Gupta periods respectively. During the supremacy of the later Gupta rulers over north Bengal, the officer of the visaya was called Visayapati. Generally the governor of a bhukti appointed the heads of the districts or visayas which formed parts of his province. The Baigram Copper plate inscription, however, refers to a district officer who was directly responsible to the bhattaraka. This shows that in some cases the emperor gave the appointment of district officer. However, the governor of a bhukti generally appointed a visayapati during the time of the independent rulers of south and east Bengal in the 6th century CE.

Contemporary inscriptions mention only a few visayas. Each of the Damodarpur Copperplate inscription nos. 1, 2, 4 and 5 records the name of Kotivarsavisaya under the bhukti of Pundravardhana. The Dhanaidaha Copperplate inscription of Kumaragupta I dated c. 432-33 CE, however, records the name of Khatapara or Khadaparavisaya belonging to the same bhukti. The Baigram Copper plate inscription records the existence of a visaya which included Panchanagari as its headquarters. It is most likely that this was the name of the visaya too. This visaya seems to have been under the jurisdiction of Pundravardhanabhukti. The existence of a visaya known as Varakamandala under the administrative control of Navyavakashika is recorded in the Faridpur Copper plate inscription of Dharmaditya and Gopa Chandra. We know the name of Audamvarikavisaya from the Vappaghosavata grant of Jaya Naga of Karnasuvarna.

It seems clear from the Damodarpur Copper plate inscriptions (Nos. 1-5) that the district officer had his adhikarana in his headquarters (adhithanaadhikaranam) and a staff of officers under his control. Among the officers, the record keepers (pustapalas) are said to have played an important role in connection with the transactions in land. The inscriptions are the only source of information regarding the grant or sale of lands and the role of the adhikaranas in it. Probably the business of the adhikaranas was not confined to transactions in land only. They formed a general administrative body to carry on many other kinds of administrative work that a state has to perform. Unfortunately their other possible functions cannot be determined owing to lack of evidence. It is learnt from the Damodarpur Copper plate inscriptions Nos. 2, 4 and 5 that the officer-in-charge of the Kotivarsha visaya was aided by a 'Board of Advisers', which was composed of, excluding the officer-in-charge

himself, four other members representing the various important interest groups of those days. They were the Nagara-shresthi or the President of the various guilds or corporations of the town or of the rich bankers, the Prathama-sarthavaha or the chief merchant representing perhaps the merchant class or the various trade guilds, the Prathama-kulika or the chief artisan representing perhaps the various artisan classes and the Prathama-kayastha or the chief scribe representing the Prathama-kayastha as a class or acting as a state official in the capacity of a Secretary of modern days. However, the supreme authority of managing the affairs of administration of the adhikarana rested in the hands of the Visayapati. We have evidence to prove whether the Nagara-shresthin, the Prathama-sarthavaha and the Prathama-kulika were nominated by the government or elected by their respective communities or guilds. But it can fairly be asserted that they represented the various interest groups in trade, industry and commerce in the leading city of the district.

From the Faridpur Copper plate inscription of Dharmaditya (3rd regnal year), we know that besides the adhikarana of visayapati, there had been a considerable assembly of visaya-mahattara (leading men of the district), followed by other men of lesser importance (purogahprakrityas-cha), Prof. R. C. Majumdar thinks that the word 'purogah' used after the names and designations of the additional members is perhaps an indication that 'they formed an integral part of the adhikarana and possessed rights and prerogatives beyond those of mere advisers'. Mention has also been made in the Gupta inscriptions regarding the staff of record-keepers serving in the visayadhikarana. However, the description of the advisory bodies in the district administration bears clear testimony to the participation of the local people as well as the democratic principle pursued in local administration.

Next to the district, the administration of the vithi forms one of the important features of the administration. The exact meaning of the term vithi seems to be unclear. Sometimes it corresponds to a subdivision of the bhukti or a mandala. Several inscriptions refer to this administrative unit. Suvarnavithi, as referred to in the Ghugrahati inscription of Samachara Deva, is taken to mean "the bullion market" situated in Navyavakashika. The use of vithi in the sense of an administrative unit is available in the Mallasarul Copper plate inscription. In the same inscription we find mention of a vithi known as the Vakkattakkavithi in the Vardhamanabhukti without any reference to a visaya. Another reference to vithi can be found in the Paharpur Copper plate inscription of 159 Gupta Era in which it is recorded that Dakshinangshakavithi was under the jurisdiction of the Pundravardhanabhukti. We

have specific references to the *adhikaranas* of the *vithis*, but we have definite information regarding their constitution. So far as the land transactions were concerned, the *adhikarana* of the *vithi* performed the same duties as were fixed for the district *adhikarana*. It appears from the evidence of the *Mallasarul* plate that the *adhikarana* of a *vithi* was assisted by a board of prominent persons, comprising *mahattaras* (leading men of different localities or wards of the *vithi*), *agraharins*, *khadgis* (swordsmen) and at least one *Vaha Nayaka* (Superintendent of conveyances). It will not be unreasonable to assume that such *adhikaranas* existed in Bengal under the imperial Gupta rulers also.

Villages played a very significant role in the whole system of administration of ancient Bengal. They probably formed the smallest unit of administration. Contemporary inscriptions usually suffix the name of a village with *grama*, while some others are mentioned with the names ending with the term *agrahara*. We have references to the existence of the village *Gunekagrahara grama* in the *Gunaighar* Copper plate inscription of *Vainya Gupta* dated c. 507 CE and the *Ambila grama Agrahara* in the *Nandapur* grant of 169 Gupta Era or c. 488 CE. It seems that an *agrahara* was often considered more important and better developed than a *grama* from an administrative point of view. The combination of villages for the purpose of administration seems to have been common in ancient times. We have reference to the name of *PalashaVrindaka* in the *Damodarpur* Copper plate inscription of *Budha Gupta* dated c. 482 CE, the area of which seems to have been larger than the usual area of a *grama*. An example of perhaps a union of small villages is found in the *Baigram* Copper plate of Gupta Era 128. It is referred to as *Vai-grama* and is said to have included two distinct localities like *Trivrata* and *Shrigohali*.

Prominent men of a village were involved in its administration or in local affairs. Their role was, however, confined to cooperation with the state officials. We can find a parallel in the participation of *Mahattaras* and other leading men in the affairs of the *adhikarana* of a *visaya* or a *vithi*. The theory that the *Gramika* was the head of administration in every village cannot be satisfactorily established. The inscriptional references do not make it sufficiently clear as to who represented the official side of the administration in villages administered by *Gramikas*. The *Paharpur* Copper plate inscription informs us that *Brahmins*, *Kutumbins* and *Mahattaras* represented the non-official side. The *Damodarpur* Copper plate inscription of *Budha Gupta* (c. 476 - 495 CE) mentions that in the administration of the village *Chandagrama* the non-official members included prominent subjects headed by

Brahmins and also Kutumbins (the chief Brahmanas, prominent subjects and householders). However, the nature of administration of such villages differed from that of others where the powers were entrusted not only to the local Mahattaras and Kutumbins but also to the Astakuladhikarana and the Gramika. The villages, belonging to this category had their own adhikaranas, which represented the official side. Such an adhikarana probably consisted of eight persons and the Gramika. In such villages, there appears to have been an office of record-keepers. We have definite information regarding the adhikarana of a grama under the independent rulers of south and east Bengal in the 6th century CE. However, the exact constitution of the rural adhikaranas might have varied to a certain extent in different times.

18.4 Administration under the Pala and Sena rulers

Bengal experienced for the first time a stable government under the long rule of the Pala rulers. Unfortunately we do not possess a detailed account of the Pala administration from the available materials. We can only reconstruct glimpses of different aspects of it. It was during the rule of the Pala kings that the central administrative machinery was established in Bengal upon the structure of the Gupta provincial administration. The monarchical form of government prevailed throughout the period. The king's eldest son was usually meant for successor (Yauvarajyam). We have detailed information regarding the duties and functions of the Yuvaraja. As in the Gupta period, the term Kumara was applied to a son of the king. He was given a high administrative post such as a provincial governorship. Sometimes the Kumaras played vital roles in the military campaigns of the reigning king.

In the task of administering the empire, the king was assisted by a group of officials at the head of which were the ministers' known as mantri or sachiva. During the rule of the Pala kings we find references for the first time in the records to an important official of the state whose position was similar to that of the Prime Minister. We are told in the Badal Prasasti of Deva Pala about the great power and high dignity of the post. It seems that the post of Prime Minister was hereditary in the family of Brahmana Garga from the time of Dharma Pala. The descendants of Garga (namely Dharbhapani, Someshvara, Kedaramishra and Guravamishra) occupied the post of Prime Minister for the next hundred years. They played an active role in the foundation and consolidation of the Pala empire. Members of another family were however associated with the later Pala kings as their Prime Ministers. Yogadeva

was the Prime Minister of Vigrahapala III while his successor Vaidyadeva is said to have served in the same post during the reign of Kumarapala. The hereditary principle in regard to higher services seems to have been in operation under later dynasties also viz, the Chandras and the Yadavas. The evidence of the Bhuvaneshwar Prashasti of Bhatta Bhavadeva proves it.

The Pala emperors had numerous feudatory chiefs under their control. They are referred to in the Pala records as Rajan, Rajanyaka, Ranaka, Samanta and Mahasamanta etc. It is very difficult to determine the real significance and mutual relation of these titles. But it can fairly be said that the power of the central authority compelled them to be under its control. Sometimes the weakness of the central authority led them to assume higher prerogatives and declare independence. The fact of Ramapala's seeking assistance from fourteen samantas to recover Varendra definitely proves that the power of the Pala kings depended to a great extent on the help of the feudal chiefs.

During the rule of the Palas, the administrative units of the earlier period, like bhuktis, visayas, mandalas and other smaller ones, were retained. The bhuktis, referred to in the Pala records, are Pundravardhana, Vardhamana and Danda-bhukti in Bengal, Tira-bhukti in North Bihar, Shrinagara-bhukti in South Bihar and Pragjyotisa-bhukti in Assam. The Pala inscriptions record the names of a large number of visayas and mandalas. They also recorded the names of a large number of smaller units of administration such as khandala, avritti and bhaga. The avritti was subdivided into chaturakas and the chaturakas into patakas. The exact nature of none of these is clearly known. The inscriptions of the Palas refer to the officers connected with various administrative units. The long list of officials furnished by the land grants indicates the efficiency and comprehensive character of the administrative organisation. Regarding the power and functions of many of the officers very little is known. The list only helps us to form a general idea of the wide scope of the administrative machinery and the different departments through which it was carried on. It is to be noted here that the Pala inscriptions, although providing more details regarding the central government, do not throw much light on the forms of contemporary provincial and local governments. It is not also certain whether the *adhikaranas* of the earlier period still survived as a very significant aspect of administration. It is, however, true that the names of the *adhikaranas* do not appear in any inscription, but their survival in a modified form cannot altogether be ruled out.

The king, during the Pala epoch, was at the top of the whole administration. His titles remained as in the preceding period. He had practically unlimited power. The central executive body, controlled by the king, exercised the main powers and responsibilities of the government. Besides the Yuvaraja and the Prime Minister specific references have been made to other ministers such as Mahasandhivigrahika (Minister in charge of Peace and War or Foreign Minister of the present day), Rajamatya, probably indicating junior ministers in general, Mahakumaramatya, whose real position is unknown, and Duta, the envoys. Next to these high executive officials were the Amatyas, referring probably to the officials of high rank. Among other high officials mention may be made of the Angaraksa, probably the head of the Royal bodyguard, and Rajasthaniya, probably holding the rank of a Regent or a Viceroy. There was a class of officers described as Adhyaksas whose position may be taken to mean the superintendents in the civil administration. Among other officials connected with the central administration Pramatri and Ksetrapa were prominent. The scope of their work was perhaps limited to disputes regarding property or they might have been in charge of the Department of Land Survey. However, some scholars to mean a Judge with civil cases only have explained the term Pramatri.

18.5 Conclusion

The history of administration in ancient Bengal, as gleaned mainly from the inscriptions, is certainly sketchy. But there cannot be any doubt that there prevailed well-organised administrative machinery. Besides the long list of officials, as contained in the land grants, other important information regarding the administration bear clear testimony to the fact that the administrative system of ancient Bengal was uniform throughout the region in its main outline and was subject to changes and modifications when the situation demanded. It can fairly be concluded that ancient Bengal was not lagging behind in respect of administrative efficiency in comparison with other parts of India.

18.6 Model Questions

1. Briefly narrate the evolution of the administrative structure of ancient Bengal.

2. Write a short note on the provincial administration under the Gupta rulers.
3. Briefly discuss the administrative structure of the Pala rulers.

18.7 Suggested Readings

1. Nitish Sengupta, *The Land of Two Rivers*, London, 2011.
2. Pramode Lal Paul, *The Early History of Bengal*, Vol. II, Calcutta, n.d.
3. R. C. Majumdar (ed.), *History of Ancient Bengal*, Delhi, 1989.

Unit-19 □ The Condition of Economy and Social Formation

Structure

- 19.0 Objective**
- 19.1 Introduction**
- 19.2 Economy – Agriculture, Trade and Commerce**
- 19.3 Agricultural Productions**
- 19.4 Trade and Commerce:**
- 19.5 Market centres and merchants**
- 19.6 Important Trade Routes**
- 19.7 Coins and other Medium of Exchanges**
- 19.8 Conclusion**
- 19.9 Model Questions**
- 19.10 Suggested Readings**

19.0 Objective

- The objective of the present unit is to study the socio-economic formation of Bengal during the ancient period.
- The present unit will study both the agrarian economy and trading pattern.
- Three focal points will be elaborated :
 - The agricultural production
 - The trading network, the merchants, and the market centres.
 - The medium of exchanges

19.1 Introduction

Bengal enjoyed prosperity throughout the ancient period. The vast alluvial plain

of Bengal is very fertile and therefore agriculture flourished here since long past. The surplus agricultural production helps in the growth of trade and commerce from time immemorial. The multitude of rivers afforded easy communication for internal trade and Bengal's location on the Bay of Bengal offered her the opportunity of participating in sea-borne trade and commerce, the tradition of which seems to have been built up from as early as the 2nd millennium BCE.

19.2 Economy – Agriculture, Trade and Commerce

Bengal as a territory in the early period of its history embraced the present areas of Bangladesh and West Bengal, parts of Bihar and Orissa in India, and actually denoted an aggregate of four major subregions i.e. Pundravardhana, Radha, Vanga and Samatata. The term Bengal therefore is taken to mean here the areas lying in Bangladesh and West Bengal in India. Geography and human activities in this deltaic area of the Ganga, the largest delta in the world, were largely shaped by the hydrography of this region. Its location between the middle Ganga plains and the Brahmaputra valley provides regular access to the Ganga basin in the west and the northeastern part of India. The Ganga delta opening out to the Bay of Bengal makes the region under review the only outlet of the landlocked Ganga valley to the sea. These geographical features considerably influenced movements of men and merchandise in early Bengal.

The four sub-regions mentioned above never experienced political unification under a single power and witnessed uneven political developments. The developments in social, economic and cultural history in these units were neither uniform nor unilinear. In other words, political, socio-economic and cultural developments show regional features in different subregions of early Bengal.

A perusal of trade in early Bengal has to be placed in the broader context of commerce in the subcontinent. In India, as in early Bengal, the mainstay of economic life must have been agriculture. In the Brahmanical theoretical treatises, for instance the Arthashastra, however, *vartha* (the science related to occupations or *vritti*), includes *krsi* (agriculture) and *vanijya* (trade) as well. The Pali canonical literature in fact clearly underlines the greater economic advantages in trade than in agricultural pursuits (MajjhimaNikaya); there is also the clear recognition in the AnguttaraNikaya that out of trade could be derived enormous profit. It is no wonder that the great grammarian Panini (c 5th century BC) was aware of *kraya-vikraya* (purchase and sale) as the principal aspect of *vyavahara* or trade. The principal sources of our

information regarding trade in early Bengal are indigenous literature (both normative and creative), impressions of foreigners (Classical, Chinese, Arabic, Persian and European), inscriptions, coins and field archaeological evidence from explored and excavated sites. These sources, though diverse, rarely throw any light on transactional activities in Bengal prior to c. 6th century BC; our survey also, therefore, begins from that period. The evidence is scattered and far from adequate, providing virtually no statistical data and offering what is termed as 'qualitative data'.

It should also be pointed out that the socio-economic and political situation in Bengal did not always conform to an Indian or even north Indian pattern. When, for instance, the northern and northwestern part of the subcontinent experienced mature urbanisation in the period from c 2500 to 1750 BC, there was no such similar development in eastern India. Similarly, Bengal was outside the scope of urban development and emergence of mahajanapadas (territorial polities) in and around the sixth century BC when the Ganga valley witnessed such significant changes. It is important to note that complex economic life in Bengal, including sedentary agriculture, diversified crafts and trade, did not emerge prior to c 4th century BC, or before the emergence of the Maurya empire. It is likely that the material culture of the Ganga valley, characterised by flourishing agriculture, different crafts, growing trade and urban centres, reached the area of Bengal with the gradual spread of the political power of Magadha under the Mauryas.

19.3 Agricultural Productions

Bengal was always a prosperous land in terms of agricultural produces. A variety of crops were cultivated here since long past. Pundra was well known for the cultivation of dhanya (paddy) and tila (sesame) which figure in the Mahasthan stone inscription, palaeographically assignable to c. 3rd century BC. The important point here is that these two types of crops were kept in the storehouse (kosthagara) at Pundranagara or present Mahasthangarh in Bogra district of Bangladesh, the earliest urban centre of Bengal, and the said crops were meant for distribution among certain people afflicted by some emergencies (atyayika). In short, the grains stored in the granary at Pundranagara were used for relief measures. The Arthashastra too recommends the Panyadhyaksa (officer in charge of trade) to build up similar buffer stocks of grains and other essential commodities to be released during emergencies. Seen in this light, north Bengal seems to have experienced surplus crop production, a part of which was stored in a state granary located in an urban centre. This implies

some kind of transactions in grain, especially paddy, probably under administrative supervision. Subsequent sources however do not suggest similar state initiatives in the buying and distribution of grains in Bengal.

The recent discovery of many terracotta seals principally from archaeological sites in the South 24 Parganas and Midnapore districts of West Bengal notably from Chandrakhetugarh and Tamralipta has significantly enriched knowledge in this regard. Some of these inscribed terracotta seals inscribed in Kharosti and the mixed Kharosti-Brahmi scripts and assignable to c. late 1st century BC to 4th century CE, depict sailing crafts of different types carrying either a box with stylised stalks of grain or a stylised stock of grain shown on the seal. There is also a reference to a merchant who became wealthy by selling food (possibly rice). That Bengal was known both for profusion of crops and their export to overseas destinations cannot be lost sight of. A further continuity in the trade in paddy of Bengal is clearly visible in the accounts of Ibnbatuta (14th century) and Ma Huan (15th century), both referring to the overseas export of paddy of Bengal to Maldives in exchange of cowry shells.

Besides this important cereal, Pundravardhana became so famous for the plantation of sugarcane that the very term paundraka stood for sugarcane (iksu) grown in north Bengal. There is a strong likelihood that sugarcane of Bengal was in considerable demand and was transacted as the raw material for the sugar making industry in early India.

19.4 Trade and Commerce

The 'Gange' country (lower part of the Ganga delta) in the Periplus of the Erythraean Sea (c second half of the 1st century CE), an invaluable source for the study of India's long distance trade network, prominently figures for the availability of malabathrum (Sanskrit Tamalapatra, Bangla Tejpata) and nard (Sanskrit nalada, narada, probably *Nardostachys grandiflora*), a particular type of fragrant oil. The Periplus clearly suggests that these exotic items were in considerable demand among the rich in the Roman Empire. A significant corroboration of this comes from a recently discovered loan contract document written on a mid-second century CE papyrus. According to this document, Gangetic nard of considerable quantity was loaded at the famous Malabari port of Muziris (near Cranganore in Kerala) and exported to Alexandria on board the ship Hermopollon. Though the Periplus considered malabathrum and nard as Gangetic, these were not locally grown in

coastal Bengal region, but were plant products of the northeast from where these reached the Bengal coast. These exotic items were sent to Malabar, obviously by a coastal route (see later), for their final shipping to the eastern Mediterranean region. Bengal was thus involved in the transit trade of malabathrum and nard.

The same 'Gange' looms large in the Periplus for the availability of the best variety of Muslin which was a major item of export from the Bengal coast. This text further refers to of the trade in Thinae (Chinese) silk floss, yarn and cloth, which went to Limyrike or Damirica (the Dravida country in far south India) via the Ganges. While the muslin was a locally manufactured item of Bengal, the transaction in Chinese silk, an extremely costly product, belonged to the category of re-export trade. The fame of the textile products of Bengal, however, goes back to the days of the *Arthashastra*, the earliest stratum of which dates back to c. 3rd century BC. That Bengal continued to be famous for its textile products during the subsequent centuries is amply evident in the eloquent praise of the textiles of Bengal in the accounts of Arab and Persian authors (c 9th to 14th centuries), Chinese writers and Marco Polo (late 13th centuries). As many of them did not actually visit Bengal, their estimation of the excellence of the textiles of Bengal is based on their ideas/information of the quality and quantity of textiles of this region. Significantly enough, Chauju Kua (1225 CE), a Chinese official speaks of the availability of fine cotton (tou-lo) in Pong-kielo or Vangala.

Inscriptions of the period from 8th century onwards occasionally record the plantation of both betel nuts (guvaka) and betel leaves both of which must have been transacted. Coconut (narikela) plantations also figure in inscriptions of the same period, particularly in those coming from coastal tracts. Salt as an indispensable daily necessity product also appears in the copper plates of the period from c. 9th to 13th centuries, especially from areas close to the coast.

Bengal was also associated with the availability of excellent aloes wood, according to Arab accounts (c 9th to 13th centuries). Arab authors labelled it as Qamaruni aloes wood, available at the port of 'Samandar' or 'Sudkawan' located near modern Chittagong of Bangladesh. The Qamaruni aloes wood, rated second only to the aloes wood of Multan, was a forest product from Qamarun or Kamarupa and brought to Samandar for export through the river Meghna. Arabic and Persian texts also refer to the export of rhinoceros horns, an exotic and costly item, from Samandar. This forest product is likely to have reached Samandar also from Kamarupa, which is traditionally noted for rhinoceros.

The importance of Bengal in the trade of another animal has been underlined in recent decades. This is the transaction in the horse, especially the war-horse, in early Bengal. The best quality of war-horses were however generally not indigenous to India and were brought from Central Asia to north India through the northwestern frontier region. According to the account of Kang tai (3rd century CE), Yueh-chih (ieKusana) merchants regularly brought horses to the Koying country by sea. Koying is located in the Malay Peninsula. A copper drum, found from the Sangean Island in Southeast Asia, depicts two men in typical Yuehchih dresses standing beside a horse.

The most likely point of maritime contacts between the Malay Peninsula and north India seems to have been the Bengal littorals. To this must be added the evidence of a terracotta sealing from Chandraketurah, with a legend in the mixed Kharosti-Brahmi script (assigned to c. 3rd century CE), which shows the figure of a ship on which stands the figure of a horse. The accompanying legend describes the vessel as a trapyaka, which is the same as trappaga of the Periplus and the trapyaga of the Jaina text Angavijja. This seal provides the earliest known evidence of the shipment of horses from the Bengal coast. A perusal of the Tamil Sangam texts may suggest that horses reached the ports on the Tamilnadu coast from the north, which could imply in this context the Bengal coast.

One may therefore logically see Bengal's participation in the maritime transportation of horses to Southeast Asia and/or Tamilnadu coast in and around the 3rd century CE. The need for the horse as major war machinery in Bengal could have increased as a result of the rise of Bengal as a formidable regional power in north India under the Palas and the Senas (c 750-1205 CE). An impression of this can be seen in the epigraphic account of the gift of countless cavalry to the Palas by rulers from the northern quarter. Though it is stereotypical and eulogistic in nature, the account suggests that the Palas perceived the northern quarter as the principal supply zone of war-horses for their cavalry. This suggestion gains ground in the light of the annual horse-fair (ghotakayatra) at Prthudaka (modern Pehoa in Haryana), figuring in an inscription of 848 CE. The *Tabaqat I Nasiri* of Minhajuddin (13th century) leaves little room for doubt that excellent Arab horses were brought to Nudiah or probably Nadia near modern Navadwip in the Nadia district of West Bengal during the Sena period. In fact, the arrival of the Arabian horse-dealers at Nadiawas so regular that when some of Bakhtiyar Khalji's soldiers reached Nadia, they were mistaken as horse merchants and they hardly raised any suspicion. Apart from this centre of horse trade in the Radha region, Lakhnawti or Laksmanavati, the capital of LakshmanaSena also received the supply of horses from Karambattan or Karampattan,

which is identified either with Kera Gompa in south-west Bhutan or an area in the northern fringe of Tibet. Horses were thus imported to Bengal both from the northwest and also the northeast. A recent study of 15th century Chinese annals points to the possibility of the overseas shipping of horses from the Bengal coast to China under the Ming rulers. It is likely that Bengal exported to China some of the horses, which were brought to Bengal from the northwest and/or the northeast.

Among other imported items to Bengal mention may be made of cowries, which were profusely used as a medium of exchange in Bengal, particularly during the 750-1300 CE phase. Best quality cowries were, however, not native of Bengal. These were in fact brought from the Maldives, obviously across the sea, as informed by Ibn Batuta and Ma Huan. The cowry must have been transported in bulk, almost in the nature of ballast. It logically follows that cowries were integrally integrated to the overseas trade network in the Indian Ocean. Among precious metals gold and silver, used for minting coins, appear to have been brought to Bengal from elsewhere. One of the possible sources of silver could have been the area around Arakan and Pegu.

The rapid overview of the exchangeable products in early Bengal highlights their impressive diversities, ranging from cereals, cash crops, agro-based products and other daily necessity objects to precious and exotic commodities catering to the needs of the moneyed communities and the ruling groups.

19.5 Market centres and merchants

An understanding of trade centres and traders is closely related to the study of exchangeable commodities in early Bengal. Available evidences suggest that there were specific types of market places and merchants.

Major urban centres in early Bengal like Pundranagara, Kotivarsha, Mangalkot, Karnasuvarna, Ramavati and Vikramapur appear to have combined the functions of politico-administrative centres and commercial centres. These seem to have occupied the top position in the hierarchy of market places in early Bengal. Closely connected with the markets at principal urban centres were ports, generally called pattanans and velakulas. The foremost port of Bengal from the late 2nd centuries BC to the eighth century CE was certainly Tamralipti, the major outlet for the landlocked Ganga valley. Located on the Rupnarayan and generally identified with Tamluk in Midnapur in West Bengal, Tamralipti is noted in early literature as a velakula. Archaeological remains, though not matching the profusion of literary references to it, point to its

flourishing conditions. Ptolemy called it Tamalites while Pliny named the same as Taluctae. The importance of Tamralipti as a port of international trade, especially in the Bay of Bengal maritime network, is clearly highlighted by FaHian and Hiuen-Tsang.

The *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* and Ptolemy's *Geography* (c 150 CE) mention a port called Gange located on the river Ganga close to the confluence of the Ganga with the sea. This port is generally, but not unanimously, identified with the well-known archaeological site of Chandraketugarh in north 24 Pargana district of West Bengal. That Chandraketugarh, located on the river Vidyadhari, was a flourishing port is unmistakable on the basis of a number of visual representations of water crafts of various types on inscribed terracotta seals and sealing discovered from Chandraketugarh and datable to the first three centuries of the Christian era. These unique materials from Chandraketugarh yield depictions of ordinary boats, trapyaka type of coastal vessels and ocean going ships fit for distant journeys. While Tamralipti was undoubtedly the port par excellence in ancient Bengal, Gange/Chandraketugarh is likely to have played the role of an important feeder port to Tamralipti.

It appears that the last known definite epigraphic reference to Tamralipti does not go beyond the eighth century CE, after which the port seems to have declined mainly because of the siltation in the Rupnarayan. The gradual fading away of this premier port may have adversely affected the commercial activities of ancient Bengal, which according to some scholars experienced as its consequence a closed and self-sufficient rural economy in sharp contrast to the erstwhile trade based urbanism in Bengal. However, the southeastern most part of Bangladesh or Samatata-Harikela region was coming to recognition for long-distance overseas communications to southeast Asia, as is evident from Hiuen-Tsang's accounts of early seventh century. The combined evidence of several Arab (Sulaiman, IbnKhordadbeh, Al Masudi, Al Idrisi, Al Marvazi and Ibn Battuta to mention the outstanding writers), Persian (Hudud al Alam) and Chinese (ChaujuKua and the accounts of the voyages of Cheng ho) texts indicate the remarkable rise of a port, variously called Samandar, Sudkawan and Sattigaon, probably located near present Chittagong. The loss of Tamralipti seems to have been considerably compensated by the emergence of Samandar/Sudkawan as the premier harbour in the Bengal coast, to be ultimately given the status of portogrande by the Portuguese in the sixteenth century.

Like Tamralipti of the earlier centuries, Samandar too had a few feeder ports in

the form of inland riverine ports. Two such prominent ports were Devaparvata and Vangasagarasambhandariyaka. Devaparvata, located in Mainamati, figures in a few inscriptions of 7th-10th centuries as being encircled by river Ksiroda, on which plied many boats and described as sarvatobhadra. Apart from being a riverine port it also served as a jayaskandhavara or a politico-administrative centre of the Khadga and Deva rulers of Samatata. That there was another riverine port near Savar (Sabhar) has been suggested on the basis of the reference to Vangasagarasambhandariyaka in a Chandra inscription of 971 CE. The place was so named because it offered warehousing facilities (sambhandara) and also provided a linkage with the Bay of Bengal (Vangasagara). The very name Savar is probably a survival of the ancient name sambhara or collection of merchandise.

In 1196, according to the Sundarbans copper plate of Srimaddomanapala, there existed close to the Ganga's confluence with the sea, a place named Dvarahataka. It was obviously a small riverine market centre (hataka, iehattaka) functioning as a dvara or gateway to the sea. These inland riverine trades centres/ports, whether in Vanga-Samatata area or in the lower regions of Radha, were less prominent than Tamralipta or Samandar, but provided the crucial linkages between the littorals and the interior in a nadimatrka region like Bengal. The navigability of the many rivers, including the Ganga, in the Bengal delta is unmistakably evident from the epigraphic account of fleets of boats on the Bhagirathi and the description of Vikramapura in Vanga as a navigable tract.

In the interior must have existed a number of market places, generally designated as hattas or hattikas. This first appeared in the copper plates of the 5th century but actually proliferated in the landgrants from the 8th century onwards. The term hatta, corresponding to the present hat generally stands for a rural level market centre where transactions usually take place once or twice in the week. As periodic or weekly market places in rural areas hattas can be placed at the base of the hierarchy of market centres in early Bengal. However, the term hattavara may suggest a centre of trade larger than an ordinary hatta. Devapaladevahatta was located close to Nalanda and being named after the Pala ruler, must have been more important and perhaps larger also than an ordinary hatta.

An occasional mention of shops (apana) figures in the Khalimpur copper plate of Dharmapala. Copper plates belonging to the last phase of the Sena rule refer to the chaturaka, not known before 12th century. The term chaturaka may denote a place situated at the junction of four roads or quarters. The location of chaturakas at the

crossroads probably implies that they served as nodal points in locality level and regional trade. One such chaturaka was Betaddachaturaka (with the Ganga as its eastern boundary - purvve Jahnvisima), identified with modern Batore in Howrah district, West Bengal. One may logically infer that larger hattas and chaturakas could have provided significant linkages between the large urban centres and major ports on the one hand and rural-level periodic market places on the other. Similar commercial linkages were provided also in more or less contemporary north India, the Deccan and the far south by the middle-tier trade centres like mandapika (mod. mandi), pentha (mod. peth) and nagaram.

At these market places and ports thrived merchants, who like the centres of trade, were not an undifferentiated category. Terracotta seals and sealing from Chandraketugarh and other sites in deltaic West Bengal speak of merchants dealing in paddy. The Sanskrit generic terms vanik and vaidehaka refer to the trader in general and also possibly to a petty merchant. In many Jataka stories leaders of caravans (sathavaha or sarthavaha) appear as undertaking distant journeys (puvvanta- aparanta) between Puskalavati (Charsadda in Pakistan) and Tamralipta. Caravan traders and nagarashresthis prominently appear in Kotivarsa according to the five Damodarpur copper plates, dated in c 444-544 CE. The term nagarashresthi literally means a very rich merchant in the nagara or town of Kotivarsa. The shresthi, lauded in early Indian texts as possessing fabulous wealth, was also a financier who invested a part of his wealth in various commercial ventures. It will be difficult to miss from these records that the sarthavaha and the nagarashresthi were members of the district board (visayadhistanadhikarana) for at least a century, though they were by no means government functionaries. One may therefore logically infer that the sarthavaha and the nagarashresthi were representatives of their respective professional groups and enjoyed considerable social pre-eminence. Individual merchants became a rarity in inscriptions of subsequent centuries. Jambhalamitra, a vrddhasartha, is known to have donated an image of Ganesha in Samatata in the late 10th century.

The term vrddhasartha may be taken to mean an old caravan trader, or on the basis of the analogy of the term vadduvyavahari in more or less contemporary Tamil inscriptions may be considered as a senior caravan merchant. The lack of references to merchants in the records of 8th-13th centuries have led some scholars to perceive a decline of trade and traders in Bengal during the period from 600 to 1300 CE. The image of languishing trade, a marker of the emergence and consolidation of feudal formation, has however been effectively countered by several historians who do not view a slump in trade in Bengal during this phase.

19.6 Important Trade Routes

It has already been stressed that Bengal's geography and physical features endow the region with considerable facilities of communications, overland, riverine and maritime. Pundravardhana offers the major connections with the middle Ganga valley through the Rajmahal corridor. It is therefore no wonder that Pundravardhana was the first area in early Bengal to have witnessed the advent of the Northern Black Polished Ware and urbanism in c. 4th-3rd centuries BC, both being major features of the material life of the middle Ganga plains.

An eloquent testimony to Bengal's overland communications with the Ganga valley and the northwestern extremities of the subcontinent is available from the discovery of Kharoshti and Kharosti-Brahmi documents. The principal zone of the use of Kharosti being the north-western part of the subcontinent, the presence of Kharosti-using people in West Bengal during the early centuries of the Christian era amply illustrate the linkages between the northwest and the Ganga delta. That this communication must have been maintained through the Ganga valley, especially the middle Ganga plains, is well driven home by the discovery of Kharosti inscriptions at Chunar near Banaras in Uttar Pradesh and also the finding of a terracotta plaque with a Kharosti inscription from the Kumrahar excavations. The inclusion of Srichampa (Bhagalpur in eastern Bihar) in Kaniska I's realm, as evident from his Rabatak inscription, may indicate that the eastward spread of the Kusanaempire from its base in the northwestern borderlands to the middle Ganga plains could have facilitated the advent of Kharosti in Bengal. Such cultural contacts were usually not bereft of commercial significance and may explain the regular availability of horses in Bengal, imported possibly from the northwest.

The contacts between the Ganga delta and the Ganga basin continued in subsequent centuries. Fahsien's overland journey from Magadha to Tamralipta is a clear pointer to that. Hiuen-Tsang's itinerary in Bengal may also throw interesting lights on this subject. Hiuen-Tsang started from Nalanda and reached Kajangala near the Rajmahal hills. From there he proceeded eastwards to Pundravardhana and continued further east to Kamarupa. From Kamarupa in the Brahmaputra valley he came down southeast to reach Samatata from where he travelled westwards to Tamralipta. From Tamralipta he journeyed northwards and arrived at Karnasuvarna, the capital of Shasanka.

The pilgrim finally left Bengal for Orissa; the final leg of his overland journey

from Karnasuvarna in Radha region to Orissa must have been undertaken through ancient Dandabhukti. His travels in Bengal demonstrate that existing routes of communication connected different areas within early Bengal. Bengal's overland connections with the neighbouring regions of Magadha, Kamarupa and Orissa have also to be taken into consideration. In the eighth century three merchant brothers undertook an overland journey from Ayodhya to Tamralipta. The Dudhpani inscription, recording their activities, suggests that they planned their return trip from Tamralipta to the middle Ganga valley through the present Hazaribagh region. The Ghoshrawan inscription of the time of Devpala indicates the very long overland journey by Viradharadeva from Nagarahara to Mahabodhi (Bodhgaya).

The interesting point here is that Viradharadeva is said to have been happy as he saw many of his countrymen at Nalanda. This cannot but underline the regularity of communications between southern Bihar and the northwestern extremities during the 9th century. The regular arrival of horses and their dealers from the northern quarter to Bengal during the Pala-Sena period also strongly suggests the continuity of commercial linkages between the two areas. That coastal Bengal could be reached from Coromandel Coast is clearly illustrated by the descriptions of CholaRajendra's celebrated Gangetic campaign (c 1022-23 CE) in Tandabutti (Dandabhukti), Takkanaladham (Daksinaradha), Uttiraladham (Uttararadha) and Vangaladesa (southern and coastal areas of Vanga). Rajendra's forces arrived from Coromandel Coast through coastal Andhra, Orissa and entered Bengal through the Medinipur region in West Bengal. One may see here the continuity of the overland connections between Bengal and the Coromandel Coast, previously undertaken by Hiuen-Tsang in the 7th century. The frequent mentions of the gamagamika (officer in charge of arrival and departures) and shaulkika (officer in charge of the collection of tolls and customs) in the records of the Pala-Sena period further highlight the possibilities of commercial contacts both within Bengal and beyond.

Above survey of ports has already driven home the importance of the Bengal coast as an outlet to the landlocked Ganga valley and also its significant position in the overseas trade network, particularly in the Bay of Bengal. The frequent use of terms like nau-khata, nauyoga, nau-yogakhata, nau-dandaka, nau-bandhaka, nausthiravega, nauprthvi in copper plates ranging from 6th-13th centuries demonstrates that inland water transports regularly plied on numerous rivers, including of course the Ganga. A sure index of Bengal's growing participation in the trade along the entire length of the East Coast is furnished by the distribution of Rouletted Ware sites. The Rouletted Ware, now datable to 2nd century BC - 200 CE period, has been

found from many coastal sites in the eastern sea-board, such as Alaganakulam, Kaveripattinam, Arikamedu, Vasavasamudram, Kanchipuram (Tamilnadu), Amaravati, Salihundam, Kalingapatnam (Andhrapradesh), Sisupalgarh (Orissa), Tamluk and Chandraketugarh (West Bengal).

In 414 CE Fahsien began his voyage to China from Tamralipta. He boarded a merchant vessel and reached Sri Lanka from where he sailed to Java and finally to China. His accounts leave little room for doubt about the direct overseas route between the Bengal coast and Sri Lanka with further connections to Southeast Asia. Hiuen-Tsang explicitly mentions that Samatata maintained maritime contacts with several areas in Southeast Asia: i.e. Pegu, Sriksetra, Dvaravarti and Yamanadvipa. This is clearly corroborated by Itsing's arrival at Harikela in 675 CE by a maritime voyage from Southeast Asia. On such maritime routes must have plied the master mariner (mahanavika) Buddhagupta, a resident of Raktamrttika (near Karnasuvarna), who figures in a sixth century inscription from the Malay Peninsula. Another instance of maritime contacts of Bengal with Southeast Asia is seen in the request of the king of Yavadvipa, Balaputradeva, to Devapala to grant some lands to the Nalanda monastery. Such cultural exchanges speak of intimate commercial linkages too. According to the Arab accounts of the period from 9th-13th centuries, there were regular sea voyages between Samandar on one hand and Silandib (Sri Lanka), Kanja (Kancipuram) and Uranshin (Orissa) on the other. From the second half of the 12th century, a new sea-borne network connected Bengal with the Maldives. IbnBatuta used this route to come to Bengal. For his return journey from the Bengal coast to Java (Sumatra) he boarded a Chinese junk from Sonargaon and from Java he finally reached China. Ma Huan's celebrated accounts of the voyages of the Ming admiral Cheng ho leave little room for doubt that the Chinese fleet visited Sattigaon (i.e. Chittagong) no less than four times during the period from 1404 to 1433 CE. All these bring to limelight the maritime network between the Bengal coast (especially the littorals of Samatata-Harikela) and Southeast Asia in which the Strait of Malacca seems to have played a crucial role.

19.7 Coins and other Medium of Exchanges

Media of exchange prior to the advent of minted metallic pieces as a medium of exchange in c. 3rd century BC, it is likely that exchanges in ancient Bengal probably took the form of barter. From the 3rd century BC onwards punch-marked coins, in regular circulation in north India since c. 600 BC, began to appear in many

of the excavated urban centres of early Bengal, like Mahasthan, Bangarh, Chandraketurah, Mangalkot, Tamralipta etc. The recent discovery of punch-marked coins from wari-bateswar in Bangladesh highlights the possibilities of the spread of money economy and therefore, trade, in the eastern part of the delta. These silver species were struck on the karsapana standard of 32 ratis or 57.6 grains.

The introduction of coinage in Bengal since the 3rd century BC certainly suggests burgeoning trade in the region. The epigraphic reference to the filling up of the kosa or treasury at Pundranagara with ganda and kakini may imply, according to some scholars, the circulation of gandaka and kakini types of coins. An alternative interpretation of the same account, however, points to the possibility of the use of cowries counted in the unit of four (ganda). The latter interpretation implies that cowries could have been used as a medium of exchange right from the 3rd century BC. In addition to the silver punch-marked coins copper and bullion punch-marked coins were introduced to Bengal in c 2nd century BC. There are not only full-unit coins, but half unit and quarter unit pieces too. These uninscribed cast copper coins were based on the silver karsapana standard. Die-struck coins were introduced to Bengal during the Kusana age. In lower parts of Radha and Vanga a new series of cast copper coins merged in the 2nd century CE. These were developed on the basis of the Kusana devices and they followed karsapana weight standard. As a medium of exchange, these copper coins, labelled as Kusana-Radha/ Kusana-Vanga coinage, have some correspondence to the so-called Puri-Kusana coinage of Kalinga. This indicates the likelihood of a trade network in the Vanga-Kalinga zone.

The political presence of the imperial Guptas in several regions of early Bengal during the 5th and first half of the 6th centuries CE paved the way for the circulation of the Gupta gold coins, known for their superb execution. Several Gupta copper plates from north Bengal refer to coin-terms dinara and rupaka. The two terms respectively denote gold and silver coins of the Guptas. A Gupta inscription from north Bengal suggests that the Gupta dinara could be exchanged with 15 or 16 rupakas or silver coins. The Gupta gold coin was issued on the weight standard of 124 grains; Skandagupta introduced a heavier weight standard of 144 grains, but the heavier suvarna coins became increasingly debased after the reign of Narasimha Gupta Baladitya. Gold coins struck on the suvarna standard were issued by rulers of Vanga before the emergence of Shashanka and also by Shashanka himself. The suvarna standard continued to be based in gold coins of rulers of Samatata of the seventh and early eighth centuries. In most of these species, struck on suvarna

standard, metallic purity of the gold coin is appreciably low. After this gold coins faded out from the monetary scenario of Bengal for at least four or five centuries.

19.8 Conclusion

The period from c 750 to 1200 probably witnessed a complex monetary system in Bengal. One has to note here the curious position that while the Palas and Senas did not strike any coin, the Samatata-Harikela region experienced the uninterrupted minting and circulation of high quality silver coins (the issuing authorities of these coins are unknown) for six centuries -from the 7th to the 13th centuries. The steady maintenance of the weight standard and metallic purity of these silver coins certainly implies the active role of an effective authority ensuring the quality of the silver coins. These silver pieces corresponded to the well-known purana or dramma standard of 57.6 grains. Coin terms like purana and dramma do appear in the copper plates of the Palas and the Senas. It has also been observed that the Harikela silver coins after the 10th century became lighter in weight and broader in its flab with legends and motifs only on one side. The changes in the Harikela issues are suggested to have had some conformity with the reformed Arab currency system. This would once again speak of intimate linkages between the Bengal Coast and the trading world of the Arabs. The overseas contacts of the Bengal Coast with the Arab world are further demonstrated by the discovery of coins of the Abbasid Caliphs Harun-or-Rashid (8th century) and MustasimBillah (12th century) from the excavated sites respectively of Paharpur and Mainamati.

The lively scenario of trade in early Bengal, including long distance overseas trade from and to the Bengal littorals, does not uphold the image of a languishing trade and 'monetary anaemia', projected in the construction of Indian feudalism. Landgrants and minted currency system were not mutually incompatible, but they could coexist in a given region. Possibilities of the easy convertibility of one silver coin of purana or dramma variety with 1280 cowries have been stressed, on the basis of a medieval Bengali arithmetic table. Attention has been drawn to the use of a term churnni, which began to appear in the Bengal records since the Sena times, hyphenated with kapardaka or cowry-shell. This implies that the term churnni and/or kapardaka-churnni are to be associated with a medium of exchange.

The term churnni has been rightly interpreted as dust of pure silver or gold. In other words, the records offer the image of the introduction of dust currency, of equal weight to the purana (silver) standard and suvarna (gold) standard. Such a dust

currency would be preferable to merchants when gold or silver coins were either relatively rare or of uncertain weight standard and metallic purity. The gold or silver dust currency could be logically exchanged with a gold or silver coin struck on dinara/suvarna or dramma/karsapana standard; the dust currency of equivalent weight as a purana or suvarna coin could also be converted to kapardakas or cowrie shells. The above discussions suggest the gradual development of a complex monetary system in early medieval Bengal. A three tier monetary system has been perceived, consisting of the cowry shell (kapardaka) at the base, the minted metallic pieces (especially in precious metals) at the top and the newly introduced dust currency in between the two.

19.9 Model Questions

1. Write an essay on the economic condition of ancient Bengal.
2. Briefly discuss the development of trade and commerce in ancient Bengal.
3. Write a short note on agricultural development in ancient Bengal.

19.10 Suggested Readings

1. Nitish Sengupta, *The Land of Two Rivers*, London, 2011.
2. Pramode Lal Paul, *The Early History of Bengal*, Vol. II, Calcutta, n.d.
3. Ranabir Chakrabarti, 'Maritime Trade and Voyages in Ancient Bengal', *Journal of Ancient Indian History*, Calcutta, 1996.
4. R. C. Majumdar (ed.), *History of Ancient Bengal*, Delhi, 1989.

Unit-20 □ Bengali Society – Literature, Cultural Pattern, Religious Tradition

Structure

- 20.0 Objective**
- 20.1 Introduction**
- 20.2 Religious Traditions of Ancient Bengal**
- 20.3 Vedic and Puranic**
- 20.4 Shaivism**
- 20.6 Saura**
- 20.7 Buddhism**
- 20.8 Royal support**
- 20.9 Jainism**
- 20.10 Literature of Ancient Bengal**
- 20.11 Sandhyakar Nandi (c. 1084-1155 CE)**
- 20.12 Ramacharitam**
- 20.13 Chakrapani Datta**
- 20.14 Art and architecture**
- 20.15 Model Questions**
- 20.16 Suggested Readings**

20.0 Objective

- The objective of the present unit is to study the long-term evolution of the Bengali society in the ancient period.
- Three major aspects of the societal developments of ancient Bengal will be highlighted :
 - The literary flourishing

- The cultural traits
- The religious traditions
- The growth of art and architecture will also be discussed.

20.1: Introduction

It is indeed a difficult task to define the geographical territory of ancient Bengal as there was no 'Bengal' up to 11th century CE. The early Bengal as an entity of historical cultural study in the pre-11th century CE era consists of many units and sub-units of which five were more prominent. These five units are Pundravardhana, Radha, Vanga, Gauda and Samatata. There were many other units, co-units and sub units also. Thus it is needless to mention that the cultural map of ancient Bengal is also multi dimensional. The present chapter will focus on the Cultural history of ancient Bengal emphasizing on the religious and literary history.

20.2 Religious Traditions of Ancient Bengal

The ancient period witnessed many changes in the religious traditions. We have no information about the pre-Gupta religious history of Bengal. During the beginning of the Gupta period probably Buddhism was on the decline and idol worship on the rise in Bengal. However, under the Khadgas and the Palas, Buddhism again grew, and as its last resort India, it developed some unique sects here. Similarly, Hinduism started developing its uniquely eastern Indian and Bengali forms during this period.

20.3 Vedic and Puranic

Many of the land grants in this period given to Brahmins mention Vedic rituals, and the Brahmins are praised for their knowledge of the scriptures, grammar, philosophy, and travel to holy places. During this period, Brahmins from other parts of India especially from madhyadesha came and were settling down in Bengal. Mention of this settlements is found as early as the donation of land to 205 Vaidika Brahmins by Bhuti Varma, great-great-grandfather of Bhaskara Varma but the largest record is of a large land grant to 6000 Brahmins in Pundravardhana by the Chandra king Jaya Chandra Deva.

In this period, the Puranic tradition is also in strong force in Bengal. Vedavyasas Mahabharata, Ramayana, and the various Puranas were also commonly read. The stories of Prithu, Dhananjaya, Ambarisha, Sagara, Nala, Yayati, Vali, Bhargava, Karna, Vrihaspati, Agastya, Parashurama, Rama, Hutabhuja and Svaha, Dhanapati and Bhadra, Visnu and Brahma, Brahma and Sarasvati, Indra and Paulami, Purandara and Vali, Shiva and Sati, Uma, and Sarvvani, Surya and his horses, Samudrotthita Sashadhara Anchana Chandra of Atri's dynasty and Kanti and Rohini were already well known. Visnu has already completely merged with Avatara Krishna, son of Devaki who went to Yashoda. The other Avataras like Narasimha, Parashurama and Vamana were also known.

Temples to Narayana and Garuda stambha, temples to Kadambari Devakulika, Sthanaka Vishnu with Lakshmi and Sarasvati, and separate idols of Lakshmi and Sarasvati (one with Ram instead of the usual swan as her steed) and Garuda have also been found. Overall, Visnu with Lakshmi, Sarasvati, Vasumati, Jaya, Vijaya, his twelve avataras, and Brahma predominate the idol collections. Most of the Visnu idols found in Bengal are Sthanaka and in a group, few Garuda statues are also found. The Shayana style is extremely rare. Similarly, the most common form was the Trivikrama form, and the next was of the Vasudeva form. But some other forms, e.g. Abhisarika, Shridhara (Hrishikesha), Vishvarupa, and Chaturmukha are also been found. Joint idols of Brahma and Visnu, and separate idols of fat, four faced, four armed Brahma seated on a swan are also found. Lakshmi is usually Gajalakshmi, but four armed and two armed standing idols are also found, sometimes carrying a jhapi. Out of the Avataras of Visnu other than Krishna, the most popular separate ones were Varaha, Narasimha and Vamana; though a few Matsya and Parashurama, and Haladhara were also found. A few idols of this period indicate clearly the influence of Mahayani Buddhism over Vaishnavism.

20.4 Shaivism

Shaivism was probably less important in comparison to Vaishnavism. There is mention of establishment of a four headed Lingam for Shiva. Narayana Pala donated land to the Pashupatas, and is said to have established one thousand Shiva temples. Rampala is said to have constructed three Shiva temples, one temple dedicated to the eleven Rudras and others to Suryya, Skanda, and Ganapati. The Shaivism was

probably of the Pashupata kind started by Shiva-shrikantha and Lakulisha in the 1st century BCE. The eighteen Agamas and the six Yamalas written slightly later, including the Piggala appendix to the Brahmamayamala describe the Pashupata sect. It describes Kamarupa, Kalinga, Kashi, Koshala, and Kashmira as being outside the Aryavarta which is ideal for Shiva worship. However, Gaudiya teachers were not considered amongst the best. Shiva was worshipped mainly as a lingam, usually one headed, but sometimes four headed in north Bengal. The latter usually has four Shakti idols. Also are found Chandrashekhara, Nrityapara, Sadashiva, Uma-maheshvara, Ardhanarishvara and Kalyana-sundara or Shiva-vivaha. Out of the Rudra forms Vatukabhairava and Aghorarudra has been found. Both two armed and four armed Ishana forms have been found. A four armed Sthanaka is known as Virupaksa, though it fits Nilakantha better. The Nataraja or Nateshvara form in Bengal is distinct from the southern ones, are usually ten armed as described in Matsyapurana, and do not have the Apasmarapurusa at his feet. A twelve armed version is also found. The Sadashiva follows utara-kamikagama and Garuda Purana description; it is similar to the southern forms, and might have been brought from there. The Uma-maheshvara was the favorite of the Bengalis. This had Tantrika significance also. But the idol worship of Ardhanarishvara (man on right, woman on left) is rare in Bengal. The Kalyanasundara forms have typically Bengali characteristics like Saptapadi and Kartri vahana. The Aghorarudra worship was probably a cult. The wildly laughing, fiery faced naked Vatukabhairava holding skull and wearing skull garland and wooden slippers accompanied by dogs is definitely a Tantrika influence. Some Shaivaite teachers, especially of the Sadashiva form, were respected far outside Bengal.

Separate Ganapati and Karttikeya are also found though Ganesha was probably more popular. He was always portrayed dancing on a mouse with a fruit in his hand: a typical Siddhiphaladata. A single example of Shaiva Ganapatya sect has been found, and is exactly like the southern form : probably an import.

20.5 Shakta

Shakta Purana from 7th and 8th centuries speaks of Shakti worship in Radha, Varendra, Kamarupa and Bhattadesha. Jayadratha-yamala written outside Bengal after the Guptas mentions Ishana Kali, Raksha Kali, etc., as well as Gohoratra,

Yoginichakra, Chakreshvari, etc. These ultimately lead to the Tantradharmā in Bengal, and the forms of Shakti in this phase are probably already precursors to being Tantrika. In fact Mahanila Sarasvati seems completely Tantrika. Most idols are four armed and standing. Sometimes she is alone, sometimes with the entire family of Ganesha, Karttikeya, Laksmi, and Sarasvati, and sometimes with family and Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. The contents in the four hands vary, and these have been variously called Chandi or Gauri-Parvati. Sometimes, they are only two armed, sometimes joined by other gods like Navagraha. Seated forms are rarer, and have four, six or twenty hands, and are called Sarvnamangala, Aparajita, Parvati or Bhuvaneshvari, and Mahalaksmi. There is an example of Lingodbhava Chaturbhujā, two arms in Dhyānamudra, two holding garlands and a book, called Mahamaya or Tripurabhairavi. Of the ugra forms, Mahisamardini Durga, sometimes called Shri-Masika-Chandi, is the most popular, in the oldest forms she is eight or ten armed. The Navadurga form mentioned in Bhavishya Purana is also found; this is probably influenced by Mahayana and Vajrayana. Twelve and sixteen armed Mahisamardini have also been found, as well as a thirty-two armed. A few four and six armed Vagaleshvari have also been found. Of the Matrkas, Chamundi was most common in Bengal especially in the twelve armed Siddha-Yogeshvari, two armed Dantura, Rudra Chandika, Rudra Chamuda, and Siddha Chamunda forms. There is a Pishitasana on a donkey, and a Charchika on a corpse. A four armed Brahmani, a few Varahi, and an Indrani have also been found. Ganga and Yamuna used to flank the temples, Yamuna alone is rare otherwise. Ganga on a crocodile is not that rare, and four armed Ganga idols are also found.

20.6 Saura

Suryya was considered the healer of illnesses, and his importance continued to rise. The forms of the idols were clearly of the western/Iranian kind, though the interpretation probably got strongly influenced by the Vedic and Brahminical thoughts. Most of the idols are standing, and with entire family: seated ones are rare. They rarely had six hands. There is one which has three faces and ten hands; probably this is Marttanda Bhairava. There are rare idols influenced by southern rather than western tradition. A few horse-riding Revanta idols are also seen. Some independent Navagraha idols are also found; separately only a single Chandra and a single Vrihaspati have been found.

20.7 Buddhism

Although Hinduism especially the Puranic Hindu traditions were the most prominent religious faith in ancient Bengal but Buddhism was also a very important religion at this time. In fact during the post Gupta period especially under the rules of the Palas the support for Hinduism pales into insignificance when compared to the rise of Buddhism during this period. The state support for building and enhancing Viharas, already known from the previous period, continued during this period. Thus Dharmapala enhanced the Nalanda Mahavihara with repairs, and established the Sompuri Mahavihara located in Paharpur in Rajshahi district of present day Bangladesh. Tibetan sources claim that the latter was established by Devapala, but archaeological evidence is against that. Its three storied central building housed the main temple on the second floor; with ornamentation on top it looked like a pyramid. The courtyard surrounding this had buildings at each corner, and 177 housing units around it. This Mahavihara had 108 temples, 6 schools and 114 teachers, including such famous ones like bhikshu Bodhibhadra, Atisha Dipankara. In the 8th century itself, Balaputradeva made a Vihara in the Mahavihara of Nalanda, and Devpala gave five villages for its upkeep. Either he or Dharmapala established the Odantapuri Vihara as well. Later he put Brahmin Viradeva, who turned Buddhist under Acharyya Sarvajjashanti of Kaniskavihara and came to Yashodharmapura Vihara in Bodh Gaya, as a teacher in Nalanda.

During Mahipala and Jayapala, Vikramashila and Somapura Mahaviharas were international institutions of knowledge. Many great texts were written during this time, and teachers like Atisha Dipankara and Ratnakara arose. A Bengali whose name is recorded as Pau-si or Ko-lin-nai took a lot of Sanskrit texts to China in c. 1026 CE.

20.8 Royal support

In ancient Bengal both of the Hindus and the Buddhists got royal support from various rulers of Bengal. Many of the kings in this period belonged to the Mahayana sect of Buddhism, as is clear from their official documents starting with appropriate prayers. However, many of the queens seem to be Shaivaites (especially the Pashupata sect), and the kings established many temples dedicated to Shiva, Sarvvani,

Narayana, eleven Rudras, Suryya, Skanda, Ganapati, and other Hindu gods. Sometimes, like under Narayana Pala not only were temples dedicated to Shiva, but arrangements were made to provide for worship and sacrifice in these temples. The kings also participated in Hindu rituals like bathing during the summer solstice, giving land grants to Brahmins, attending the sacrifices, and organizing sraddha ceremonies. Dharma Pala seems to even have accepted and somewhat reformed the caste system in society, and it seems that the later Palas and Kambojas might even have become Hindus.

20.9 Jainism

Jainism (or nirgrantha religion) reduced in influence during this period. It still seems to have existed up to the 13th century: at least in Samatata, Gauda, and Vanga regions; but it was quite weak by then. A few idols have been found of the Digambara sect: mainly of Parshvanatha, but a few of Risabhanatha, Adinatha, Neminatha, and Shantinatha as well.

20.10 Literature of Ancient Bengal

The Palas patronized several Sanskrit scholars, some of whom were their officials. The *Gauda* style of composition was developed during the Pala rule. Many Buddhist and Tantric works were authored and translated during the Pala rule. Jimuta Vahana, Sandhyakar Nandi, Madhava Kar, Sureshwara and Chakrapani Datta are some of the notable scholars from the Pala period.

The notable Pala texts include Agama Shastra by Gaudapada, *Nyaya Kundali* by Sridhar Bhatta and *Karmanushthan Paddhati* by Bhatta Bhavadeva. The texts on medicine include

- *Chikitsa Samgraha, Ayurveda Dipika, Bhanumati, Shabda Chandrika* and *Dravya Gunasangraha* by Chakrapani Datta;
- *Shabda-Pradipa, Vrikkhayurveda* and *Lohpaddhati* by Sureshwara
- *Chikitsa Sarsamgraha* by Vangasena
- *Sushrata* by Gadadhara Vaidya
- *Dayabhaga, Vyavohara Matrika* and *Kalaviveka* by Jimutavahana Sandhyakar Nandi's semi-fictional epic *Ramacharitam* (12th century) is an important

source of Pala history. A form of the proto-Bengali language can be seen in the *Charyapadas* composed during the Pala rule.

20.11 Sandhyakar Nandi (c. 1084-1155 CE)

The most famous Sanskrit poet of the Pala period, Sandhyakar Nandi was born in a Kayastha family at Brihadbatu, a village close to Pundravardhana city in Varendrabhumi in North Bengal. His father, Prajapati Nandi was a minister (truce-maker) of Ramapal (c. 1082-1124 CE), the king of the Pala dynasty. Sandhyakar himself was patronised by Madanpala (c. 1143-1162 CE).

Sandhyakar is considered to be the greatest poet of the Pala dynasty. He became famous for his *Ramacharitam*, a biographical history in verse; written in Sanskrit the book has two different themes. Laid out in four chapters, the first part of the book describes the biography of Ramachandra, son of Dasharatha, and the second part narrates the life of Ramapala, the king of Gauda. At the end of the book, the poet describes himself in twenty couplets where he condemns malicious people, praises good ones and narrates the high points of his book. *Ramacharitam* is recognized by historians as an important source for reconstructing the ancient history of Bengal.

20.12 Ramacharitam

Is a unique Sanskrit kavya written by Sandhyakar Nandi and its importance lies in the fact that it throws light on the condition of Bengal in the period between the second half of the 11th and the first half of the 12th century CE. The *Ramacharitam* is the only Sanskrit text, composed in Bengal by a poet of Varendra (North Bengal), which had a contemporary historical event as its main theme. As such it is considered to be an authentic source for the history of the late Pala period.

The author enjoyed the patronage of the last known Pala king Madanapala (c. 1143-1162 CE) and ended his kavya with the wish for a long life of the king. His father Prajapati Nandi was the Sandhivigrahika (Minister of Peace and War) of Ramapala (c. 1082-1124 CE) and hailed from the village of Brhadvatu near the city of Pundravardhanapura (possibly same as Pundranagara).

The kavya contains 215 verses (though the Buddhist scribe, Shilachandra mentions 220 verses) including the 20 verse appendix, Kaviprashasti. The verses were composed in a rare Sanskrit figure of speech called shlesa (double entendre)

providing two different meanings simultaneously by play of words. Read one way it gives the well-known story of the Ramayana and the other way it gives the history of Ramapala of the Pala dynasty of Bengal. The second meaning could only be understood from the prose commentary (tika) in one of the two manuscripts found so far, which, however, ends with the 35th verse of the second canto. As a result it is difficult to reconstruct the second meaning of the last 14 verses of the second and the 48 verses each of the third and fourth canto.

Sandhyakara Nandi dealt with the early history of the Palas in only 10 verses, and then dwelt on his main theme in the rest of the text. He equates the story of Ramapala with the story of the epic figure Rama. The loss of Varendra to the Kaivarta chief Divya (Divyoka) was equated with the loss of Sita to Ravana and her retrieval by Rama has been equated with the reoccupation of Varendra by Ramapala. Then he continued the history of the Pala kings to the beginning of Madanapala's reign in the last two cantos of the text. An appendix has been added, Kaviprashasti, in which the poet calls himself Kalikalavalmiki (Valmiki of the Kali age) and gives his genealogy and explains the nature and style of his work.

Historians are indebted to this work mainly for the history of the Varendra rebellion that took place during the reign of Mahipala II, which resulted in the loss of Varendra to the Kaivarta chief Divya, and its reoccupation by Ramapala. It is an important source for Ramapala, who being the central figure of the *kavya* got elaborate treatment. Nandi carried his narration to the initial years of Madanapala's reign. However, Nandi's partisan treatment of his hero Ramapala is apparent, and one has to be cautious in deducing proper history from panegyric narration of the *kavya*.

The value of the *Ramacharitam* also lies in the detailed description of Varendra provided in the first 18 verses of the third canto. The flora and fauna of Varendra, situated in between the Ganges (on the west) and the Karatoya (on the east), palaces and gardens, places of pilgrimage, cities (especially Ramavati) and institutions (especially Jagaddala Mahavihara) have been recorded, though in hyperbolic terms. This is the only important literary evidence for the history of ancient or early medieval Bengal, and, being a contemporary work, it is of immense value for the reconstruction of the history of the period covered by it.

Mahamahopadhyaya Haraprasad Shastri discovered a palm-leaf manuscript of the *kavya* and published its text in 1910. Subsequently two more editions with English and Bangla translations were published respectively in 1939 and 1953.

20.13 Chakrapani Datta

This famous Ayurveda physician and scholar was born in the village of Mayureshwar in the Varendra region, He was the son of Narayan Datta, the head of the kitchen of Nayapala, the king of Gauda. Naradatta, a courtier of the king, was Chakrapani's spiritual guide. Chakrapani's best known books on ancient medical science are Chikitsasamgraha (Collection of medical practices and procedures), Dravyaguna (Properties of plants), and Sarvasarsamgraha (Collection of the essence of things). Chikitsasamgraha, better known as Chakradatta, incorporates sections from two rare Ayurvedic books : Charakanyasa and Vrddhasushruta. Chakrapani was awarded the titles 'Charakachaturanana' and 'Sushrutasahasranayana' for Charakatattvapradipika and Bhanumati, which were annotations on Charakasamhita and Sushruta respectively.

Chakrapani also made significant contributions to Sanskrit grammar and Nyaya philosophy. One of his famous books is Vyakaranatattvachandrika (Treatise on theories on grammar). It is believed that he also annotated Gautam's Nyayasutra and compiled the dictionary Shabdachandrika.

20.14 Art and architecture

The Pala School of sculpture and art is recognized as a distinct phase of the Indian art, and is noted for the artistic genius of the Bengal sculptors. It is influenced by the Gupta art. The Pala style was inherited and continued to develop under the Sena kings. During this time, the style of sculpture changed from "Post-Gupta" to a distinctive style that was widely influential in other areas and later centuries. Deity figures became more rigid in posture, very often standing with straight legs close together, and figures were often heavily loaded with jewels; they very often have multiple arms, a convention allowing them to hold many attributes and display mudras. The typical form for temple images are a slab with a main figure, rather over half life-size, in very high relief, surrounded by smaller attendant figures, which might have freer Tribhango poses. Critics have found the style tending towards over-elaboration. The quality of the carving is generally very high, with crisp, precise detail. In east India, facial features tend to become sharp.

Much larger numbers of smaller bronze groups of similar composition have survived than from previous periods. Probably the numbers produced were increasing.

These were mostly made for domestic shrines of the well-off, and from monasteries. Gradually, Hindu figures come to outnumber Buddhist ones, reflecting the terminal decline of Indian Buddhism, even in east India, its last stronghold.

As noted earlier, the Palas built a number of monasteries and other sacred structures. The SomapuraMahavihara in present-day Bangladesh is a World Heritage Site. It is a monastery with 21 acre (85,000 m²) complex has 177 cells, numerous stupas, temples and a number of other ancillary buildings. The gigantic structures of other Viharas, including Vikramashila, Odantapuri, and Jagaddala are the other masterpieces of the Palas. These mammoth structures were mistaken by the forces of Bakhtiyar Khalji as fortified castles and were demolished. The art of Bihar and Bengal during the Pala and Sena dynasties influenced the art of Nepal, Burma, Sri Lanka and Java.

20.15 Model Questions

1. Discuss the religious traditions of ancient Bengal.
2. Briefly narrate the cultural contribution of the Pala and Sena dynasties in ancient Bengal.
3. Write briefly the development of literature in ancient Bengal.

20.16 Suggested Readings

1. Nitish Sengupta, *The Land of Two Rivers*, London, 2011.
2. Pramode Lal Paul, *The Early History of Bengal*, Vol. II, Calcutta, n.d.
3. R. C. Majumdar (ed.), *History of Ancient Bengal*, Delhi, 1989.