

**TRACING THE HISTORY OF LITERARY CULTURE IN EARLY
MEDIEVAL BENGAL IN THE LIGHT OF INSCRIPTIONS (6TH
CENTURY CE TO 13TH CENTURY CE)**

BY

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A THESIS

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HISTORY

Certified that the Thesis entitled

‘TRACING THE HISTORY OF LITERARY CULTURE IN EARLY MEDIEVAL BENGAL IN THE LIGHT OF INSCRIPTIONS (6TH CENTURY CE TO 13TH CENTURY CE)’ submitted by me for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Arts at Jadavpur University is based upon my work carried out under the Supervision of Professor Nupur Dasgupta and Professor Debarchana Sarkar and that neither this thesis nor any part of it has been submitted before any degree or diploma anywhere/ elsewhere.

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INTRODUCTION

Introducing the theme and its context:

The current research attempts to explore into the history of evolution of a rich literary culture in early medieval Bengal through a study of inscriptions. The study is also designed to throw light on a juncture of this history to trace the rise of a literate society. The society comprised an exclusive yet complex orbit comprising various social and occupational categories from the common scribe to the prominent writers and the diverse social communities who were its consumers. The society was emerging under varied state powers and was influenced by respective dynastic policies at different phases of history. The historical evidence for the initiation of this literary culture comes from the epigraphic records related to a few ruling figures whose dynastic affiliations are not clear. For example, we come across records of Pradyumnabandhu, Gopacandra, Dharmāditya, Dvādaśāditya, and Samācāradeva group of rulers whose dynastic and chronological as well as territorial associations remain unclear. The history progressed further with the records of Śaśāṅka, Bhāskarvarman, and the Khaḍgas, etc. The full-fledged efflorescence of a regional literary style begins to take off in epigraphic form through the inscriptions of the Pālas and Candras. We also get glimpses of the cultural accomplishments through texts of varied genres composed in this phase. Finally, a heightened level of enrichment was observed in the inscriptions of the Varman and Sena rulers, which bore the marks of a regional style along with an array of creative literature that came to be composed in this final phase.

A study of the history of literary culture however, needs to cover the social base for creativity, the emergent technicalities of the production as well as the nexus between the compositions and the readers or audience who consumed these products. Some ideas and approaches have developed worldwide on aspects of literary culture and the interface between literature and society. For example, writing about Roman literary culture, Elaine Fantham has made certain observations about the social expanse of a literary culture. This would include the initial audience or the general public reading or appreciating a creative work as well as large communities of readers focusing on selected works that were already in vogue.¹ He had analyzed each phase of literary culture through different genres and works, their medium of

¹ Elaine Fantham, *Roman Literary Culture: From Plautus to Macrobius*, Second Edition, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), p.ix.

writing and speaking, and their intended audience. He had, in fact, considered the Roman theater as an extension and outreach of the contemporary literary culture. Again William V. Harris had also traced a sustained literacy through the continuous cultural tradition of the Greeks and Romans from the invention of the Greek alphabet to the 5th century CE.² He categorized the social demography of literacy into three sections, the literates, the semi-literates and a section of those outside the literate domain, but functioned on the edge. Traversing the complex world of literacy in ancient contexts, he observed the lack of mass literacy in the Greek and Roman world and encounters the limited domains of the ‘craftsmen literacy’ and ‘scribal literacy’. He uses the term ‘cultivated’ for the literatus and refers to the illiterates as ‘uncultured’.³ Averil Cameron and Peter Garnsey tracked the rapid and varied cultural change of the late Roman empire from 337 CE to 425 CE through the diverse and rich literary, artistic and other forms of creativity and the nature of its audience.⁴ Finally and most significantly, in all these works, oral communication emerges as a significant mode of transmission for literary culture.⁵

In the Indian context, Meera Visvanathan has hinted toward a literate society through a reading of the early historical evidence. She talked about the development of written culture in the context of early Brahmi inscriptions from 300 BCE to 250 CE and pointed to the forces that worked behind to make it happen.⁶ She noticed the social significance of this writing and the ‘different modes of responses’ to interpret the texts. These ‘different modes of responses’ marked the shift from orality to literacy. She had indeed stressed on the significance of oral transmission of the texts to the common people in an era of limited literacy.

Taking cue from these studies on literary culture in the global and Indian contexts, we attempt to observe the literary culture and the associated society of early medieval Bengal in a wider lens mainly through select epigraphic records of the period. Much as Harris had found in his own context, the diverse society that was observed in the light of early medieval Bengal inscriptions can be categorized into three sections, the literati, a probable group of literates and

² William V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), p.3.

³ *Ibid.* p.6.

⁴ Averil Cameron and Peter Garnsey, eds., *The Cambridge Ancient History: The Late Empire A.D. 337-425*, Vol. XIII, (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p.665.

⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 703 - 704.

⁶ Meera Visvanathan, *Writing, Gifting and Identities: Providing Contexts for Early Brahmi Inscriptions (300 BCE- 250 CE)*, (New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru University, 2009), pp.60-131.

the large body comprising non-literates. How this society developed is reflected through the study of various inscriptions of early medieval Bengal.

A vast number of inscriptions are available in the context of early medieval Bengal which can be mainly categorized as copperplates, eulogies and dedicative and donative inscriptions engraved on images, rocks and other objects. In early medieval Bengal, the majority of royal and land related inscriptions were found engraved on copperplates and thus considered the most important. In most instances, with the rising trends in literary culture we note these inscriptions to include a poetic section which mainly presents an eulogistic narrative of the genealogy of the concerned authority or ruler and his dynasty. This praśasti is followed by the actual business matter, the donative part. While the praśasti part of the inscription was usually composed in verse, the part about the land grant was in prose. It is this praśasti part that portrayed the contemporary literary style. The donative part of the inscription recorded the details of the land grant, including reference to the lay out of the land, identity of the donees, whether brāhmaṇas or religious institutions, addressees and the issuing authority and the administrative agents. These records would often neatly document the land sale figures, land measurement units and land evaluation methods, furnishing information of the developing stage of practical knowledge related to state matters. The prose part therefore exhibited writing techniques evolved within the administrative domains of the polities.

In the general context of literary forms, we may point to an important comment made by Van Buitenen. Talking in connection with the early historic classical literature, he had pointed out that ‘the distinction between prose and poetry was less sharp’.⁷ Thus, there was a discernible flow of continuity in emotions and style between the prose and poetry when they featured consecutively in classical dramas for example. He had also pointed out that the literary prose ‘avoids the trap of over ornamentation’⁸ which is generally found in a verse. On the other hand, talking about the poetic metres employed in the early historic inscriptions, P.V. Kane had talked about kāvya, the term employed for all kinds of literary forms, and pointed to its major categories as gadya and padya.⁹ Kane therefore makes the distinction more obvious. Perhaps, this is what is most significant when we come to epigraphic compositions. It is in

⁷ Van Buitenen, *Two Plays of Ancient India*, (New York: Columbia University Press), 1968, p.13.

⁸ *Ibid.* p.18.

⁹ P.V.Kane, ‘The origin and growth of poetics in Sanskrit’, in *An Introduction to Indian Poetics*, ed. V. Raghavan and Nagendra, (Madras: Macmillan and Company Limited, 1970), p.3.

these compositions that the distinction between gadya and padya gets more sharpened. The two parts began to get clearly defined in style and form and possibly emanated from distinct groups of composers, writers and documenters. The trend remained the same in the inscriptions of early medieval Bengal as all over in South Asian state societies at the time. But we now see it garnered with increasing degrees of literary embellishments featuring as an index of culture and highlights the emergence of an overall literary style in our context.

A parallel development of textual literacy is also noted, which actually forms the main focus of most studies on this period of Bengal's history. This was especially more evident from the late 10th - 11th century onward which exhibits the evolved literary style. Nupur Dasgupta's study into this development takes us through the different genres of works produced through the entire period and showcases the evolution through historical phases, which, quite significantly coincided with the major junctures in the political process.¹⁰ These vast resources of inscriptions offer a window to the emergence of literary characteristics in the use of Sanskrit as a language and also hint at the evolution of a distinctive literary style.

In the context of ancient India, inscriptions have been found to not only serve as important administrative devices but also offer excellent means for tracking the emergence of the literate society. Talking about the initial stages of Sanskrit text compositions, especially the administrative documents, we may refer to certain ideas offered by Sheldon Pollock.¹¹ His observations may be taken further to understand that the task of writing invested the writer with authority, which was not a natural entitlement but gained through skill and knowledge and brought with it certain socio-political privileges and at the same time imposed some restrictions on the cultural freedom of this medium of communication. Certain strict parameters of uses were getting defined gradually. Such developments were necessarily correlated to the emergence of particular socio-textual communities. In this regard, Barbara Stoler Miller had observed that the learned audience of this rich, refined, classical language, Sanskrit, was certainly limited.¹² Taking Van Buitenen's view in this context, it can be said that, Sanskrit

¹⁰ Nupur Dasgupta, 'Sanskrit Literature and Technical Treatises', in *The History of Bangladesh: Early Bengal in Regional Perspectives (up to c.1200 CE)*, eds. Abdul Momin Chowdhury and Ranabir Chakravarti, vol.2, Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2018, pp.536-80.

¹¹ Sheldon Pollock, 'The Cosmopolitan Vernacular', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol.57, No. 1, 1998, p.8.

¹² Barbara Stoler Miller, 'Microcosmos of a complex world: Classical Drama in the Gupta age', in *Essays on Gupta Culture*, ed. Bardwell L. Smith, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1983), p.163.

was the language of culture and thus it went through an intense learning process in those regions where Sanskrit was accepted as a proper cultural conceptualization and experience.¹³ All these references allude to a closed community of composers and their intended audience. Inscriptions from early medieval Bengal can be offered as examples to substantiate this case. For not only do we see the earliest glimmer of an evolving literacy in physical form in these inscribed words but also as records of administration this very body of evidence remains geared to the state and ruling community and as such flourish within an enclosed community to begin with. The authorship of these inscribed messages thus possibly invested agency of some kind to its writers. It is through them that the literary style expanded and flourished.

This process was obviously endorsed by a politico-administrative infrastructure that grew and evolved over time. The epigraphic records not only reveal the complex political history of the region and the dimensions of dynastic rule in different subregions, but a close scrutiny of the records also offer an indication of the nature of personnel associated with administration and agrarian life. We note the emergence of communities of the literate like the Brahmanical scholars, the vaidyas and karaṇa - kāyasthas, whose presence is observed in the upper echelons of society in the different politico-geographical subregions.

At the same time, we note that this very significant regional literary trend had grown with deeper roots connected to the emerging pan-Indian Sanskritic cultural trends, visible in the post Gupta phase. The references made to the gauḍī style by Bāṇabhaṭṭa and others following him indicate this phenomenon.¹⁴ This gauḍī rīti, has some special features, such as, gentle albeit hard words with long compounds, ornate and charming poetry with various ‘upamā, drṣṭānta and unfamiliar words’ and overbearing composition or ‘atīśoyokti’, etc. Although it has been criticized by several scholars such as Bāṇabhaṭṭa (c.7th century CE), Bhāmaha (c.7th century CE) and Daṇḍin (c.8th century CE) and found to lack finesse, especially in comparison with the prevailing Vaidarbhī style, yet at the same time this figurative language did not lack in attention from contemporary and later litterateurs and poets.

¹³ Buitenen, *Two Plays*, p.11.

¹⁴ Kāśināth Pāṇḍurang Parab, *The Harṣhacharita of Bāṇabhaṭṭa*, 4th edition, (Bombay: Nirnay Sāgar Press, 1918), line 7.

Of all these eloquent Sanskrit scholars, Bāṇabhaṭṭa was the one who deserves special mention. He was a Vātsyāyana brāhmaṇa of the Bhārgava lineage in association to Dādhiśas.¹⁵ Brāhmaṇas of this group who inhabited in eastern India during the early medieval period have been referred in several early medieval Bengal inscriptions like Irda copperplate of Nayapāla, Barrackpore copperplate of Vijayasena, Govindapur copperplate of Lakṣmaṇasena, Madanpur plate of Keśavasena and Madanpada plate of Viśvarūpasena.¹⁶ The genealogical identities of all these eminent brāhmaṇas are found in these inscriptions. They also emerged as potential authors of the inscriptions. This may indicate a cultural-genealogical connection with the great litterateur and could explain the notable influence of Bāṇabhaṭṭa's style of writing found in some of the Bengal inscriptions.

On the other hand, it is very surprising to note that there is no mention of any significant literature in Bengal as the bearer of the gauḍī rīti in the 6th and 7th centuries even though Bāṇabhaṭṭa speaks of the rīti during that era. In the subsequent times, this rīti has also been discussed specifically in the writings of Bhāmaha and Daṇḍin. In view of the lack of any extant textual sources, we can only cite the 7th century CE Nidhanpur copperplate of Bhāskaravarman, as a possible example, which bears a mark of early genesis of literary creativity. However, even with a few glimpses of literary trend evident in some inscriptions of the late 6th – 8th centuries CE, it is only with the Pāla - Candra phase that true efflorescence of literary composition makes an appearance in inscriptions. Even then we have to admit that barring Chandragomin's work on grammar there were no early texts that could lay claim to a regional textual tradition of literacy in these early days. How then could we explain the problem of the early references to Gauḍī rīti as a distinctive regional literary style made by poetic critics of import and try to understand the implications of this reference in the context of the wide horizon of pan Indian Sanskrit studies? We can hypothetically offer the idea that the presence of early epigraphic compositions in post – Gupta Bengal tentatively indicates the emergence of a regional class of elite literates, growing familiar with the Sanskrit-based literary culture of the heart-land of Pan-Indian state society. The composers brought out literary styles by composing the inscriptions. They composed the eulogy part. Along with the eulogy part, they also provide us with information about important commercial reports related to land grants through the medium of

¹⁵ Vishwambhar Sharan Pathak, *Ancient Historians of India; A Study in Historical Biographies*, (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1966), p.33.

¹⁶ N.G.Majumdar, 'Irda copperplate of the Kamboja king Nayapāladeva', *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol.XXII, 1933, p.151; N.G. Majumdar, *Inscriptions of Bengal*, Vol. III, 1929, pp.63, 96, 125, 137.

copperplate charters. The identity of this group of composers may not have been known at first, but later they do have a somewhat more transparent identity, which we note especially from the 10th century onwards. They flourished further from the 12th century during the reign of the Varmanas and reached an apex in the 13th century during the reign of Lakṣmaṇasena. The composers were obviously addressing a literate society, as indicated in the references to various royal officials, urban and rural elites, landholding classes, etc. The artisanal groups and other social classes and sundry residents of rural society could have formed the background of this socio-cultural fabric.

So, this whole process certainly indicates a potential society, variously situated with the rise and fall of dynastic rulers in the varied sub-regions of Bengal. The role of the regional states in their varied orders and orbits had, over time, provided patronage and thus impacted the direction that literary culture took. For example, one notes that with the emergence of new political forces during the time of the Senas, the literary efflorescence culminated into a heightened creativity of the Brahmanical affiliation. And yet, there are indications of a sustained development of literary culture beyond the scope of a political state.

Secondary literature

The review of secondary literature begins with a focus on the early trend of research on the growth of literary style in Sanskrit inscriptions in general. The phenomenon of Sanskrit as a medium of language in epigraphs has been discussed by several eminent experts in epigraphy. For example, D.C. Sircar had pointed out how in the later part of early historic period Sanskrit took over Prakrit as the primary language for inscriptions.¹⁷ According to Richard Saloman, Sanskrit inscriptions could be noted on the scene from the end of the pre-Christian era and the language was used by the Brahmanical elite to exhibit a high classical style in the administrative realm.¹⁸ Pandurang Vaman Kane traced the theory of poetics that had evolved through the inscriptions, remarkably illuminated in the Junagadh rock inscription of

¹⁷ D.C. Sircar, *Indian Epigraphy*, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited, 1996), p.39.

¹⁸ Richard Saloman, *Indian Epigraphy*, (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt.Ltd., 1998), p.93.

Rudradāman (150 CE) and the Allahabad Pillar inscription of the 4th century CE. These bore testimony of high quality kāvya in Sanskrit inscriptions.¹⁹ Debarchana Sarkar has highlighted the Nandsa Yūpa inscription of Kṛta year 282 to reflect its rich poetic composition. literary analysis of the Gupta inscriptions by Manabendu Bandyopadhyay illuminated their growing extensive kāvya literature.²⁰ Inspired by these perspectives and theories, we turn our attention toward searching for a poetic style in the inscriptions of early medieval Bengal. Debarchana Sarkar has enlightened us about the manifestation of an ornate style of language structure, full of rhetorical inflexions and complex grammatical formations in the inscriptions of early medieval Bengal.²¹

Looking into the general literary trends in the pan-Indian Sanskritic cultural atmosphere during the Early Medieval period, we get a few indicators for analysis from S.N. Dasgupta's, seminal work.²² Again, V. Raghavan's article on Sanskrit Kāvya Literature illuminates the characteristics of the works of eminent poets like Bhāravi (c.6th century CE), Māgha (c.7th century CE) Subandhu (7th century), Bāṇabhaṭṭa (c.7th century CE), Bhāmaha(c.7th century CE), and Daṇḍin (c.7th-8th century CE) as the bearers of this pan-Indian Sanskritic trend.²³ Arthur Berriedale Keith's discussions on the tradition of prose kāvya's of Daṇḍin, Subandhu and Bāṇabhaṭṭa, provide the most significant clues to the fountainhead of the regional style in our context.²⁴ Gaurinath Sastri's studies on the pan-Indian literary scene during the 8th-9th century, especially highlights the works of poets like Udbhaṭa (8th century CE), Vāmana (end of the 8th century), Rudraṭa (first quarter of the 9th century CE), Rājaśekhara (10th century CE) and others who had flourished between the tenth to twelfth century.²⁵

¹⁹ P.V.Kane, *History of Sanskrit Poetics*, 4th ed. (Delhi: Motilala Banarsidass Publishers, 1971), p.336.

²⁰ Dr Manabendu Banerjee, *Historical and Social Interpretations of The Gupta Inscriptions*, (Calcutta: Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar), p.323.

²¹ Debarchana Sarkar, 'Saṁskṛta Abhilekha Sāhitye Upamā', in *Saṁskṛta Sāhitye Upamā*, ed. Indira Chatterjee, (Kolkata: Rabindra Bharati University, 2014), p.74.

²² S.N. Dasgupta, ed., *A History of Sanskrit Literature*, vol.I, (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1947), p.xiv.

²³ V.Raghavan, 'Sanskrit Kavya Literature; a General Survey', in *The Cultural heritage of India*, ed. Suniti Kumar Chatterji, Vol.V, (Calcutta: The Ramkrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 1978), pp.216-23.

²⁴ Arthur Berriedale Keith, *A History of Sanskrit Literature*, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1993), p.308.

²⁵ Gaurinath Sastri, 'Sanskrit Poetics', in *The Cultural heritage of India*, ed. Suniti Kumar Chatterji, Vol.V, (Calcutta: The Ramkrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 1978), pp.297-99.

We may now turn our attention towards the prior works on Sanskrit literature of Bengal. The first excellent review was made by S. K. De, whose contribution was pivotal in providing a detailed list of Sanskrit literature of Bengal, especially during the Pāla and Sena rule.²⁶ For the first time, he brought out all the literary genres together in distinct categories. We may refer to Siddheswar Chattopadhyay's work next which emphasized the form and the style of writing Sanskrit literature in Bengal.²⁷ In recent times Nupur Dasgupta's article on a myriad of Sanskrit literature and technical treatises reveals the cultural flow and evolution in the literature of early medieval Bengal since the early period.²⁸ Romila Thapar's critically historical analysis of Sandhyākara Nandi's *Rāmacarita* (c.11th-12th century CE)²⁹ offers most significant light on the work and related history. Daniel H. H. Ingalls' observations³⁰ on the verses of the anthology *Subhāṣitaratnaḥ* (c.11th-12th century CE), especially the uses of distinct traits of Sanskrit poetry in the verses, different established features like elongated metaphors, moods or rasa, grammar of imageries helps us in analyzing the poetic characteristics noted in our context. Barbara Stoler Miller's deep study of the literary structure of the *Gītagovinda* (12th century CE) again is most illuminating and aids in getting at the features of classical ornamentation.³¹ Jesse Ross Knutson's work is a comprehensive one, covering a historical context and its cultural environs. He observed the grand emergence of ornate and aesthetically high literary creativity in the court of Lakṣmaṇasena between 12th-13th centuries.³²

The way in which previous researchers have shown distinctive development of literary traditions mark a cultural flow that was particularly regional in tone. But this is possibly most observed in the style of composition met within the inscriptions. This is evident if we review the early tone of compositions starting with the Nidhanpur Copper Plate inscription up to the examples from the Sena inscriptions. For example, we note a distinct similarity of literary tone

²⁶ S.K.De, 'Sanskrit Literature', in *The History of Bengal*, ed. R.C.Majumdar, Vol. I, (Dacca: University of Dacca, 1943), pp.304-63.

²⁷ Siddheswar Chattopadhyaya, 'Bengal's Sanskrit Literature Through the Ages' in *Culture of Bengal through the Ages*, ed. Bhaskar Chattopadhyaya, (Burdwan: The University of Burdwan, 1988), pp.65-91.

²⁸ Dasgupta, 'Sanskrit Literature', pp.535-36.

²⁹ Romila Thapar, *The Past Before Us: Historical Traditions of Early North India*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), pp.496-98.

³⁰ Daniel H.H.Ingalls, ed. and trans., *An Anthology of Sanskrit Court Poetry: Vidyākara's "Subhāṣitaratnaḥ"*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), pp.1-29.

³¹ Barbara Stoler Miller, ed. & tr., *Jayadeva's Gitagovinda, Love song of the dark Lord*, Oxford, 1978.

³² Jesse Ross Knutson, *Into the twilight of Sanskrit court poetry; The Sena Salon of Bengal and beyond*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2014).

between textual literature of Sena period as highlighted by Knutson and the contemporary inscriptions. It is the root and course of this phenomenon of a complex, multi-layered regional literary culture vibrantly exhibited in epigraphic form and its associative sphere of communication that has been sought in the current research.

In terms of defining the early medieval period of Indian history we have especially derived the discursive frame offered by Brajadulal Chattopadhyay and Hermann Kulke.³³ Brajadulal Chattopadhyay's minute and deeply nuanced observations on the formation of regional societies and states at various regional levels provide the most critical clues which we have used to frame our understanding of this entire historical context.³⁴ Within this frame of reference we turn attention towards the diverse political structures of early medieval Bengal. In this context, the recent two-volume publication of *The History of Bangladesh*, edited by Abdul Momin Chowdhury and Ranbir Chakraborty offers rich and current data-base on the very complex political history of early medieval Bengal. To go to singular works, Ranbir Chakraborty focuses on the local state formation in early Bengal from 300-1300 CE reviewing the political forces and entities characterizing the diverse and layered nature of monarchical polity in different sub-regions of Bengal.³⁵ Ryosuke Furui's article on 'Variegated Adaptations: State Formation in Bengal from the fifth to the seventh century' has been utilized to understand the variable process of secondary state formation in Bengal especially in the light of environmental conditions and different levels of agrarian developments³⁶ Rajat Sanyal's study of the dynastic history of the Pāla-Sena in terms of their geographical distribution and their chronological problem comes to much use.³⁷ On the other hand, on a micro level, the

³³ Hermann Kulke, 'The Early and the Imperial Kingdom: A Processual Model of Integrative State Formation in Early Medieval India', in *Rethinking Early India*, Upinder Singh, ed. (New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2011); Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya, *The Making of Early Medieval India*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010); Chakrabarti, Religious Process.

³⁴ Chattopadhyaya, *The Making of Early Medieval India*.

³⁵ Ranabir Chakravarti, 'State Formation and Polity', in *The History of Bangladesh: Early Bengal in Regional Perspectives (up to c.1200 CE)*, eds. Abdul Momin Chowdhury and Ranabir Chakravarti, Vol.I., (Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2018), pp.857-98.

³⁶ Ryosuke Furui, 'Variegated Adaptations: State Formation in Bengal from the fifth to the seventh century', in *State Formation and Social Integration in Pre-modern South and Southeast Asia: A Comparative Study of Asian Society*, eds. Noboru Karashima and Masashi Hirose, (Tokyo: The Toyo Bunko, 2017), pp.73-74.

³⁷ Rajat Sanyal, 'The Pala-Sena and Others', in *Political History and Administration (c. AD 750-1300)*, *History of Ancient India*, eds. Dilip K.Chakrabarti and Makkhan Lal, Vol.V, pp.165-203.

fascinating study of the sub-regional context of Samatata-Harikela by Suchandra Ghosh offers valuable input for our research.³⁸

As far as society is concerned, we may first mention Ramesh Chandra Majumdar's edited volume, *The History of Bengal*. This work provides the basic socio- economic and political framework for the early history Bengal.³⁹ But it is with Nihar Ranjan Ray's *Bāṅgālīr Itihas: Ādi parba*, that we truly enter into an analytic frame of social history. Ray perceived ancient Bengal society in a new light, moving away from a narrative of facts to analytic examination of frameworks of State, polity and economy. He delved deep into understanding the social structure, social strata, class, language and literature of Bengal.⁴⁰ This general social structure refers to a stratified society and its internal world with diverse social classes and functional communities. Attention may be drawn to the rich work of Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya who attempted to understand the distribution of early rural settlements in Gupta and post-Gupta Bengal in the light of inscriptions. Besides, he re-examined the concept of a village community, the search for hierarchies among village residents, and the changing nature of relationship between apex political authorities and villages.⁴¹ Chitrarekha Gupta had attempted to understand the position of the kāyasthas - as the class of literate writers in a pan – Indian frame from the 9th century onwards.⁴² Puspa Niyogi had made an attempt to trace the rise and development of the brāhmaṇas in early Bengal.⁴³ Both these works provide important premises for our research. In recent times, Ryosuke Furui has made an in-depth study of the social structure of early medieval Bengal based on the epigraphic records. He wanted to interpret the early medieval rural society of south Asia through the agricultural text *Kṛṣiparāsara* (c.11th

³⁸ Suchandra Ghosh, 'The Trans-Meghna Region: Making of a Sub-Regional Identity', *Journal of Ancient Indian History*, Vol. XXVII, 2010-11, pp.220-31; Suchandra Ghosh and Sayantani Pal, 'Political Geography and Locational Importance of Samatata-Harikela Region', in *History, Culture and Coinage of Samatata and Harikela*, ed. Jahar Acharjee, Agartala, 2006, pp. 78-96.

³⁹ R.C. Majumdar, ed. *The History of Bengal*, Vol.1, (Delhi: B.R.Publishing Corporation, 2003), pp.1-3.

⁴⁰ Nihar Ranjan Ray, *Bāṅgālīr Itihas: Ādi parba*, 7th ed. (Kolkata: dey's publishing, 2009), p.6.

⁴¹ Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya, *Aspects of Rural Settlements and Rural Society in Early medieval India*, (Calcutta: K P Bagchi & Company, 1990), pp.18-57.

⁴² Chitrarekha Gupta, *The Kāyasthas*, (Calcutta: K P Bagchi & Company, 1996), pp.1-4.

⁴³ Puspa Niyogi, *Brahmanic Settlements in Different Subdivisions of Ancient Bengal*, Calcutta, 1967, p.i.

century).⁴⁴ He found the rural society of early medieval Bengal to evolve through phases of agrarian relations from 400 CE to 13th century CE, and highlighted the hierarchy in power relations evident in the agrarian structure. He talked about the presence of subordinate rulers, landed magnets, grassroots cultivators and agrarian laborers.⁴⁵ Furui has also thrown deeper light on rural social networks and integrations highlighting the emergence of regional features of varṇa-jāti system in early medieval Bengal.⁴⁶ In the process he has offered important clues to the emergence of the brāhmaṇas as a social group with clear socio-cultural dominance and their emergence into influential landholders, having built genealogical networks and links with both the royal court and local elite clientele, and the wider rural society.⁴⁷ In terms of incorporating the diverse local tradition into the Brahmanical social order, Kunal Chakraborty has shown how in early medieval times Brahmanical culture integrated the local tradition by propagating the ideals of the Bengal purāṇas through dialogic and ritual forms.⁴⁸ Suchandra Ghosh and Sayantani Pal illumined the life of elite and non-elite groups and the people of the lower strata in the varied sub-regions of Bengal up to c. 1300 CE.⁴⁹ Sayantani Pal attempted to understand the movement of the kaivartas from an occupational group to a jāti as reflected in the verses of *Rāmacarita*.⁵⁰ B.N.S. Yadava has made a significant contribution in interpreting the term ‘Kuṭumbin’ in the early medieval period as a peasant householder in terms of

⁴⁴ Ryosuke Furui, ‘The Rural World of an Agricultural Text: A Study on The Krsiparasara’, *Studies in History*, Vol. 21, No. 2, New Delhi/ Thousand Oaks/ London, 2005, 149ff; Furui, ‘Brahmanas’, pp.181-215.

⁴⁵ Ryosuke Furui, *Land and Society in early South Asia (eastern India 400-1250 AD)*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2020), pp.1-2.

⁴⁶ Ryosuke Furui, *Rural Society and Social Networks in Early Bengal from the Fifth to the Thirteenth Century A.D.*, (New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru University, 2007), pp.1-2; Ryosuke Furui, ‘Social Life: Issues of Varna-jati system’, in *The History of Bangladesh: Early Bengal in Regional Perspectives (up to c.1200 CE)*, eds. Abdul Momin Chowdhury and Ranabir Chakravarti, vol.2, (Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh,2018), pp.46-47.

⁴⁷Ryosuke Furui, ‘Brāhmaṇas in early medieval Bengal: Construction of their Identity, Networks and Authority’, *Indian Historical Review*, 2013, p.223.

⁴⁸ Kunal Chakrabarti, *Religious Process: The Purāṇas and making of a Regional Tradition*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001, pp.1-35.

⁴⁹ Suchandra Ghosh and Sayantani Pal, ‘Everyday Life in Early Bengal’, in *The History of Bangladesh: Early Bengal in Regional Perspectives (up to c.1200 CE)*, vol.2, eds. Abdul Momin Chowdhury and Ranabir Chakravarti, (Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh,2018), pp.3-6.

⁵⁰ Sayantani Pal, ‘Revisiting the Kaivartta Revolt Locating the Emergence of a Caste’, in *Early Indian History and Beyond*, eds., Osmund Boppearachchi and Suchandra Ghosh, New Delhi, 2019, pp.502-17.

explaining social terminologies in early medieval northern inscriptions.⁵¹ These works offered several significant clues, some of which have helped in marking the social orbit of the literary culture which forms one of the major aspects of the present research.

Research question and methodology

The referred secondary works provide significant clues and theoretical frames for analyses.

However, extensive and focused research on the current theme of research remains absent. The work, therefore, delved deeper to track the different scopes of investigations into the primary sources and came up with many hypotheses based on these investigations in order to frame the findings and provide answers to a hitherto unveiled chapter of cultural history of early medieval Bengal. The current research has observed its findings within the wider socio-political frame in order to track deeper into the problems of emergence and sustenance of a literary culture and society in early medieval Bengal. The evident fact that this culture continued to grow and evolve led us to wonder and seek for the social and material support base. Questions on patronage, creativity, consumption and conduits of literary culture have been sought in epigraphic evidence, which were aligned with the textual sources, and then found to provide valuable information on these varied aspects.

The specific questions that needed to be addressed were focused on the nature of the society in general and in the specific scopes of the sub-regions. The major question also revolves around the matter of the identity of the agents of literate culture and patronage. What was the nature of influence that worked behind the formation of this social infrastructure and who cultivated such a rich culture? These questions have been sought and addressed as far as possible with reference to the primary sources and based on some major hypothetical parameters set in earlier studies.

Details of methodological parameter

Literary analysis of some select inscriptions by previous epigraphists is significant in understanding the overall literary culture at this stage. The choice of inscriptions was

⁵¹B.N.S.Yadava, “General President’s Address: Historical Investigation into Social Terminology in Literature: A Problem of the Study of Social Change (Mainly in the Context of Early Medieval Northern India)”, *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol.53, 1992, pp.5-6.

determined on the basis of the most voluble and rich contents as the most representative among the extensive number of epigraphic materials associated with this historical phase. Among the early epigraphists, Padmanatha Bhattacharya has carefully analyzed the literary traits of the Nidhanpur copper plate inscription of Bhāskarvarman (seventh century CE).⁵² He highlighted the reflection of Bāṇabhaṭṭa's style in this inscription. Radhagovinda Basak illustrated the characteristics of artificial poetry and a reflection of Bāṇabhaṭṭa's style in the Tipperah copperplate of Loknātha (middle of the seventh century CE) and in the Kailan Copper Plate Inscription of Śrīdhāraṇarāta (middle to the last quarter of the 7th century CE).⁵³ Among the selected Pāla inscriptions, the literary analysis of the Khalimpur inscription of Dharmapāla (9th century CE) by F.Kielhorn is significant to observe its eulogistic poetry, with fine expertise in literary style, handling of language and use of similes, like upamā in poetic beauty, alaṃkāra and rūpaka (metaphor), atīśayokti (hyperbole) and play of words or śleṣa.⁵⁴ A meticulous translation of the Nalanda copperplate inscription of Devapāla (9th century CE) by Hirananda Sastri illuminates the voluble and loaded tone of the praśasti.⁵⁵ The main point of interest here is to observe the juxtaposition of praise of military power with the qualities of generous benevolence and supreme wisdom while praising kings. F. Kielhorn highlighted the literary merits of the Badal pillar inscription of Guravamiśra (855 – 910 CE).⁵⁶ He indicated the peculiarities of orthography and grammar in this elegant and rich composition. D.C. Sircar portrayed the fine literary tone of the Gaya Kṛṣṇadvārikā temple inscription of Viśvāditya in the eleventh century CE through its poetic charm.⁵⁷ Arthur Venis has carefully edited and translated the Kamauli Copperplate inscription of Vaidyadeva (mid-12th century) where he

⁵² Vidyavinoda Padmanatha Bhattacharya, 'Nidhanpur Copper Plates of Bhaskarvarman', *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol.XII, 1913, pp.65-79; Padmanatha Bhattacharya, *Kāmrūpa Śāsanābali*, Rangpur, 1931, pp.1-43.

⁵³ Radhagovinda Basak, 'Inscriptions: Their Literary Value', in *The Cultural heritage of India*, Vol.V, ed. Suniti Kumar Chatterji, (Calcutta: The Ramkrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 1978), p.404.

⁵⁴ F. Kielhorn, 'Khalimpur Plate of Dharmapāladeva', *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol.IV, 1896, pp.243-54.

⁵⁵ Hirananda Sastri, 'Nalanda Copper plate of Devapāla', *Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India*, No.66, p.92ff; Hirananda Shastri, 'The Nalanda Copper-plate of Devapāladeva', *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol.XVII, 1924, pp.310-27.

⁵⁶ F. Kielhorn, 'Badal Pillar Inscription of the time of Nārayanapāla', *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol.II, 1892, pp.160-67.

⁵⁷ D.C. Sircar, 'Inscriptions of Two Brāhmaṇa Rulers of Gaya', *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XXXVI, 1965, pp. 86 – 88.

illuminated an artistic illustration of poetic beauty or alamkāra in the praśasti part of this inscription as a mid-12th century style.⁵⁸ Among the Candra inscriptions, D.C. Sircar carefully analyzed the literary importance of the Pascimbhag copperplate inscription of Śrīcandra (935 CE).⁵⁹ He had pointed out that the script reflected the genesis of the gauḍī from the siddhamāṭṛkā. Among the inscriptions of the Varman and Sena period, N.G. Majumdar meticulously analyzed the literary traits of the Bhuvaneswar Praśasti of Bhaṭṭabhadra and the Deopara Rock Inscription of Vijayasena.⁶⁰ Debarchana Sarkar has offered an analytic discussion of the Bhuvaneswar Praśasti and the Deopara Rock Inscription.⁶¹

Along with the numerous inscriptional sources, we have investigated some contemporary Sanskrit literature for further reference, for example, the *Rāmacarita* by Sandhyākara Nandi (c.11th-12th century CE),⁶² *Subhāṣitaratnakoṣa* compiled by Vidyākara (c.11th-12th century),⁶³ *Kṛṣiparāśara* (mid-11th century),⁶⁴ *Pavanadūta* by Dhoyī (c.12th century CE),⁶⁵ *Gītagovinda* by Jayadeva (12th century CE),⁶⁶ *Āryāsaptaśatī* of Govardhanācārya (c. 12th century),⁶⁷ *Sadukti-karnāmṛta* by Śrīdharadāsa (early 13th century).⁶⁸ These texts represent an array of literary genres which indicate the richness of literary creativity in the chosen context.

⁵⁸ Arthur Venis, ‘Copper-plate Grant of Vaidyadeva, King of Kamarupa’, *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol.II, pp.347-58.

⁵⁹ D.C. Sircar, ‘Paschimbhag plate of Sricandra’, *Epigraphic Discoveries in East Pakistan*, Calcutta, 1973, pp.19-40, 63-69; D.C. Sircar, ed. ‘Paschimbhag Copper-plate Inscription of Srichandra (c.925-75 A.D.)’, *Select Inscriptions*, Vol.II, 1983, pp.92-100.

⁶⁰ Majumdar, *Inscriptions of Bengal*, pp. 25-41, 42-56.

⁶¹ Debarchana Sarkar, *Nityakaler tui Puratan (Nirbachita sonskrito obhilekhomala)*, (Kolkata: Paschimbanga Rajya Pustak Parshat, 2013), pp. 220-36, 237-52.

⁶² Haraprasad Sastri, ed. ‘Rāmacarita by Sandhyākara Nandi’, Revision with English Translation, Notes and Re-editing by R.G.Basak, *Memoirs of the Asiatic society of Bengal*, Vol.III, No.1, (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1969).

⁶³ D.D.Kosambi and V.V.Gokhale, eds. *The Subhāṣitaratnakoṣa*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1957).

⁶⁴ Furui, ‘The Rural World of an Agricultural Text’.

⁶⁵ Srichintaharanchakravartisharmana, *Pavanadūtā*, Sanskrita sahitya Parishad.

⁶⁶ Jibananda Vidyasagara, ed. *Gītagovindamkāvyam*, Calcutta, 1882; Miller, *Jayadeva’s Gītagovinda*.

⁶⁷ Pandit Durga Prasad, Kasinath Pandurang Parab and Vasudev Laxman Sastri Pansikar, eds., *The Āryāsaptaśatī of Govardhanācārya with the Commentary Vyāñgārtha Dīpanā of Ananta Paṇḍit*, Kāvyaṁālā No.1, Bombay, 1934; Pandit Sachal Misra, *The Āryāsaptaśatī of Govardhanācārya with the Commentary Rasapradīpikā*, 1931; Janhabi Kumar Chakraborty, *Āryāsaptaśatī o Gauḍabaṅga*, Kolkata, 1971.

⁶⁸ Ramavatara Sharma, ed. *Saduktikarṇāmṛta by Śrīdharadāsa*, Calcutta, 1912; S. C Banerji ed., *Sadukti-karṇāmṛta of Śrīdharadāsa*, Calcutta, 1965.

To understand the literary style of the textual works of this period we have to rely on the study and analysis of the literature of this period by previous researchers. Haraprasad Sastri's edition of Sandhyākaranandi's *Rāmacarita* has been revised with English translation and notes by Radhagovinda Basak.⁶⁹ This has been consulted heavily for our research. Romila Thapar's analysis on the *Rāmacarita* and Sandhyākaranandi from a historical perspective⁷⁰ offers significant clues. H.H. Daniel Ingalls's critical introduction and translation of the text *Subhāṣitaratnakoṣa* illustrates the merits of its poetic appeal and evaluates the anthological literature as a representation of classical Sanskrit literature as a whole.⁷¹ Sures Chandra Banerji's edition of the text of *Sadukti-karṇāmṛta* is the only one available on this important anthology and therefore invaluable.⁷² James Mallinson's meticulous translation of the text of *Pavanadūta* helps to understand the literary features of this text.⁷³ A Ph.D. dissertation on Dhoyī's *Pavanadūta* by Tandrima Sarkar throws some light on the literary traits of the text.⁷⁴ Janhabi Kumar Chakraborty's translation of the *Āryāsaptaśatī* in Bengali with Bengali notes helps to analyze the literary formation of the text.⁷⁵ Barbara Stoler Miller's excellent analysis and edition helps in understanding the classic literary structure of *Gītagovinda*.⁷⁶ Dr. M.V. Krishna Rao meticulously delineated the theme of the *Gītagovinda*.⁷⁷ Vicitri Dasi narrated the substance and actual significance of the text *Gītagovinda*.⁷⁸ An interpretation of the literary principles and method of the text has been portrayed here.

The major source and subject matter of the study are the Sanskrit inscriptions of early medieval Bengal that exhibited a rich literary style. This trend of development of literary style has evolved in at a Pan-Indian level for a long time. Even the poets who wrote the inscriptions mentioned their own work to be poetry. For example, Hariṣeṇa and Ravikīrti had both presented themselves as poets. Manabendu Bandyopadhyay and Debarchana Sarakar's earlier

⁶⁹ Sastri, 'Rāmacarita'.

⁷⁰ Thapar, *The Past Before Us*, pp. 496-98.

⁷¹ Ingalls, *An Anthology of Sanskrit Court Poetry*, pp. 1-53.

⁷² Banerji, *Sadukti-karṇāmṛta*.

⁷³ James Mallinson, trans. 'Messenger Poems by Kalidasa, Dhoyi & Rupa Gosvamin', in *Clay Sanskrit Library*, eds. Isabelle Onians and Somadeva Vasudeva, New York University Press and JIC Foundation, 2006.

⁷⁴ Tandrima Sarkar, *A study of Dhoyī's Pavanadūta*, (Ph.D. diss., University of Burdwan, 2007).

⁷⁵ Chakraborty, *Āryāsaptaśatī*.

⁷⁶ Miller, *Jayadeva's Gitagovinda*.

⁷⁷ M.V.Krishna Rao, *Gita Govinda of Jayadeva*, (Bangalore: Satsangha Seva Samithi, {Date of publication not found in copy consulted}).

⁷⁸ Vicitri Dasi, ed. *Śrī Gita Govinda-Śrī Jayadeva Gosvāmī*, New Delhi, 2017, first ed. 2005.

analyses of the literary value of the early historic inscriptions, substantiate the idea that epigraphic compositions were indeed taking off to a level of heightened literary activity in many cases.⁷⁹ Taking cue from this Pan-Indian perspective, our study seeks to establish the value of epigraphic compositions from early medieval Bengal as a special example of the phenomenon. In parallel to this we also take a cue from the rich research on textual literature of early medieval Bengal carried out by S.K. De and in recent times by Nupur Dasgupta to track the cultural flow and evolutionary paradigm of Sanskrit literature of Bengal. Knutson's work makes an important contribution in situating an ultra-rich creative literature within the domain of courtly culture, thus pointing to the possibilities of envisaging an aspect of the social domain within which the literary society flourished.

This literary style, communicated through the inscriptions, demonstrated a literary community and a community who accessed it. Here we can refer to Sheldon Pollock's theory which talks about inscriptions as representations of literary culture and illustrates how it was cultivated within a particular socio-textual community.⁸⁰ It is through this mode of communication that a literate society emerged. Meera Visvanathan pointed to the existence of 'different communities of response to interpreting the same text in different ways'.⁸¹ In this way, a picture of different categorizations of a literate society emerges. Nurtured within the domain of social and political structure of power, the pursuit of Sanskrit ornate literature represents on the one hand the upper echelons of society. In this regard, Sheldon Pollock stated that 'Sanskrit inscriptions, typically issued from the royal courts, were crucial as an expression of the political'.⁸² Thus, the political picture that these inscriptions highlight, indicates the prevalence of a grand and visibly powerful political authority behind the growth of this literate society - possibly a court. Since we want to delve into this courtly background for the literary paradigm, we are resorting to the methodology and perspective furnished by Daud Ali.⁸³ According to this research design, the following chapters will be:

⁷⁹ Banerjee, *Historical and Social Interpretations*, pp.323-43.

⁸⁰ Pollock, 'The Cosmopolitan Vernacular', pp.8-9.

⁸¹ Visvanathan, *Writing, Gifting and Identities*, p.90.

⁸² *Ibid.* p.10.

⁸³ Daud Ali, *Courtly Culture and Political Life in Early Medieval India*, (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press India Pvt. Ltd., 2014), p.4.

Chapter I	The Historical Frame
Chapter II	Period of Genesis of the regional literary Trend (6 th – 8 th century CE)
Chapter III	The flourishing phase of literary culture (8 th – 12 th century CE)
Chapter IV	The full efflorescence of regional literary culture (11 th - early 13 th century CE)
Chapter V	The regional socio-cultural matrix (6 th -early 13 th century CE)

The first chapter discusses the general socio-political framework of Bengal behind the emergence of a rich literary trend, which flourished predominantly from the 5th-6th century CE onwards in distinct geo-ecological zones like Puṇḍravardhana, Rāḍha, Vaṅga and Samataṭa-Harikela. The second chapter opens up with a discussion on the first and initial phase of the history where we begin to observe the genesis of literary works in terms of their available from in epigraphic records. Besides portraying an administrative-political formation and the official cadres associated with it, the source materials also delineated to study the structural transformation of the rural society of early medieval Bengal as the process of historical change. For this, we can take recourse to the pattern of social structure in rural Bengal of the early medieval period as portrayed by Ryosuke Furui. References to various social groups who influenced the society and led to its construction from the 5th-6th century have also been reflected here. Finally, a group of literate classes can be traced out of these diverse social classes through whom this literary culture emerged and developed in early medieval Bengal. We have begun the discussion on the tentative emergence of literary style in the regional inscriptions in the second chapter. A thematic analysis of the inscriptions reveals that the records of each dynasty carried their distinctive features. This process was shaped with the records related to Pradyumnabandhu, Dharmāditya, Dvādaśāditya, Gopacandra and

Samācāradeva, Śaśāṅka, Nāthas, Rātas, Khaḍgas and early Devas. The third chapter deals with the evolution of compositional quality in some selected inscriptions of the Pālas and the Candras rulers in the phase between 8th and 12th centuries. The choice of inscriptions was determined on the basis of the most voluble and rich contents as the most representative among the extensive number of epigraphic materials associated with this historical phase. Along with this, taking examples from the variegated Sanskrit literature, a number of works composed by the learned preceptors during this phase may be reviewed illuminating the textual cultural scene of the region. This is the period when early medieval Bengal witnessed the establishment of strong dynasties that ruled wider territories covering several sub-regions like Puṇḍra, Rāḍha, Vaṅga, Samataṭa and beyond. Inscriptions belonging to the next phase, between the 12th-13th centuries may be regarded as an exuberant and matured phase of literary style. This has been discussed in the fourth chapter. The rich literary trend of this period was initiated with the Varmans, culminating during the Sena times. The pompous literary treasure consisted of an extensive number of grandeur inscriptions issued under the Varmans and Senas. Apart from the inscriptional references, we do have ample evidence of grandiose creative literature, raised within the courtly circuit of Lakṣmaṇasena's regime. The fifth chapter is devoted to a review of the literary evolution and tracks the salient features of the social context. The conclusion reviews the discussions made so far and attempts to summarize trends of convergences of varied socio-cultural and political factors that have been noted so far to lead to the emergence of the distinctive culture of Literary Sanskrit and literacy also attempts to project the findings on the social orbit of this development.

Overall, this whole process certainly indicates a potential society, variously situated with the rise and fall of dynastic rulers in the varied sub-regions of Bengal. namely, Puṇḍravardhana, Rāḍha, Vaṅga, Samataṭa-Harikela etc. The role of the regional states in their varied orders and orbits had, over time, provided patronage and thus impacted to a certain extent the direction that literary culture took. But it was not the royal court that alone could nurture this literary culture. The answer is to be found in the presence of influential rural communities that emerged and flourished in the society from the 6th century CE.

CHAPTER I

The Historical Frame

The long history of Bengal since the early times is intertwined with the history of the broader Indian subcontinent and the surrounding regions of south Asia and Southeast Asia. Bengal, located in the eastern part of the Indian subcontinent at the apex of the Bay of Bengal, was dominated by the fertile Ganges delta. Abdul Momin Chowdhury and Ranabir Chakravarti have provided the origin of the name Bengal or Bāṅglā or Bāṅgālā, which comes from an ethnic group or geographical entity called Vaṅga.¹ This Vaṅga is located in the Dhaka-Vikrampur-Faidpur region of Bangladesh.² The southernmost part of Vaṅga was known as Vaṅgāla (āla/āli) due to the abundance of dams built to prevent heavy rains.³ This is probably the origin of the word Bengal, Bāṅglā, or Bāṅgālā. This Bengal was an agglomeration of five sub-regions, which were politically, socially, and culturally distinct from each other. Different political entities have created a political environment here by exercising their varying powers. However, this political history of Bengal has been illuminated in terms of evidence since the fourth-fifth century. Since early times, diverse ethnic groups and communities have settled here considering it suitable for living. The fertile land of Bengal at the apex of the Gangetic delta was also favorable for their inhabitation. The cultural history of the place was also cultivated by the people of these different ethnic groups, a special reflection of which was the literary culture of the region. The integration of vernacularism from the tradition of high Sanskritization has elevated Bengal as an independent entity at the pan-Indian level. A long literary genre became influential in the context of the political, social, and cultural practices of Bengal.

A literary trend, as a long-standing creation of an overall region, depends on how the social and political perspectives of the region are based. What kind of political and social environment was conducive to the development of this creation? A literary ambiance depends on the patronage and encouragement of the different ruling groups of a region. In that case, inscription as an official

¹ Abdul Momin Chowdhury and Ranabir Chakravarti, eds. *History of Bangladesh: Early Bengal in Regional Perspectives (up to c. 1200 CE)*, Vol.I, (Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2018), p.xxiv.

² *Ibid.* p.xxiv.

³ *Ibid.* p.xxiv.

document has been endorsed by a definite political structure that upholds them. The innumerable inscriptions of Bengal during and after the 5th-6th century help us analyze socio-political history until the end of the 12th-13th century. Besides, some high-level creative Sanskrit literature in Bengal also highlights a socio-political picture of the region. But most of its existence can be traced back to the Sena Varman era and before that, a few examples of this can be found in the time of the Pālas in the *Rāmacarita* of Sandhyākara Nandi and in *Subhāṣitaratnakoṣa* of Vidyākara which too dates back to around tenth-eleventh century. However, if this regional literary genre can be denominated in any way, it can be named after Bāṇabhaṭṭa or others referring to gauḍi rīti. This has been further mentioned in the Udayasundarī Kathā of Soḍḍhala, which has found resemblance in Vaidarbhī to the style of the cuckoo, Gauḍī to that of the peacock, Pāñcalī to that of the swan.⁴ Sivaprasad Bhattacharya who has considered Gauḍī ‘as much relishing and charming as Vaidarbhī’ has elucidated this.⁵ Thus, this Gauḍī rīti has been considered a distinct literary style on the wide horizon of pan-Indian Sanskrit studies and accepted amongst a section in the contemporary Sanskrit literate world.⁶ An ornate style of language structure, full of rhetorical inflections, and complex grammatical formations were the common features of gauḍi rīti.

However, here the question arises about the vividness of the reflection of this gauḍi style in the inscriptions of early medieval Bengal. Where Bāṇabhaṭṭa speaks of the ornate gauḍi style in the 7th century, there was no impact of it in any other inscription in Bengal at that time except in the copperplate inscription of Nidhanpur. However, since this gauḍi rīti originated from the word Gauḍa and this was a sub-region of Bengal, this gauḍi rīti or literary Gauḍa region is what has to be understood in a historical frame.

⁴ V.V. Mirashi, *Literary and Historical Studies in Indology*, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1975), p.84.

⁵ Sivaprasad Bhattacharya, ‘The Gauḍī Rīti in theory and practice’, in *Indian Historical Quarterly*, ed. Narendra Natha Law, Vol. III, 1927, p.378.

⁶ De, ‘Sanskrit Literature’, pp.302 – 303.

The term Gauḍa has an ethnic identity. Annapurna Chattopadhyay presumed that Gauḍas were originally mongoloid people.⁷ Broadly speaking, the Gauḍa is referring to the lower Ganga valley. Whether Bāṇabhaṭṭa has referred to this Gauḍa as a particular region of Bengal or to the overall Bengal is something yet to be agreed upon. In the early historical evidence, Gauḍa has mainly been a country containing a large tract of area ranging between Benāras and the Bay of Bengal. In the political scenario, the geographical connotations of Gauḍa change with time. During the rule of Śaśāṅka, Gauḍa embraced the parts of West Bengal including its coasts and north Bengal. Bāṇabhaṭṭa in his *Harṣacarita* referred to Śaśāṅka as the lord of Gauḍa and referred to him as ‘Gauḍādhipa’.⁸ During the 8th-9th centuries, Gauḍa denoted the entire Pāla kingdom. The Rāṣtrakūṭa and Pratīhāra records identified the Pāla rulers as ‘Gauḍeśvara’, ‘Gauḍendra’, ‘Gauḍarāja’, etc. The same designations go for the Sena rulers as well. From the external sources of Bengal, it can be said that outside the so-called geographical boundaries of Bengal, it was mainly identified as Gauḍa, whether about a ruler or in terms of location. In this context, Abdul Momin Chowdhury and Aksadul Alam have stated the geographical connotation of Gauda. They mentioned that Gauḍa used to denote the whole of Bengal despite the existence of other geopolitical entities.⁹ With the increase of its political influence to the peak, the Gauḍadeśa even denoted the whole of eastern India at times.¹⁰ Sivaprasad Bhattacharya stated that ‘the gauḍī took its name from the style prevailing in the Gauḍa country’.¹¹ This probably indicates that the people outside Bengal at that time had considered it familiar with the name Gauḍa, which includes borders of Orissa, West Bengal, North Bengal, and extended up to the Vaṅga. However, it is recognized that the gauḍī rīti was a regional literary style named after the Gauḍa sub-region of Bengal or broadly eastern India and was adopted as a rīti in the contemporary Sanskrit literati world.

⁷ Annapurna Chattopadhyay, ‘A brief note on the Ethno-historical approach to the cities of ancient Bengal’, *Proceedings of the History Congress*, Vol.62, 2001, p.68.

⁸ P.V. Kane, ed. *The Harshacarita of Bāṇa Bhaṭṭa*, Delhi, 1973, p.115.

⁹ Abdul Momin Chowdhury and Aksadul Alam, ‘Historical Geography’, in *The History of Bangladesh: Early Bengal in Regional Perspectives (up to c.1200 CE)*, eds. Abdul Momin Chowdhury and Ranabir Chakravarti, Vol.I., (Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh,2018), p.21.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* p.21.

¹¹ Bhattacharya, ‘The Gauḍī Rīti’, p.380.

Bengal was understood to be formed of distinct geo-ecological zones as mentioned in several references from inscriptions and literature. B.M. Morrison has divided the Bengal delta according to its principal soil formations. They are the Delatiac plain, the Tippera surface, and the Sylhet basin, which are made of recent alluvial plain, and the Madhupur and Varendra uplands composed of the ancient Pleistocene alluvium.¹² The deltaic plain is made of the deltaic deposit and flood plains of the Ganga, Brahmaputra and Meghna, which is about fifty thousand square miles.¹³ The Tippera surface is made up of the deposit of Meghna and Padma with Lalmai-Mainamati hills at its centre and is about 3000 square miles.¹⁴ Suchandra Ghosh showed that the east of Meghna was known as the 'Trans-Meghna' region.¹⁵ The Sylhet basin is demarcated by the Shillong plateau in the north, Burmese and Tippera highland on the east and Madhupur Jungle in the south, which is about 5000 square miles.¹⁶ The Madhupur and Varendra uplands are made up of old alluvium deposits and are distinguished by the deep red oxidized soil.¹⁷ Morrison situated the strategic location of the principal political centres of early Bengal alongside the rivers. Like the ancient and medieval capitals, Rāmāvati and Lakhnauti were situated beside the northern stream of Ganga.¹⁸ Karnasuvarna had access to the Bhagirathi basin.¹⁹ Vikrampur, Sonargaon and Dhaka were situated near the confluence of Padma and Meghna.²⁰ Pundranagara and Kotivarsa were located alongside small rivers in the Varendra region.²¹ These geographical zones of Bengal have been identified by Abdul Momin Chowdhury and Aksadul Alam in their recent publication of the *History of Bangladesh*. They segregated the sub-regions of early Bengal into four major divisions in the pre-CE 1200 period according to their distinct cultural, economic, and intellectual entity. They are Puṇḍravardhana, Rāḍha, Vaṅga and Samatāṭa-Harikela.²² This account may be

¹² B.M.Morrison, *Political Centres and Cultural Regions in Early Bengal*, (Tuscon: The University of Arizona Press, 1970), p.8.

¹³ *Ibid.* p.8.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* p.8.

¹⁵ Ghosh, 'The Trans-Meghna Region', p.220; Srabani Chakrabarty, 'River, Water Bodies, Riverine Ports, Marshy land: The Making of the Trans-meghna Sub-Regional Node of the Early Medieval Bengal', *Puravritta*, Vol.2, 2017, pp. 55-77.

¹⁶ Morrison, *Political Centres*, p.8.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* p.8.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* p.12.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* p.12.

²⁰ *Ibid.* p.12.

²¹ *Ibid.* p.12.

²² Chowdhury and Alam, 'Historical Geography', p.18.

juxtaposed with the references drawn by Amitabha Bhattacharya, who was considered a stalwart scholar in historical geography. He correlated the traditional divisions of Bengal with the physical divisions based on geographical evidence i.e. Varendra, Gauḍa, Vaṅga, Vaṅgāla, Samatāṭa, etc.²³ According to Amitabha Bhattacharya, Varendra was an integral portion of Puṇḍravardhana.²⁴ Abdul Momin Chowdhury and Aksadul Alam manifested that Puṇḍravardhana denotes the northern portion of Bengal, i.e. Rajshahi-Bogra-Dinajpur areas of Bangladesh and part of the northern sector of west Bengal²⁵ and within it, Varendra was bounded by the Ganges on the south and the Korotoyā on the east.²⁶ During the Sena times, Paṇḍravardhanabhukti was comprised of northern, south-western ('Khāḍi' and 'Vyāghrataṭi') and south-eastern parts of Bengal.²⁷ Rāḍha denoted the areas to the west of the Bhagirathi which incorporated the districts of Birbhum, Bankura, Bardhaman, Hooghly, Howrah, and Medinipur.²⁸ It was further divided into Dakṣiṇa Rāḍha and Uttara Rāḍha. Gauḍa, as a sub-unit of Rāḍha, denotes the northern portion in general and may have been extended in the southwest as far as the Ganjām district of Orissa.²⁹ It is comprised of Malda-Murshidabad, Birbhum, and Bardhaman though sometimes it defines the whole of Bengal or eastern India.³⁰ Vaṅga denotes the Dhaka-Faridpur- Munshiganj, and Barishal areas in present Bangladesh.³¹ Abdul Momin Chowdhury and Aksadul Alam opined that Vaṅgāla as a separate geographical unit from the Vaṅga denotes the coastal areas of south-eastern Bengal.³² Samatāṭa denotes the south or southeast Bengal comprising of Noakhali, Comilla, Chittagong, and adjacent areas in present Bangladesh and some parts of present Tripura in India.³³ On its northern and southern sides, Śrīhaṭṭa and Harikela were denoted as the sub-units of Samatāṭa.³⁴ Harikela, as another sub-unit of Samatāṭa, formed a separate entity in the coastal tract of Chittagong and its

²³ Amitabha Bhattacharya, *Historical Geography of Ancient and Early Medieval Bengal*, (Calcutta: Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar, 1977), p.9.

²⁴ *Ibid*, p.43.

²⁵ Chowdhury and Alam, 'Historical Geography', p.18.

²⁶ Bhattacharya, *Historical Geography*, pp.42-44.

²⁷ Chowdhury and Alam, 'Historical Geography', p.18.

²⁸ *Ibid*. p.20.

²⁹ Bhattacharya, *Historical Geography*, pp.51-55.

³⁰ Chowdhury and Alam, 'Historical Geography', p.22.

³¹ Bhattacharya, *Historical Geography*, pp. 56-62; Chowdhury and Alam, 'Historical Geography', p.22.

³² *Ibid*. p.23.

³³ *Ibid*. pp. 24 – 25.

³⁴ *Ibid*. p.24.

neighboring areas.³⁵ Suchandra Ghosh and Sayantani Pal have discussed the locational importance of Samataṭa-Harikela region.³⁶ With the growth of political power, it progressively incorporated the areas of Noakhali, Comilla, Tripura, and Sylhet.³⁷ Although it is difficult to distinguish Samataṭa and Harikela by their geographical location, it is generally held that while the Comilla-Noakhali area was the core territory of Samataṭa, the coastal tract of Chittagong was the core area of Harikela.³⁸ The geographical connotations of these sub-regions had changed along with time and with the rise of political power. Several Political entities were formed based on these sub-regions. Sometimes it is seen that the geographical area of a sub-region has expanded and exceeded its ascertained limits during the reign of a ruler or ruling dynasty. Gauḍa and Harikela can be taken as an example here. However, besides the inconsistency of their geographical limitations, it is generally held that all these janapadas or sub-regions were incorporated into Bengal and outside the Bengal periphery; it was generally denominated as Gauḍa from the 7th century CE onwards.

Each of the sub-regions of Bengal carried its own entity and feature. Particularly, there is an explicit cultural, political, and social distinction between the northern or western Bengal and the southern or eastern Bengal. South-eastern Bengal had its political-cultural identity. This is probably because the southern or south-eastern Bengal had been open to south-east Asian influence. However, under the the expansive rules of the Pālas and the Senas for a time all the sub-regions were brought under a single umbrella of political sovereignty and were interrelated in some way or other. Thus, despite distinctions, this integrated a unique regionality and cultural tradition of Bengal before the people outside. In addition to this, it can be said that although each political dynasty is different from the other, hints to cultural exchanges can be gleaned. Bengal, as a separate political-cultural entity, has predominantly flourished from the 5th-6th century onwards after the end of the Gupta rule and flourished into a distinct regional identity.

We now turn our attention towards the political structure of early medieval Bengal since the 6th century CE. Ranbir Chakraborty's work throws important light on these processes and aids in our attempt to understand the political history. It mainly focuses on the local state formation in

³⁵ *Ibid.* p.26.

³⁶ Ghosh and Pal, 'Political Geography and Locational Importance', pp. 78-96.

³⁷ Chowdhury and Alam, 'Historical Geography', p.26.

³⁸ *Ibid.* p.26; Ghosh, 'The Trans-Meghna Region', p.220.

early Bengal from 300-1300 CE with diverse and transformed spread of monarchical polity in different sub-regions of Bengal.³⁹ Ryosuke Furui draws attention to the structure and the varied processes of secondary state formation in Bengal according to the environmental conditions and different levels of agrarian development in several sub-regions since the fifth century onwards by adapting the Gupta state system.⁴⁰

Abdul Momin Chowdhury has analyzed the emergence of Gauḍa during the reign of Śaśāṅka as a threshold of a regional political entity.⁴¹ He also throws light on the rise of Pālas as a regional political power across a wide area of Gauḍa, Rāḍha and Puṇḍra in Bengal and in the sub-regions of Magadha and Mithila in Bihar through the recent discoveries of numerous Pāla inscriptions.⁴² Rajat Sanyal highlighted the dynastic history of the Pāla-Sena in terms of their geographical distribution and their chronological problem.⁴³ Shariful Islam has studied the emerging political entities in south-eastern Bengal since the time of Dharmāditya, Dvādaśāditya, Gopacandra and Samācāradeva till the time of later Devas in the light of the recent discovery of various inscriptions and coins.⁴⁴ Abdul Momin Chowdhury and Chitta Ranjan Misra have studied the Sena rule as one royal parasol which, in a way, opened up the process for the integration of the sub-regions of

³⁹ Chakravarti, 'State Formation', pp.857-98.

⁴⁰ Furui, 'Variegated Adaptations', pp.73-74.

⁴¹ Abdul Momin Chowdhury, 'Threshold of Regional Political Identity', in *The History of Bangladesh: Early Bengal in Regional Perspectives (up to c.1200 CE)*, eds. Abdul Momin Chowdhury and Ranabir Chakravarti, Vol.I., (Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh,2018), pp.529-50.

⁴² Abdul Momin Chowdhury, 'Pāla Realm: Making of a regional political power', in *The History of Bangladesh: Early Bengal in Regional Perspectives (up to c.1200 CE)*, eds. Abdul Momin Chowdhury and Ranabir Chakravarti, Vol.I., (Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh,2018), pp.691-816.

⁴³ Sanyal, 'The Pāla-Sena', pp.165-203.

⁴⁴ Shariful Islam, 'Emerging Political entities in south-east Bengal (Vaṅga-Samatata-Harikela)', in *The History of Bangladesh: Early Bengal in Regional Perspectives (up to c.1200 CE)*, eds. Abdul Momin Chowdhury and Ranabir Chakravarti, Vol.I., (Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh,2018), pp.551-671.

western (parts of Puṇḍra, Gauḍa and Rāḍha) and eastern (Vaṅga, Samatāṭa and Harikela) Bengal.⁴⁵ The sub-regional identity of Samatāṭa-Harikela has been highlighted by Suchandra Ghosh.⁴⁶

We may now turn our attention toward the prior literature on the trends of studying the social structure of early medieval Bengal. Here, the first mention may be made of Ramesh Chandra Majumdar who has edited the first volume of *The History of Bengal*. This work may be borrowed to structure the general socio-economic-political framework of Bengal since the early times.⁴⁷ Nihar Ranjan Ray's *Bāṅgālīr Itihas: Ādi parba* threw light on an overall framework about the State, polity and economy; social structure, social strata, the elite class, their language and literature of Bengal from very early times.⁴⁸ Ryosuke Furui has further highlighted the social structure of Bengal. He framed the rural society of early medieval Bengal into four layers from 400 CE to 13th century CE, determined by the power relations depending on control over land by the king, his subordinate rulers, the landed magnets and the cultivators.⁴⁹ Ryosuke Furui has again interpreted some aspects of rural society, social networks and integration and their internal relationship in early medieval Bengal from the 5th to the 13th century.⁵⁰

Authors do have different takes on various social issues. Suchandra Ghosh and Sayantani Pal threw light on everyday life in early Bengal up to c. 1300 CE. They illumined the life of elite, non-elite groups and the people of the lower strata of the society according to the varied sub-regions of Bengal.⁵¹ Ryosuke Furui has highlighted the regional features of varṇa-jāti system in Bengal during 5th-13th century from epigraphic and textual sources and connected the process with agrarian expansion and the emergence of state-polity at regional and local levels.⁵²

⁴⁵ Abdul Momin Chowdhury and Chitta Ranjan Misra, 'The Sena Rule: Towards the integration of sub-regions', in *The History of Bangladesh: Early Bengal in Regional Perspectives (up to c.1200 CE)*, eds. Abdul Momin Chowdhury and Ranabir Chakravarti, Vol.I., (Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh,2018), pp. 833-56.

⁴⁶ Ghosh, 'The Trans-Meghna Region', pp.220-31; Ghosh and Pal, 'Political Geography and Locational Importance', pp.78-96.

⁴⁷ Majumdar, *The History of Bengal*, pp.1-3.

⁴⁸ Ray, *Bangalir Itihas*, p.6.

⁴⁹ Furui, *Land and Society*, pp.1-2.

⁵⁰ Furui, *Rural Society*, pp.1-2.

⁵¹ Ghosh and Pal, 'Everyday Life', pp.3-6.

⁵² Furui, 'Social Life', pp. 46-47.

Society is usually determined by the variable position of people and their relationships and interaction in the social sphere. Thus, various social communities and their stratification according to the different sub-regions of Bengal as well as their modified forms have been discussed by several scholars. Among them, Chitrarekha Gupta attempted to understand the position and development of the kāyasthas- as an evolution of the writers' class from the 9th century onwards.⁵³ Dr. Puspa Niyogi attempted to construct the rise and developments of the brāhmaṇas in early Bengal from the early times to the early medieval period.⁵⁴ Reference may be made to Ryosuke Furui who has studied the brāhmaṇas & how they acquired a clearer identity as a social group through network building and established their authority in the royal court and rural society.⁵⁵ From this overall social structure, we may borrow the position of various social communities to understand the concerned literate society and the people associated with it.

Political ambiance since the 5th-6th-century C.E:

From the first half of the fifth century, the umpteen inscriptions of Kumāragupta I and his successors attested the Gupta rule in Puṇḍravardhana.⁵⁶ Before that, it was assumed that during the reign of Samudragupta and Candragupta II, the Gupta rule expanded in western Bengal and towards the coastal areas of Bengal afterward as evidenced by the Susuniya rock inscription of

⁵³ Gupta, *The Kāyasthas*, pp.1-4.

⁵⁴ Niyogi, *Brahmanic Settlements*, p. i.

⁵⁵ Furui, 'Brāhmaṇas in early medieval Bengal', p. 223.

⁵⁶ Radhagovinda Basak, 'Dhanaidaha copper plate Inscription of the time of Kumāragupta I: the year 113', *Epigraphia Indica*, vol.XVII, 1923, pp.345-351; Niradbandhu Sanyal, 'Sultanpur Copper plate Inscription', *Epigraphia Indica*, 1955, Vol.XXXI, pp.57-66; Niradbandhu Sanyal, 'The Five Damodarpur copper plate Inscriptions of the Gupta period', *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. XV, 1982, pp.129-141; D.C. Sircar, 'Jagadishpur Plate, Gupta year 128', *Epigraphic Discoveries in East Pakistan*, Calcutta, 1973, pp.61-63; D.C. Sircar, 'Baigram copper plate Inscription of the Gupta year 128', *Epigraphia Indica*, vol.XXI, 1931, pp.78-83; Arlo Griffiths, 'Conflicting Land Transactions in the Kuddālakhāta Settlement: A Copperplate Inscription of the Gupta year 159', *Pratna Samikshā*, Vol.6, Kolkata, 2015, pp.15-38; K.N. Dikshit, 'Paharpur copper plate grant of the Gupta year 159', *Epigraphia Indica*, vol.XX, 1983, pp.56-67; N.G. Majumdar, 'Nandapur copper plate of the Gupta year 169', *Epigraphia Indica*, vol.23, 1940, pp.54-55.

Candravarman and Mehrauli iron pillar inscription.⁵⁷ Under the successors of Candragupta II, northern Bengal and parts of West Bengal (Rāḍha and Gauḍa) were under the firm control of the Guptas.⁵⁸ Meanwhile, in Samatāṭa the copperplate grant of mahārāja maheśvara Nāthacandra as a subordinate king under the Guptas, dated 91 GE attests to the rise of political power there which grew into a semi-independent rule under Vainyagupta as evidenced from the copied grant of mahārājā Nāthacandra by the latter and his Gunaighar copperplate.⁵⁹ However, after the Gupta rule, small-scale rulers emerged in Bengal who spread across the whole region with their localized territories. These rulers include Pradyumnabandhu, Dharmāditya, Dvādaśāditya, Gopacandra and Samācāradeva, Śaśāṅka, Nāthas, Rātas, Khaḍgas and early Devas. Following the trend of the Gupta administrative policy, these sub-regional governing rulers adapted their state policy in diverse forms in their small territorial realm. Due to the lack of adequate sources, it is difficult to determine their chronological order. Yet, through the inscriptions and coins published in recent times, we get a fairly clear idea about their geographical locations and administrative divisions. Gradually, from the 8th century onwards, Bengal saw the rise of large-scale dynasties who built their kingdom across a large area of Bengal. They include the Pālas, Candras, Senas, Varmans, Devas, etc. They developed their individuality in their political framework. Even if they build their wide range of bureaucracy, their structural model is identically formed since the 6th century C.E.

⁵⁷ D.C. Sircar, 'Susuniya rock inscription of Candrarvarman', *Select Inscriptions*, Vol. I, 1942, pp.341-42; D.C. Sircar, 'Mehrauli Iron pillar inscription of Chandra', *Select Inscriptions*, Vol. I, 1942, pp.275-77.

⁵⁸ Abdul Momin Chowdhury, 'Bengal and the Gupta realm', in *The History of Bangladesh: Early Bengal in Regional Perspectives (up to c.1200 CE)*, eds. Abdul Momin Chowdhury and Ranabir Chakravarti, Vol.I., (Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh,2018), p.518.

⁵⁹ Ryosuke Furui, 'Ajīvikas, Manibhadra and Early History of Eastern Bengal: A New Copperplate Inscription of Vainyagupta and its Implications', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, September 2015, pp.1-25; Dinesh Chandra Bhattacharya, 'A Newly discovered copper-plate from Tippera', *Indian Historical Quarterly*, Vol.VI, 1930, pp.45-60; Dines Chandra Sircar, ed., 'Gunaighar copper plate Inscription of Vainyagupta', *Select Inscriptions*, Vol. I, 1942, pp.331-334.

Pradyumnabandhu:

A previously unrecorded king mahārājādhiraḥ Pradyumnabandhu ruled in Puṇḍravardhana between 550- 650 CE as recorded in a new copperplate inscription found there.⁶⁰

Dharmāditya, Dvādaśāditya, Gopacandra and Samācāradeva:

Mention may be made of Dharmāditya, Dvādaśāditya, Gopacandra and Samācāradeva group of rulers. Their extension of political authority from the second quarter of the 6th century CE to the latter half of the 6th century was reflected in their copperplates. Three copperplates have been discovered from Kotalipara in the present Gopalganj district of Bangladesh.⁶¹ Among those three, two copper plates have been issued under the name of Dharmāditya and the other one was issued under the name of Gopacandra.⁶² Gopacandra's copperplates have also been found at Jayarampur village of Balasore district and Mallasarul of the Burdwan district.⁶³ Two of his gold coins have been found at Samataṭa bearing the legend 'gopa'.⁶⁴ Another copperplate was discovered from Ramashila village under Kotalipara police station in Gopalganj district under the name of

⁶⁰ Arlo Griffiths, 'Sale deed of the village Mastakaśvabhra issued under Pradyumnabandhu, regnal year 5', *Pratna Samiksha*, Vol.6, 2015, pp.27-38.

⁶¹ Islam, 'Emerging Political entities', p.563.

⁶² F.E. Pargiter, 'Three copper plate Grants from East Bengal: Grant of the time of Dharmāditya', *The Indian Antiquary*, vol. XXXIX, 1985, pp.193-205; Dines Chandra Sircar, ed., 'Faridpur Copper Plate Inscription of Dharmāditya- Regnal year 3', *Select Inscriptions*, Vol.I, 1942, pp.350-53.

F.E. Pargiter, 'Second Grant of the time of Dharmāditya,' *The Indian Antiquary*, Vol. XXXIX, 1985, pp.199-202; Dines Chandra Sircar, ed., 'Faridpur Copper-plate Inscription of the time of Dharmāditya', *Select Inscriptions*, Vol.I, 1942, pp.354-56.

F.E. Pargiter, 'Grant of the time of Gopacandra: the year 19', *The Indian Antiquary*, vol. XXXIX, 1985, pp.203-05; Dines Chandra Sircar, ed., 'The Faridpur Copper Plate Inscription of the time of Gopacandra- Regnal year 18', *Select Inscriptions*, Vol.I, 1942, pp.370-72.

⁶³ Snigdha Tripathy, 'Jayarampur copper plate grant of the time of Gopacandra, year 1', *Inscriptions of Orissa*, vol.I, 1998, pp.174-79; N.G. Majumdar, 'Mallasarul copper plate of Vijayasena', *Epigraphia Indica*, vol.23, 1940, pp.372-77; Dines Chandra Sircar, ed., 'Mallasarul Copper Plate Inscription (of Vijayasena) of the time of Gopacandra', *Select Inscriptions*, Vol.I, 1942, pp.359-64.

⁶⁴ Islam, 'Emerging Political entities', p.570.

‘Mahārājādhiarāja Śrī- Dvādaśāditya’⁶⁵. Some gold coins have also been issued by him.⁶⁶ Three Gupta imitation gold coins—two under the name of Sudhanyā and one under the name of Sudhanyāditya have also been preserved at the British Museum.⁶⁷ Apart from this, some gold coins have been discovered in Sabhar, Dhaka, Kotalipara, Faridpur, and Comilla districts.⁶⁸ Another copper plate discovered in Ghugrahati, a village under the Kotalipara police station of Gopalganj district was issued under the name of Samācāradeva⁶⁹. Another of his unpublished copperplate was found at Kurapala, a village in the Faridpur district.⁷⁰ The provenances of these copperplates and coins evidenced their rule mainly over the Vaṅga region which according to Amitabha Bhattacharya comprised eastern Bengal.⁷¹ Among these rulers, Gopacandra had a wider extent of the political domain. He extended his territory in Vardhamāna bhukti and Daṇḍabhukti of Rāḍha. Odisha and Samatāṭa were also possibly included within his kingdom as evidenced by the provenance of his copperplates and coins.

The chronology and political affiliations of these rulers are difficult to determine. In this case, with the reference to Shariful Islam, it can be said that Dvādaśāditya and Dharmāditya’s copperplates were very similar according to their writing style, a common source in Kotalipara, the common royal seal of Gajalaksmī, a common legend of Vārakamaṇḍala-*viṣayādihikaraṇasya* and so many other aspects.⁷² Hence, according to recent studies, Dvādaśāditya and Dharmāditya were kings of a single group and Sudhanyāditya was also considered to be in the same line of rulers because of the common name ending ‘Āditya’.⁷³ Samacāradeva has generally been accepted as the last king

⁶⁵ Shariful Islam, ‘Kotalipada Copper-plate of Dvādaśāditya’, *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh*, Vol.53, 2011, pp.72-82; Ryosuke Furui, ‘The Kotalipada Copper-plate Inscription of the time of Dvādaśāditya’, *Pratna Samiksha*, vol.4, 2013, pp.89-98.

⁶⁶ Islam, ‘Emerging Political entities’, p.564.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* p.565.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* p.565.

⁶⁹ Nalinikanta Bhattasali, ‘The Ghugrahati Copper Plate Inscription of Samāchāra-deva’, *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol.XVIII, 1983, pp.74-86; Nalinikanta Bhattasali, ‘The Ghugrāhāti Copper Plate Inscription of Samāchāra-deva and Connected Questions of Later Gupta Chronology’, *Dacca Review*, vol.10, No.2 and 3, May and June 1920, p.55.

⁷⁰ Islam, ‘Emerging Political entities’, p.565.

⁷¹ Bhattacharya, *Historical Geography*, pp.132-33.

⁷² Islam, ‘Emerging Political entities’, p.565.

⁷³ *Ibid.* p.569.

of this line.⁷⁴ Gopacandra on the other hand was ascertained to be in a different lineage of a king because of the dissimilarities in writing style between his copperplate and the plates of Dvādaśāditya and Dharmāditya.⁷⁵ He was the most powerful among the post-Gupta rulers who probably came after Dharmāditya and before Samacāradeva.⁷⁶

Śaśānka:

Śaśānka emerged as an independent ruler in Gauḍa and Magadha in the first quarter of the 7th c. CE, which marked the beginning of the independent political identity of Bengal as a region. His sovereign rise was attested by textual references as well as inscriptions and coins.⁷⁷ He had started his career as a feudatory under the later Gupta ruler Mahāsenagupta and by taking advantage of the weakness of the later Guptas, he declared independence and started his reign as the ruler of Gauḍa before 606 CE.⁷⁸ Śaśānka of Gauḍa defines his close association with Gauḍa. The perimeter of Śaśānka's rule meant Gauḍa. Bāṇabhatta in his *Harṣacarita* referred to Śaśānka as 'Gauḍādhipa' and castigated him as 'Gauḍabhujāṅga'.⁷⁹ Gauḍa was mainly meant to refer to West Bengal, which originally comprised Murshidabad and Birbhum. Burdwan district was later included in it. Amitabha Bhattacharya evinced that during Śaśānka's reign, Gauḍa extended its territorial limit

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* p.569.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* p.569.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* p.569.

⁷⁷ Samuel Beal, trans. *Si-Yu-Ki Buddhist Records of the Western World*, London, 1906, 2nd ed. 1983; Samuel Beal, *The Life of Hiuen Tsiang by the Shaman Hwui Li*, London, 1911, 2nd ed. Reprint, New Delhi, 1973; Thomas Watters, trans. *On Yuan Chwang's Travels in India*, eds. T.W.Rhys Davids and S.W.Bushell, London, 1904-05, 2 vols. Bound in 1, Indian ed. Delhi, 2004; D.Devahuti, *The Unknown Hsuan Tsang*, New Delhi, 2001; Upinder Singh, *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India*, New Delhi, 2009, p.563; Kāśināth Pāṇḍurang Parab, *The Harṣacharita of Bāṇabhaṭṭa*, 4th edition, (Bombay: Nirnay Sāgar Press, 1918); Kane, *The Harṣacarita*; Prabodhendunath Thakur, trans. *Harṣacarita*, Kolkata, July, 1978, Second Impression, July, 1986; Jytibhusna Chaki and Abani Acharya, ed. and trans. *Harṣacarita*, Sanskrita Sahityasambhara, No.18, Kolkata, 1987; E.B.Cowell & F.W.Thomas, trans. *The Harṣacarita of Bāṇa*, London, 1897; T.Ganapati Sastri, ed. *Ārya-Maṅju-Śrī-Mūlakalpa*, Sanskrit Series No. LXX, Trivandrum, 1920; R.C. Majumdar, 'Two Copper Plates of Śaśānka from Midnapore: Text No. II', *Journal of The Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal Letters*, Vol. XI, No.1, 1945, pp.1-9; D.C., Sircar, ed., 'Egra Plate of the time of Śaśānka', *Epigraphia Indica*, vol.XL, 1974, p.38; D.C.Sircar., 'Śaśānker Śāśanakālin Egrā Tāmrapatra', *Śilalekha Tāmraśāsanādir Prasaṅga*, 1982, pp.59-64; Ryosuke Furui, 'Panchrol (Egra) Copper-plate Inscription of the time of Śaśānka', *Pratna Samiksha*, New Series, vol.2, 2011, pp.119-30.

⁷⁸ Chowdhury, 'Threshold', p.532.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* p.532.

up to north Bengal (Puṇḍra), parts of Magadha and in the southwest as far as the Ganjam district in Orissa.⁸⁰ Gauḍa came under Śaśāṅka's dominion by the last quarter of the 6th century CE. Two Midnapore copper plates and one Egra copperplate inscription of Śaśāṅka evidenced his rule in the district of Midnapore.⁸¹ His two feudatories' Śubhakīrti and Somadatta's rule in the sub-region of Daṇḍabhukti and Utkala stretched Śaśāṅka's rule up to Vardhamāna bhukti, northern and southern Orissa (Daṇḍabhukti and Kaṅgoda).⁸²

Abdul Momin Chowdhury stated that feudatory Jayanāga, a probable successor of Śaśāṅka, can be traced back sometime between 550 and 650 CE.⁸³ He was a resident of Karṇasuvarṇa and the land granted in his copper plate was a village Vappaghosavata.⁸⁴ Both were located in the Murshidabad district. It has been suggested by scholars that Jayanāga ruled between Śaśāṅka's reign and Bhāskarvarman's conquest of Karṇasuvarṇa.

After Śaśāṅka, possibly Karṇasuvarṇa witnessed the reign of Bhāskarvarman for a short period, as evidenced from his Nidhanpur copper plate.⁸⁵ According to Shariful Islam, Bhāskarvarman occupied south-eastern Bengal and stretched his rule up to Karṇasuvarṇa.⁸⁶ Hence, he was considered the overlord of the Rāta and Nātha rulers.⁸⁷

Rātas:

Southeastern Bengal saw the emergence of some synchronous line of rulers. Among them, the Nāthas and the Rātas were subordinate rulers of the Varmans. Their overlord was apparently Bhāskarvarman as mentioned above. The Rātas established their supremacy during the middle to

⁸⁰ Bhattacharya, *Historical Geography*, p.86.

⁸¹ Majumdar, 'Two Copper Plates of Śaśāṅka: Text No.II', pp.1-9 ; Sircar, 'Egra Plate', p.38; Sircar, 'Śaśāṅker Śāśanakālin Egrā Tāmrapatra', pp.59-64; Furui, 'Panchrol (Egra) Copper-plate', pp.119-30.

⁸² Majumdar, 'Two Copper Plates of Śaśāṅka', pp.1-9; Bhattacharya, *Historical Geography*, p.132.

⁸³ Chowdhury, 'Pāla Realm', p.692.

⁸⁴ D. Lionel Barnett, 'Vappaghoshavata Grant of Jayanāga', *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. XVIII, 1983, p.63.

⁸⁵ Bhattacharya, 'Nidhanpur Copper Plates', pp.65-79; Bhattacharya, *Kāmrūpa Śāsanābali*, pp.1-43.

⁸⁶ Islam, 'Emerging Political entities', p.571.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* p.571.

the last quarter of the 7th century CE. Two of their copperplates have been discovered so far.⁸⁸ The Kailan copperplate was discovered in the village Kalian of the present Comilla district (former Tippera) of Bangladesh.⁸⁹ The Uḍiśvara Copper plate is a newly discovered copper plate found in Uḍiśvara village of the Comilla district issued by the king Śrīdhāraṇa Rāta⁹⁰. Apart from this, some Gupta archer-type gold coins bearing the legend ‘Śrī-Jīva’ has been found which have been attributed to Jīvadhāraṇa Rāta, who captured Samatata and issued these coins as an independent ruler.⁹¹ Śrīdhāraṇarāta’s gold coins, found in the Vaṅga, Śrihaṭṭa and Tippera, extended the Rāta rule in a widespread area of south-eastern Bengal. They were the lord of Samatata as evidenced by the epithet ‘Samatateśvara Jīvadhāraṇarāta bhaṭṭarakasya’ used in the Kailan copperplate.⁹² Shariful Islam’s view is that Jīvadhāraṇarāta was a contemporary and possible rival of Loknātha and the first ruler of this dynasty.⁹³ Jīvadhāraṇarāta is believed to have established himself as a sovereign ruler by repudiating the overlordship of the Varmans. He subjugated a group of powerful feudal kings because of which he was referred to as ‘Pratāponotosāmantacakrasya’.⁹⁴ The most familiar and renowned ruler of this dynasty was Śrīdhāraṇarāta. Another member of this royal family was Baladhāraṇa Rāta, mentioned as a yuvarāja or crown prince.⁹⁵

Nāthas:

The Nātha realm has been unveiled from the discovery of two copper plates.⁹⁶ A list of Nātha rulers has been portrayed in the Tippera copperplate. The fourth ruler of this dynasty Lokanātha

88 Shariful Islam, ‘Uḍiśvara Copper-plate of Śrīdhāraṇa Rāta’, *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh*, Vol.57, No.1, June 2012, pp.61-72.

89 Narendra Nath Law, ed., ‘The Kailan Copper plate Inscription of king Śrīdhāraṇa Rāta of Samatata’, *The Indian Historical Quarterly*, Vol.XXIII, No.1, 1947, p.221.

90 Islam, ‘Uḍiśvara Copper-plate’, pp. 61-72.

91 Islam, ‘Emerging Political Entities’, p.572.

92 Law, ‘The Kailan Copper plate’, lines 9-10, p.238.

93 Islam, ‘Emerging Political Entities’, p.573.

94 Law, ‘The Kailan Copper plate’, line 9, p.238.

95 Islam, ‘Emerging Political Entities’, p.577.

96 Radhagovinda Basak, ‘Tipperah Copper Plate Grant of Lokanātha’, *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol.XV, 1982, pp.301-315; Dasaratha Sharma, ‘Śrī-Jīvadhāraṇa of the Tippera Copper plate Grant of Lokanātha’, *Indian Historical Quarterly*, Vol.XI, 1935, pp.326-27; Dines Chandra Sircar, ed., ‘Tipperah copper plate Inscription of Lokanātha’, *Select Inscriptions*, Vol.II, 1983, pp.28-35; K.

belonged to the middle of the seventh century CE. According to Shariful Islam, he was considered a powerful feudal lord.⁹⁷ It is generally considered that Jivadhāraṇārāta fought against him but was not able to defeat him.⁹⁸ His rule has been located in the Tipperah district which falls in the geographical division of Samataṭa. Maruṇḍanātha was considered as one of the rulers of the Nātha's realm. The provenance of his Kalapur copper plate in the village Kalapur under the jurisdiction of Srimangal police station in the Maulavi Bazar sub-division of the Sylhet district indicates his rule in the Sylhet region.⁹⁹ Although he was a member of this royal family, the exact relationship between Lokanātha and him was obscure.

Khaḍgas:

It is believed that the Khaḍgas had displaced the Rātas from their dominion. The political history of the Khaḍgas is conceivable from the discovery of two Ashrafpur copperplates found in the Ashrafpur village of Dacca district¹⁰⁰ and copperplates found at Salban Vihāra in Mainamati.¹⁰¹ Some gold and silver coins of the Khaḍga dynasty have also been discovered in Mainamati and Comilla region.¹⁰² The Ashrafpur copperplates were issued from the place called Jayakarmāntavāsaka.¹⁰³ Shariful Islam asserted that Karmānta was a place situated somewhere near Devaparvata of Samataṭa region.¹⁰⁴ The Khaḍgas also ruled in the area of the Dacca district

K. Gupta, ed., *Copper Plates of Sylhet*, vol.1, 1967, 68-80; D.C. Sircar, 'Kalapur Plate assigned to Sāmanta Maruṇḍanātha', *Epigraphic Discoveries in East Pakistan*, Calcutta, 1973, pp.14-18.

⁹⁷ Islam, 'Emerging Political Entities', p.580.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.* p.581.

⁹⁹ Sircar, 'Kalapur Plate', p.14.

¹⁰⁰ Ganga Mohan Laskar, 'Ashrafpur Copper Plate Grants of Devakhaḍga', *Memoirs of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. I, No.6, 1906, pp.85-91.

¹⁰¹ M. Harunur Rashid, 'The Mainamati Inscriptions', in *Hakim Habibur Rahman Khan Commemoration Volume*, ed. E. Haque, Dhaka, 2001, p.201; K.M. Gupta, 'Two Mainamati Copper-plate Inscriptions of the Khaḍga and Early Deva times', *Bangladesh Archaeology*, Dacca 1979, pp.141-43; Rajendra lal Mitra, 'On a copper-plate Inscription from Dacca', *Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 1885, pp.49-55; M. Harunur Rashid, 'Mainamati Copper-plate Inscriptions of Khaḍga ruler Balabhaṭṭa', in *Hakim Habibur Rahman Khan Commemoration Volume*, ed. E. Haque, Dhaka, 2001, p.202.

¹⁰² Islam, 'Emerging Political Entities', p.583.

¹⁰³ Laskar, 'Ashrafpur Copper Plate', p.86.

¹⁰⁴ Islam, 'Emerging Political Entities', p.592.

of East Bengal. This Dacca division falls into the Vaṅga region. Some parts of Śrihaṭṭa, Tippera, Sabhar, Kotalipara, Noakhali, Comilla and Kāmṛūpa were also included in their reign as is evidenced from their coins found in those places.¹⁰⁵ Khaḍgodyama was the first ruler and founder of this dynasty. The other rulers were Jātakhaḍga, Devakhaḍga, and Rājarāja. Devaparvata was the capital of Devakhaḍga as evidenced by his copperplates. It was believed that there were three other rulers of this dynasty-Balabhāṭa, Prthubhāṭa, and Sarbabhāṭa.¹⁰⁶ The Khaḍgas have ruled from the beginning of the 7th century CE to the first half of the 8th century.¹⁰⁷

Early Devas:

By displacing the Khaḍgas, the Devas came to power at the end of the 8th century and the first half of the 9th century CE.¹⁰⁸ The history of the early devas has been revealed from two copperplates of Bhavadeva and Ānandadeva,¹⁰⁹ gold coins, terracotta sealings, and archaeological remains.¹¹⁰ Their copperplates and gold coins have been found in Vaṅga-Samatāṭa regions. The early Deva rulers were Śāntideva, Vīradeva, Ānandadeva, and Bhavadeva. Ānandadeva, being the most popular among them, shifted his capital from Devaparvata to Vasantapura.¹¹¹ He was a sovereign ruler as reflected in his epithets ‘Parameśvara, Paramabhāṭṭāraka, Mahārājādhirāja and Vaṅgāla-mṛgāṅka’.¹¹² Later, Bhavadeva again shifted his capital to Devaparvata as evidenced by his copperplate issued from Devaparvata on the kshīrodā river.¹¹³ The royal epithet ‘Abhinavamṛgāṅka’ had been attached to his name. They protected their kingdom from external attack and during their rule, the prosperity of Samatāṭa had reached its highest peak.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* p.553.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* p.594.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.* p.594.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.* p.601.

¹⁰⁹ Dines Chandra Sircar, ed., ‘Copper-plate Inscription of Bhavadeva Abhinavamṛgāṅka (c.765-80 AD)’, *Select Inscriptions*, Vol.II, 1983, pp.744-50; D.C. Sircar, ‘Copper-plate Inscription of king Bhavadeva of Devaparvata’, *Journal of the Asiatic Society, Letters*, Vol.XVII, No.2, 1951, pp.83-95; Kamalakanta Gupta, ‘Mainamati copper-plate of Ānandadeva-Bhavadeva’, *Journal of Bangladesh Archaeology*, No.3, 1979, pp.145-48; Rashid, ‘The Mainamati Inscriptions’, pp.212-13.

¹¹⁰ Islam, ‘Emerging Political Entities’, p.596.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.* p.553.

¹¹² *Ibid.* p.599.

¹¹³ Sircar, ‘Copper-plate Inscription of Bhavadeva Abhinavamṛgāṅka’, p.744.

Pālas:

Bengal, during the anarchical state of law, witnessed the rise of Gopāla, chosen by the feudal lords, and the emergence of the extensive Pāla kingdom.¹¹⁴ They established their supremacy in Gauḍa, Rāḍha, and Puṇḍra in Bengal and the sub-regions of Magadha and Mithila in Bihar. They also claimed to have ruled over Vaṅga and Samatāṭa. However, this cannot be proved beyond reasonable doubt as their contemporaries in Vaṅga, Samatāṭa and Harikela ruled independently. Gopāla established his rule in the north and north-western Bengal. Magadha had also been added to his realm. Regarding Dharmapāla, his copperplates locate the provenance of his ruling zone. The Khalimpur copperplate of Dharmapāla was discovered in the village Khalimpur, near Gauḍa in the Malda district.¹¹⁵ This charter records the grant of four villages within the Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti. His Indian Museum copperplate was found in the place Karṇasuvārṇa and was issued from Jayskandhāvāra at Mudgagiri (Munger in Bihar) to grant land in Koṭivarṣa Viṣaya within Puṇḍravardhana bhukti.¹¹⁶ The Nalanda copperplate of Dharmapāla was unearthed at Nālandā, in Patna district.¹¹⁷ This records the grant of village Uttarāma near the village of Nigūha in the Gayā viṣaya of the Nagara bhukti within the Jambūnadī Vīthī. This nagara bhukti has been identified with modern Patna. Dharmapāla, for the time being, succeeded in pushing forward his influence as far as Kanauj by involving himself in the tripartite struggle with the Rāṣṭrakūṭas and Pratīhāras. During the time of Devapāla, Utkala, Prāgjyotiṣa of Kāmarūpa (Assam), Nepal and Kāamboja in the north-west had come under his control as evidenced by his Munger copperplate.¹¹⁸ In terms of Utkala, Abdul Momin Chowdhury stated that Devapāla invaded and conquered Odisha.¹¹⁹ Prāgjyotiṣa also accepted the Pāla suzerainty. His control over Nepal and Kamboja in the northwest implied his steady conflict with Tibet.¹²⁰ Besides, his copperplates also portrayed the position of

¹¹⁴ Rajat Sanyal highlighted the dynastic history and the chronological problems of the Pālas. Sanyal, 'The Pala-Sena', pp.171-93.

¹¹⁵ Kielhorn, 'Khalimpur Plate', p.243.

¹¹⁶ Ryosuke Furui, 'Indian Museum Copperplate Inscription of Dharmapāla, year 26: Tentative Reading and Study', *South Asian Studies* 27, no.2, 2011, pp.145-56.

¹¹⁷ P.N. Bhattacharya, 'Nalanda Plate of Dharmapāladeva', *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol XXIII, 1940, pp.290-92.

¹¹⁸ D. Lionel Barnett, 'The Mungir plate of Devapāladeva: Samvat 33', *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. XVIII, 1983, pp.305-07.

¹¹⁹ Chowdhury, 'Pāla Realm', p.724.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.* p.726.

his reigning area. His Nalanda copperplate was issued from Mudgagiri (modern Monghyr in Bihar).¹²¹ This charter records the grant of five villages in Gayā Viṣaya. Varanasi became a part of the Pāla Empire during his reign. The Ramganj copperplate of Īśvaraghoṣa during the reign of Devapāla was issued from the place called Dhekkarī.¹²² This place was identified with a place in Goalpārā and Kāmarūpa of Assam.¹²³ Dharmapāla and Devapāla both consolidated their position in the north and north-western Bengal and Bihar. During the reign of Devapāla's son Mahendrapāla, he was able to sustain the Pāla kingdom in north Bengal and parts of Bihar. His Jagajjibanpur Copper Plate, as the most significant evidence of the Pāla Empire, was discovered in the village of Jagajjibanpur in Habibpur police Station in Sadar sub-division of Malda district in West Bengal.¹²⁴ His own brother Śūrapāla established his separate reign in parts of Bihar and the eastern part of Uttar Pradesh. The Mirzapur copperplate of Śūrapāla was found in Mirzapur, Uttar Pradesh, and records the grant of some villages in Varanasi.¹²⁵ Afterward, Nārāyaṇapāla had possession of the whole Pāla Empire in Bengal and Bihar mostly concentrated in Magadha (Patna and Gaya districts) including Aṅga (Munger and Bhagalpur districts) and northern Bengal.¹²⁶ His Bhagalpur copperplate was found at Bhagalpur and was issued from Mudgagiri.¹²⁷ During Nārāyaṇapāla's reign, he was not powerful enough to hold the entire Pāla Empire. After this, during the weak reign of Gopāla III and Vighrahapāla II, the Kāmbojas carved out for themselves an independent kingdom in portions of northwestern and northern Bengal.¹²⁸ The eroded territories had been recaptured by Mahīpāla the first, son of 2nd Vighrahapāla in northern Bengal and the northern portion of western Bengal along with the prepossessed Magadha. He recovered northern Rāḍha and northern Bengal from the kāmbojas. After Mahīpāla I, Nayapāla ruled in the areas of

¹²¹ Shastri, 'The Nalanda Copper-plate', p.310.

¹²² N. G. Majumdar, 'Ramganj Copperplate of Īśvaraghoṣa', *Inscriptions of Bengal*, Vol.III, 1929, p.150.

¹²³ *Ibid.* p.151.

¹²⁴ K.V. Ramesh and S. Subramoniya Iyer, 'The Jagjivanpur Copperplate', *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol.XLII, 1992, p.6.

¹²⁵ Dinesh Chandra Sarkar, 'Pratham Surapaler Tamrashashan', *Silalekha Tamrashashanadir Prasanga*, 1982, pp.77-80.

¹²⁶ Chowdhury, 'Pāla Realm', p.749.

¹²⁷ D.C. Sircar, ed. "Bhagalpur Copper-plate Inscription of Nārāyaṇapāla (c.855-910 A.D.), Regnal year 17", *Select Inscriptions bearing on Indian History and Civilization*, vol. II, pp.80-86.

¹²⁸ Chowdhury, 'Pāla Realm', p.755.

northern and western Bengal and southern Bihar. During Vighrahapāla the 3rd's realm, many feudal lords started to emerge as independent rulers and some independent clans developed. Several expeditions were sent to the centres of the Pāla regime. Abdul Momin Chowdhury interpreted that Kalacuri king Lakṣmīkarṇa invaded Pāla Empire and entered into a marriage alliance by marrying his daughter to Vighrahapāla.¹²⁹ Cālukya king Vikramāditya the 6th of Kalyāṇa made an expedition during his reign.¹³⁰ Orissa's king Udyatakeśarī and Mahāśivagupta made a campaign in the Gauḍa-Rāḍha-Vaṅga.¹³¹ The Varmans also established their independent realm in eastern Bengal. In this fragile state of the kingdom, during the reign of Mahīpāla II, Pāla Empire was confined to parts of Bihar and Northern Bengal. This is the period when Kaivarta king Divya captured Varendra and dethroned the king. It is believed that this was a concerted effort by some important chieftains in North Bengal to overthrow the weak Pāla power.¹³² In this case, Ryosuke Furui had tried to depict the switching model of a land grant by the Pāla ruler behind this outrage.¹³³ The way in which the land donations were made on the petition of subordinate rulers was an indirect indicator of their social status. This land grant process was changed and was then exclusively granted to the Brahmins directly. This aggravated status of the subordinate rulers and enhanced demand of the brāhmaṇas was possibly the reason behind their revolt. His brother Rāmpāla united the independent feudals of Bengal against the contemporary Kaivarta king Bhīma and dethroned him from Varendra. He recaptured some parts of Orissa, won Kāmarūpa, and at the same time accepted the adherence of Varman king Harivarman and Cola king Kulattuṅga. The success did not last long as Kumārapāla lost the sovereignty of Kāmarūpa at the hands of his commander Vaidyadeva. 'Parameśvara Paramabhaṭṭāraka Mahārājādhirāja' Vaidyadeva issued the Kamauli copperplate inscription, which records the grant of two villages in Prāgjyotiṣa Bhukti of Kāmarūpa Maṇḍala.¹³⁴ The last known king of the Pāla kingdom was Madanapāla who usurped the throne after the 2nd regal year of Gopāla IV. They had a simultaneous reign for about 15 years and after that, Madanapāla continued for a few more years as evidenced by the Rajibpur copperplate inscription

¹²⁹ *Ibid.* p.773.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.* p.774.

¹³¹ *Ibid.* p.775.

¹³² *Ibid.* p.782.

¹³³ Ryosuke Furui, 'Characteristics of Kaivarta Rebellion Delineated from the Rāmacarita', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress, Platinum Jubilee (75th) Session, 2014*, pp.93-97.

¹³⁴ Venis, 'Copper-plate Grant of Vaidyadeva', pp.347-58.

of Gopāla IV and Madanapāla.¹³⁵ He integrated his royal power by his 8th reigning year with the domain of south-eastern Bihar (Munger and parts of Nalanda-Bhagalpur district) and parts of Puṇḍravardhana Bhukti as evidenced by his Manhali grant.¹³⁶ Finally, the small realm of the Pālas had been seized by the Gāhaḍvālas in Bihar and by the Senas in Rāḍha-Vaṅga-Varendrī in Bengal.¹³⁷ Only a part of northern Bengal was held by the Pālas.

Candras:

After the Khaḍgas and Devas, eastern Bengal witnessed the emergence of Candras as a supreme power from the first half of the 10th century to 2nd half of the 11th century CE. They supplanted the early Deva rulers from their territorial zone. They established their rule in Vaṅga. Many inscriptions have been discovered so far to understand the political history of the Candras.¹³⁸

¹³⁵ Ryosuke Furui, 'Rajibpur Copper-plate Inscriptions of Gopāla IV and Madanapāla', *Pratna Samiksha*, Vol. 6, 2015, pp.39-61.

¹³⁶ N.N.Vasu, 'The Manhali Copper-plate Inscription of Madanapāladeva', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. LXIX, Part I, 1901, pp.66-73.

¹³⁷ Chowdhury, 'Pāla Realm', pp.805-06.

¹³⁸ Kamalakanta Gupta, 'Paschimbhag copper-plate of Śrīcandra', *The copper-plates of Sylhet*, Vol.I, 1967, pp.74-94; Kamalakanta Gupta Chowdhury, 'Paschimbhag copper-plate of Sylhet', in A.B.M Habibulla (ed.), *Nalinikanta Bhattasali Commemoration Volume*, Dacca, 1966, p.183; A.H. Dani, 'Sylhet Copper-plate Inscription of Śrīcandra', *Paper read in the Asian Archaeology Conference*, Delhi, 1961; Sircar, 'Paschimbhag plate', pp.19-40, 63-69; Sircar, 'Paschimbhag Copper-plate', pp.92-100; Dines Chandra Sircar, 'Dhulla plate of Śrīcandra', *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. XXXIII, 1963, pp.134-40; Radhagovinda Basak, 'Rampal copper plate grant of Śrīcandradeva', *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XII, 1913, pp.136-42; N.G. Majumdar, 'The Rampal copper-plate', *Inscriptions of Bengal*, Vol.III, 1929, pp.1-9; R.G. Basak, 'Madanpur plate of Śrīcandra', *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XXVIII, 1953, pp.51-58; N.G. Majumdar, 'Kedarpur copper-plate of Śrīcandra', *Inscriptions of Bengal*, Vol.III, 1929, pp.10-13; N.K. Bhattasali, 'Kedarpur copper-plate of Śrīcandra', *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol.XVII, 1923, pp.188-91; A.H. Dani, 'Three Mainamati Candra Copper-plates', *Pakistan Archaeology*, No.3, 1966, pp.22-55; D.C. Sircar, 'Mainamati plates of the Candra Kings', *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol.XXXVIII, part-5, 1970, pp.197-214; D.C. Sircar, 'Two Grants of Laḍahacandra', *Epigraphic Discoveries in East Pakistan*, 1973, pp.45-49; Dinesh Chandra Sarkar, 'Maynamatir Candrabamsiya Tamrashasanatray', *Silalekha Tamrashashanadir Prashnaga*, 1982, pp.143-48; R.K. Sharma, 'Mainamati Candra plates in a new light', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh*, Vol.XVII, No.2, 1948, pp.25-37; D.C. Sircar, 'Govindacandra's Grant', *Epigraphic Discoveries in East Pakistan*, 1973, pp.77-81; N.K. Bhattashali 'Betka Vasudeva Image Inscription of the 23rd year of Govindacandra', *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol.XXVII, 1947, pp.24-26; Dinesh Chandra Sarkar, 'Gobindacandrer Paikpara-Betka Murtilekho', *Silalekha Tamrashashanadir Prashnaga*, 1982, pp.149-53; Bhattashali, 'Betka Vasudeva', *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol.XXVII, 1947, pp.26-27.

Besides, one coin had been published in the name of Kalyāṇacandra.¹³⁹ Pūrṇacandra was the first ruler of this dynasty. His political centre was located in Rohitagiri which was identified by Shariful Islam with a place somewhere between Candradvīpa and Chittagong, located in the Harikela region.¹⁴⁰ Mahārājādhirāja Trailokyocandra was the first sovereign king of this dynasty. He ruled in Vaṅga-Samatāṭa region. Śrīcandra's Paschimbhag copper plate ascertain Trailokyacandra's rule in Harikela and Śrīhaṭṭa-Comilla-Noakhali of Samatāṭa region. It is said that Ākāra kings of Harikela were subordinate allies of Trailokyacandra.¹⁴¹ He was contemporary to the kāmbojas who ruled in north Bengal during the 10th century until the restoration of the territory by Mahīpāla I.¹⁴² The most significant reign among the Candra rulers was Śrīcandra's. His copperplates have been found in the Dhaka-Faridpur region. The provenance of his Paschimbhag copperplate was in the village of Paschimbhag in the Sylhet district of East Pakistan.¹⁴³ Śrīcandra had also donated lands in Śrīhaṭṭa maṇḍala.¹⁴⁴ Mymensingh division was also included within his kingdom.¹⁴⁵ He transferred his capital from Devaparvata to Vikramapura, perhaps for a better system of governance.¹⁴⁶ He sent successful expeditions against the rulers of Gauḍa and Kāmarūpa. He led a successful military campaign against the Kāmboja king of Gauḍa.¹⁴⁷ He also provided military help to Gopāla III to retrieve his lost territories.¹⁴⁸ During Śrīcandra's son Kalyāṇacandra's reign, he defeated the Kāmboja king, which helped in the restoration of the Pāla kingdom by Mahīpāla I.¹⁴⁹ Laḍahacandra and Govindacandra were the last two kings of this dynasty. Three copper plates have been found in Mainamati, one of which belongs to Govindacandra and the other two belong to Laḍahacandra. The widespread Candra dynasty established their large kingdom in the Vaṅga-Samatāṭa region.

¹³⁹ Islam, 'Emerging Political Entities', p.611.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.* p.616.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.* p.618.

¹⁴² *Ibid.* p.622.

¹⁴³ Sircar, 'Paschimbhag plate', p.19.

¹⁴⁴ Sircar, 'Paschimbhag Copper-plate Inscription', p.92.

¹⁴⁵ Islam, 'Emerging Political Entities', p.624.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.* p.625.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.* p.624.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.* p.624.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.* p.627.

Varmans:

Around the 2nd half of the 11th century CE, the Varmans established their supremacy in the south-eastern and eastern Bengal after the Candras. The Varman history can be revealed from their copperplates¹⁵⁰ and two manuscripts: the *Aṣṭasāhasrikāprañjāpāramitā* and the *Laghukalācakraṭīkā*.¹⁵¹ They hailed from Siṃhapura which was located in Kaliṅga.¹⁵² Kalacuri ruler Karṇa invaded Kaliṅga and the Varmans became their active servant.¹⁵³ Hence, the Varmans came to Bengal during Kalacuri's invasion as their subordinate chief. Jātavarman, son of Vajravarman, was the first king of this dynasty. He confederated in a marriage alliance with Kalacuri king Karṇa by marrying his daughter Vīraśrī.¹⁵⁴ In this connection, Jātavarman and Vigraphapāla III, both of them became the son-in-law of Lakṣmikarṇa by marrying his two daughters. Hence, they maintained a healthy relationship with the Pālas. Jātavarman defeated the Kaivarta ruler Divya and saved his kingdom from their ambush.¹⁵⁵ He took the control of Aṅga. He claimed to vanquish Kāmarūpa. Less is known about the next two rulers of this dynasty Harivarman and Sāmalavarman because of their corroded copperplates. The provenances of these copperplates situate their rule in the Vaṅga region. Among these rulers, Sāmalavarman is particularly memorable because he claims that the first settlement in Bengal of the Vedic Brahmins from Madhyadeśa took place during his reign.¹⁵⁶ Sāmalavarman's son Bhojavarmana was the last

¹⁵⁰ N.K. Bhattasali, 'Two Grants of Varmans of vanga: Samantasar Copper Plate of Harivarman', *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XXX, 1923, pp.255-59; N.K. Bhattasali, 'Two Grants of Varmans of vanga: Vajrayogini Plate of Sāmalavarman', *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XXX, 1923, pp.259-63; Radhagovinda Basak, 'Belava copper plate of Bhojavarmadeva', *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XII, 1913, pp.37-43; R.D. Banerji, 'Belabo Grant of Bhojavarman', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. X, 1914, pp.121-29; N.G. Majumdar, 'Belava Copper-plate of Bhojavarman', *Inscriptions of Bengal*, Vol.III, 1929, pp.14-24; Shariful Islam, 'Unpublished Stone Inscription of the seventh regnal year of Bhojavarman', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh*, Vol.55 (1), 2010, pp.113-119; F. Kielhorn, 'Bhuvanesvara Inscription of Bhaṭṭa Bhavadeva', *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol.VI, 1901, pp.203-07; G.T. Marshall, 'Bhuvanesvara Inscription of Bhaṭṭa Bhavadeva', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol.VI, 1940, pp.88-97; N.G. Majumdar, 'Bhuvanesvara Inscription of Bhaṭṭa Bhavadeva', *Inscriptions of Bengal*, Vol.III, 1929, pp.25-41.

¹⁵¹ P.L.Paul, 'The Varmans of eastern Bengal', *Indian Culture*, Vol.VI, No.1, July 1939, p.57.

¹⁵² Islam, 'Emerging Political Entities', p.644.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.* p.644.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.* p.646.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.* p.646.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.* p.652.

known king of this dynasty. His political center was in Vikramapura of the Dacca district. The provenance of his Belava copperplate was at the village of Belava in the Naraingunj sub-division of the Dacca district. His Sujanagara stone inscription was found at Sujanagara village in Munshiganj district, the region in which Vikramapura, capital of Varmanas was located. The political power of the Varmans was mainly limited to Vaṅga and some parts of Samataṭa. The Varman kingdom spread up to Bhagirathi on the east and Meghna on the west.

Senas:

The illustrious Sena rule had commenced around the end of the 11th century CE. They supplanted the Varmans from Vaṅga and Samataṭa in south-eastern Bengal and pushed out the Pālas from Puṇḍra and Gauḍa in northern and western Bengal. An umpteen of literary and inscriptional evidence has been found which unfolds the history of the Senas. From the outset, they firmly established their position in Gauḍa and Rāḍha. They belong to the Karṇāṭa clan of the south who were included in the list of royal officials in the Pāla inscriptions from the time of Devapāla to Madanapāla.¹⁵⁷ The valiant Sāmantasena's son Hemantasena raised himself as a feudatory subordinate ruler in Rāḍha. He was a trusted lieutenant of a king ('Rājaraḡśāsudakṣaḡ').¹⁵⁸ His son Vijayasena was the first independent being of this dynasty. By marrying Śūra king Ranaśūra's daughter, he gained the sovereignty of Rāḍha.¹⁵⁹ He established his realm in Gauḍa and Kāmarūpa (possibly by defeating the ruler Vaidyadeva, minister of Kumārapāla), and claimed to have defeated many feudal kings such as the Kaliṅgas, Vīra (the ruler of Koṭāṭavī, belonged to the sāmantacakra of Rāmapāla), Nānya (Karṇāṭachief Nānyadeva of Mithila), Rāghava (son of Utkala king Anantavarman Coḍagaṅga) and Vardhanas (feudatory Dvoropovardhana or Govardhana of Kauśāmbi).¹⁶⁰ He ousted 'Guaḍapati' Madanapāla from Varendra. By the middle of the 12th century, he was strong enough to supplant the Varmans. He established his 'Jayaskandhāvāra' in Vikramapura as evidenced by his Barrackpur copperplate.¹⁶¹ This was previously the capital of the Varmans. His Deopara inscription was found near the village of Deopara in police station

¹⁵⁷ Chowdhury and Misra, 'The Sena Rule', p.835.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.* p.836.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.* p.837.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.* pp.838-39.

¹⁶¹ N.G. Majumdar, 'Barrackpur Copper plate of Vijayasena', *Inscriptions of Bengal*, Vol. III, 1929, lines 22-23, p.58.

Godagari of the Rajshahi district of Bengal.¹⁶² He brought the whole of Bengal under one canopy. Next to him was Vallālasena, who dethroned the Pālas from Magadha and campaigned against Mithila. Abdul Momin Chowdhury and Chitta Ranjan Misra stated that Vijayasena possibly extended his kingdom up to Harikela region.¹⁶³ His Naihati copperplate was issued from his camp of victory at Vikramapura, which falls in the Vaṅga region.¹⁶⁴ His son Lakṣmaṇasena exercised his political authority over Gauḍa and extended his power to Bihar,¹⁶⁵ which was reflected in his grants. His copperplates has been issued from the victorious camp (‘jaya-skandhāvāra’) situated at Vikramapura, Dhaka.¹⁶⁶ His Rajvadi and Madhainagar copperplates were issued from some ‘Dhāryya-grāma’.¹⁶⁷ This place was somewhere near south-eastern Bengal. Apart from this, Abdul Momin Chowdhury and Chitta Ranjan Misra said that Kāmarupa, Kaliṅga and Kāśī were also conquered by him, as evidenced by his records.¹⁶⁸ During the time of Lakṣmaṇasena, because of the weak administrative policies, some individuals rose to power as independent chiefs under the Sena regime like Ḍommaṇapāla of Sundarban and Raṇavaṅkamalla Harikāladeva of Comilla region.¹⁶⁹ During the last years of Lakṣmaṇasena’s reign, his rule was confined to south-eastern Bengal. Ever since Lakṣmaṇasena, the Sena regime was losing its splendor, though copper plates of his son Sūryasena and Viśvarūpasena found in eastern Bengal evidenced the existence of their rule.¹⁷⁰ These copperplates were issued from the ‘Jayaskandhāvāra’ Phālgugrāma or Phasphagrāma, which was identified with a place in south-east Bengal.

¹⁶² N.G. Majumdar, ‘Deopara Inscription of Vijayasena’, *Inscriptions of Bengal*, Vol. III, 1929, p.42.

¹⁶³ Chowdhury and Misra, ‘The Sena Rule’, p.845.

¹⁶⁴ N.G. Majumdar, ‘Naihati Copper plate of Vallālasena’, *Inscriptions of Bengal*, Vol. III, 1929, line 29, p.69.

¹⁶⁵ D. C Sircar, *Pala-Sena Yuger Vamsanucarita*, Calcutta, 1982, p.130.

¹⁶⁶ Majumdar, *Inscriptions of Bengal*, pp.83, 93, 100, 170.

¹⁶⁷ N.G. Majumdar, ‘Madhainagar Copper plate of Lakṣmaṇasena’, *Inscriptions of Bengal*, Vol.III, 1929, line 25, p.108; Dr.H.N. Randle, ‘India office plate of Lakṣmaṇasena’, *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XXVI, 1952, p.3.

¹⁶⁸ Chowdhury and Misra, ‘The Sena Rule’, p.845.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.* p.848.

¹⁷⁰ N.G. Majumdar, ‘Edilpur copper-plate of Kesavasena’, *Inscriptions of Bengal*, Vol.III, 1929, pp.118,132; N.G. Majumdar, ‘Calcutta Sahitya-Parishat Copper Plate of Viśvarūpasena’, *Inscriptions of Bengal*, Vol.III, 1929, p.140.

However, towards the end of the Sena reign, they were narrowed down surrounding the south-eastern Bengal. Despite their confined power, the Sena kings retained the use of high-ranking titles like ‘Gauḍeśvara’ as a symbol of their valor and excellence.

Political situation in Harikela:

Shariful Islam showed that the Harikela region was located near the Arakan region and was generally comprised of Chittagong and its adjoining areas.¹⁷¹ Gradually, with the growth of political power, Noakhali, Tripura, Comilla and Sylhet regions also got included here. Suchandra Ghosh highlighted the sub-regional entity of Harikela.¹⁷² Several rulers ruled in this region since the early days. Devātideva was one of them who claimed to have originated from the non-aryān khasa tribe as a provider of royal service.¹⁷³ A metal vase inscription is reported to have come from Chittagong.¹⁷⁴ The ruler mentioned here was ‘Devātideva Bhaṭṭāraka’. His kingdom contained the areas of Chittagong and Tipperah-Arakan hilly region.¹⁷⁵

Another independent ruler Kāntideva ruled around the last half of the 9th century CE. A copperplate inscription of Kāntideva has been discovered in an old temple at Chittagong.¹⁷⁶ Kāntideva was

¹⁷¹ Islam, ‘Emerging Political entities’, p.659.

¹⁷² Ghosh, ‘The Trans-Meghna Region’, pp.220-31; Ghosh and Pal, ‘Political Geography and Locational Importance’, pp.78-96; Suchandra Ghosh, ‘Understanding the Economic Networks and Linkages of an Expanded Harikela’, in *From Mountain Fastness to Coastal Kingdoms: Hard Money and ‘Cashless’ Economies in the Medieval bay of Bengal World*, eds. John Deyell and Rila Mukherjee, London and New York: Routledge, 2020, pp.77-97.

¹⁷³ Islam, ‘Emerging Political entities’, p.600.

¹⁷⁴ Gouriswar Bhattacharya, ‘Note on an Inscribed Copper vase from the collection of the Bangladesh National Museum’, *Essays on Buddhist, Hindu and Jain Iconography, Studies in Bengal Art*, Series No. I, 2000, pp.439-40; Gouriswar Bhattacharya, ‘An Inscribed Metal Vase Most probably from Chittagong, Bangladesh’, in *South Asian Archaeology 1991*, eds. Adalbert J. Gail and Gerd J.R. Mevissen, 1993, p.328; Gouriswar Bhattacharya, ‘A preliminary report on the inscribed metal vase from the national museum of Bangladesh’, in Debala mitra, ed. *Explorations in art and archaeology of south Asia: essays dedicated to N.G.Majumdar*, (Calcutta: Directorate of archaeology and museums, 1996), pp.237-47; Ryosuke Furui, ‘Bangladesh national museum metal vase inscription of the time of Devātideva and its implications for the early history of Harikela’, *Puravritta*, Vol.2, 2017, pp.46-47.

¹⁷⁵ Islam, ‘Emerging Political entities’, p.662.

¹⁷⁶ D.C. Bhattacharya and J.N. Sikdar, ‘Chittagong copper plate of Kāntideva’, *Modern Review*, November 1922, pp.612-14; R.C. Majumdar, ‘Chittagong Copper plate of Kāntideva’, *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol.XXVI, pp.313-18.

entitled 'Paramasaugata', 'Parameśvara' and 'Mahārajādhirāja'.¹⁷⁷ Thus, he was an independent ruler. He issued this plate from the capital city of Vardhamānapura which was identified by Shariful Islam with a small independent kingdom located in the Chittagong-Tippera hilly areas, adjacent to Samataṭa.¹⁷⁸

Ākara dynasty ruled in Chittagong and Tippera-Arakan regions. Attākaradeva was evidently an independent ruler of that lineage. He issued a silver coin where he used the epithet 'Samara-mṛgāṅka'.¹⁷⁹ He originated from the Arakan region which was reflected in his name.¹⁸⁰ They were contemporary to the Candras and had a friendly relation with them. Earlier, the ancestors of Trailokyacandra were probably employed as feudal chiefs under the Ākara kings.¹⁸¹ During the Varman rule in Vaṅga, they still had a steady reign in Harikela and its adjacent areas. Later, possibly Vāllalāsena extended his kingdom in the Harikela region and supplanted the Ākaras. Finally, the later Devas ousted the Senas and captured Harikela.

Later Devas:

During the weakness of the Senas, in the last quarter of the 12th century and first half of the 13th century CE, later Devas emanated as a sovereign power in the eastern and south-eastern Bengal. There were two lines of rulers whose names ended with 'Deva'. One line of rulers occupied Harikela, Samataṭa and Paṭṭikerā sub-regions and seized Vaṅga ousting the Senas. Their several copperplates have been discovered so far.¹⁸² Madhusūdanadeva, son of Puruṣottomadeva, was the

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.* lines 14-15, p.317.

¹⁷⁸ Islam, 'Emerging Political entities', p.663.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.* p.665.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.* p.664.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.* p.666.

¹⁸² B.M. Barua and P.B. Chakravarty, 'Mehar Plate of Dāmodaradeva', *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol.XXVII, October 1947, pp.181-91; D.C. Sircar, 'Mehar Plate of Dāmodaradeva', *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XXX, 1987, pp.51-58; Dines Chandra Sircar, ed., 'Mehar Copper-Plate Inscription of Dāmodara', *Select Inscriptions*, Vol.II, 1983, pp.140-45; Ahmad Hasan Dani, 'Sobharampur Plate of Dāmodaradeva', *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XXX, 1987, pp.184-88; N. G. Majumdar, 'Chittagong copper plate of Dāmodara', *Inscriptions of Bengal*, Vol.III, 1929, pp.158-63; N. G. Majumdar, 'Adavadi Copper Plate of Daśarathadeva', *Inscriptions of Bengal*, Vol.III, 1929, pp.181-82; Dinescandra Sircar, 'Daśarathadeber pakamora tamrashasan', *Silalekha Tamrashasanadir Prasanga*, 1982, pp.165-68; Swapan Vikash Bhattacharjee, 'Mainamati Copper plate of Viradharadeva', *Journal of the Ancient Indian History and Culture*, 14, pts. 1-2, 1983-84, pp.17-28; Swapan Vikash Bhattacharjee, 'Mainamati Copper plate of Viradharadeva',

first acknowledged feudal king of this dynasty. After that, Vāsudeva and Dāmodaradeva came into power. Dāmodaradeva, as the most courageous king of this dynasty, established his rule in Tipperah, Comilla, and Chattagram region. He possibly fought against the king of Kāmarūpa and the Senas of Vaṅga.¹⁸³ He expanded his kingdom towards Vaṅga by defeating the Senas. It is reflected in his use of royal epithets like ‘Arirāja-Cānura-Mādhava’ following the Sena kings.¹⁸⁴ Next to him was Daśarathadeva. He possessed the Sena kingdom in south-east Bengal. He possibly captured the ‘Gauḍeśvara’ Senas from their kingdom in Gauḍa.¹⁸⁵ He emplaced his political centre in Vikramapura. Later, he shifted his capital from Vikramapura to Sonargaon for its strategic position.¹⁸⁶ There was another ruler named ŚrīViradharadeva, who was possibly a local Hindu king who ruled during the second half of the 13th century CE. Shariful Islam thinks that he possibly came after Daśarathadeva and ruled near Samataṭa and adjoining areas of Devaparvata.¹⁸⁷

There was one Harikāladeva whose copperplate has been found at Mainamati.¹⁸⁸ He was the ruler of an ancient kingdom Paṭṭikerā which was situated on the western border of the Burma kingdom.¹⁸⁹ Paṭṭikerā developed as a semi-independent kingdom at Samataṭa and amalgamated with the kingdom of Varmans, Senas and later Devas.¹⁹⁰ Paṭṭikerā had a Burmese origin, which was reflected in their names ending with ‘eba’.¹⁹¹ Harikāladeva’s copperplate refers to Śrī-Dhāḍi-eba as the donor of the charter. His father’s name was Heḍi-eba. The composer of the charter was Medini-eba. Paṭṭikerā developed a relationship with Arakan and consequently, some Burmese

Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, Vol. 39, No.2, December 1994, pp.71-75; Rashid, 'The Mainamati Inscriptions', pp.193-224.

¹⁸³ Islam, ‘Emerging Political entities’, p.675.

¹⁸⁴ Barua and Chakravarty, ‘Mehar Plate’, lines 7-8, p.187.

¹⁸⁵ Islam, ‘Emerging Political entities’, p.679.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.* p.679.

¹⁸⁷ Islam, ‘Emerging Political entities’, p.682.

¹⁸⁸ H.T. Colebrooke, ‘Copper plate of Harikāladeva’, *Asiatic Researches*, Vol. IX, 1807, pp.401-06; D.C. Bhattacharya, ‘The Mainamati Copper Plate of Raṇavaṅkamalla Harikāladeva’, *Indian Historical Quarterly*, Vol. IX, March 1933, pp.282-89.

¹⁸⁹ Islam, ‘Emerging Political entities’, p.680.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.* p.681.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.* p.681.

families started settling down in Comilla district.¹⁹² Perhaps this was the reflection of the person's Burmese origin mentioned in this charter.

Another line of Deva rulers ruled in the Śrīhaṭṭa region, developed around the middle of the 13th century.¹⁹³ Two of their copperplates have been discovered¹⁹⁴ Navagirvān was the first king of this dynasty. Keśavadeva was a semi-independent powerful ruler among them. His copper plate was discovered in a mound called Itertillah in the village Bhatara, about 20 miles from Sylhet.¹⁹⁵ Shariful Islam showed that after the fall of the Sena kings, he held their titles to prove his prowess.¹⁹⁶ His son and successor Īśānadeva issued a copperplate from the same place. They had a very small political realm surrounding the Śrīhaṭṭa region.

It turns out that the rulers in Harikela and the Later Devas had a close connection with the Arakan region. Consequently, they continue to influence each other culturally which was also revealed by the distinct structure of the Harikela and Later deva inscriptions. Mention of some different kinds of terms and political designations in their inscriptions build their separate political entity. A consecutive Arakanese influence emanated from their political-cultural ethos.

Polity, administration and the epigraphic records

The larger political history of Bengal is mainly obtained from the inscriptions issued by the different rulers, dynasties, subordinate powers from the 5th - 6th centuries onward. The inscriptions were overwhelmingly records connected to land transactions, gifts, grants, etc. sometimes with effusive eulogies dedicated to political potentates and influential personages. Those who were directly involved in the management and recording of inscriptions comprised a large group of varied status, including the record keeper or pustapāla, the draft writer, the engraver and the composer. Among the innumerable inscriptions, majority were inscribed on copperplates. They

¹⁹² *Ibid.* p.681.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.* p.682.

¹⁹⁴ Rajendra Lala Mitra, 'Copper Plate Inscription from Sylhet', *Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, August 1880, pp.140-53; K.M. Gupta, 'The Bhatara Copper plate of Keśavadeva', *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol.XIX, 1927, pp.277-86; Umesh Chandra Chowdhury, 'Some Observation on two Copper plate Grants from Bhatara, Sylhet district, Assam', *Journal of The Asiatic Society of Bengal, Letters*, Vol.VI, 1940, pp..73-77.

¹⁹⁵ Gupta, 'The Bhatara Copper plate', p.277.

¹⁹⁶ Islam, 'Emerging Political entities', p.685.

represented administrative documents, which carried detailed and specific administrative messages. The position and responsibilities of various influential people, cultivators and other residents of the rural society, the significance of the urban elite, literate and clerical groups get reflected through these records. The copperplate charters usually list a number of officials, often marked by their hierarchical gradations. The numbers increased with time. Information on 'Jayaskandhāvāra' (victory camps) or the places from where the copperplates have been issued help in locating the particular ruler's political domain. The land grants introduce us to the location of the donated land and the administrative cadres associated with that donation as well as the geographical and social base and identity of the donees. The area of the donated land reflects the political domain of the king who issued the copperplate. The drawing up of such land charters reflect a whole process of structuring revenue administration, the very basis of polities in early medieval Bengal. The eulogical parts in these records indicate the perception of the ruler's or dynasty's political might, their political aspirations and the general socio-cultural condition. The rock and image inscriptions also bear important testimony to the religious affiliation and social-political status of donors, their lineage, their administrative designations, occupational status etc.

Since the inscriptions were documents issued by the royal court or issued under the name of the reigning king, they also bear a reflection of the courtly culture. But, in this case, it can be said that the society of Bengal was overwhelmingly agrarian and rural. The geographical and ecological conditions in ancient Puṇḍra Rāḍha and Vaṅga were favorable for agriculture as were the tracts in Samataṭa and Harikela, which were gradually incorporated into the state formation processes and agrarian economy through landgrants reflecting increasing attempts at land reclamation and creation of settlements. In that case, the historical processes through which the royal court emerged in the agrarian society of Bengal remains an important part of early medieval Bengal's history. Ryosuke Furui's intensive study into the epigraphic sources on land administration indicates the process to a large extent¹⁹⁷ while other scholars like Suchandra Ghosh have looked into socio-economic processes¹⁹⁸ and B.D. Chattopadhyaya indicates the rise of urban culture.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁷ Furui, *Land and society*.

¹⁹⁸ Ghosh, 'The Trans-Meghna Region'; Ghosh and Pal, 'Political Geography and Locational Importance'; Ghosh, 'Understanding the Economic Networks'.

¹⁹⁹ Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya, *Studying Early India: Archaeology, Texts and Historical Issues*, (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003).

Although early medieval Bengal was mainly characterized by an agrarian society, urban centers had emerged in Bengal based on surplus production and distribution since the early periods. There were centers like Koṭivarṣa as a viṣaya in Puṇḍravardhana bhukti, Vikramapura in Dacca district, Karṇasuvarṇa in the Murshidabad District, Mahasthan in Puṇḍravardhana (13 km north of modern-day Bogra city), Bangarh in the south Dinajpur district of West Bengal, Jagjivanpur as a settlement complex in Malda district of West Bengal, Lakṣmaṇāvati in the Malda district, Mainamati and Devaparvata in Samatāṭa, etc. These urban centers functioning as administrative and economic nodes witnessed cultural convergences through contacts with the wider Pan-Indian culture. However, despite the existence of these few urban centers, it can be said that Bengal was mostly rural from the beginning to the end. How then do we account for the literary culture that seems to have flourished here from the early medieval times? We have to note here that the polities that arose in our context from the 6th century CE onward were based on a hierarchically organized rural society with economic power bases as evident from the inscriptions.²⁰⁰ Although there are significant references to the urban elite groups, the influence of the rural inhabitants is evident throughout the time in the inscriptions. Among the rural inhabitants, the brāhmaṇas became visible agents from the 5th-6th century onwards and later took important roles in the royal court from the time of the Pālas. Ryosuke Furui showed the process of their development and established authority in rural society and royal court from the 5th-13th century CE.²⁰¹ It was through the aristocratic and learned Brahmins that educational exchange and cultural connections developed in early medieval Bengal and into the wider platform of pan-Indian level. These cultural connections led to Sanskritization of the regional culture. In the process however, the region saw a distinctive style of literary culture, which is found to flourish in the form of ornate compositions in the regional inscriptions from quite early times since the 6th – 7th centuries CE. The process was facilitated through political and administrative agency from the Gupta period onwards and emerged with complex characteristics within the socio-cultural sphere as time went on. A survey of the agents who nurtured the culture of literacy and literary creativity would provide the social

²⁰⁰ Ryosuke Furui, 'Agrarian Expansion and Local Power Relation in the Seventh and Eighth Century East Bengal: A Study on Copper Plate Inscriptions', *Urbanity and Economy: The PreModern Dynamics in Eastern India*, Ratnabali Chatterjee (ed.), Kolkata: Setu Prakashani, 2014, pp. 96 – 110; Furui, 'Social Life: Issues of Varna-Jati System', pp. 43 – 70.

²⁰¹ Furui, 'Brāhmaṇas in early medieval Bengal', pp. 223-44.

context and frame. They came from administrative circuit of the different sub – regional and dynastic contexts and also from the privileged social categories.

Administrative personnel

The administrative offices functioned in different local revenue units and consisted of rural and urban influential members, who were assigned designations of some authority that determined their status in the given society. Designations and official portfolios changed with time and with the enlargement of territorial holds since the Gupta times. Not only that, the patterns also evolved differently in different sub–regional contexts under different political frames. This is noted in Samataṭa where the situation arose differently from that prevailing in Puṇḍravardhana for example, or we may point out the difference in administrative scene between Puṇḍra and Vaṅga regions.

Puṇḍravardhana

Under the Gupta administration, uparika or uparika mahārāja was the highest official of Puṇḍravardhanabhukti.²⁰² According to Ryosuke Furui, the uparikas held a hereditary position, and either belonged to a local influential lineage or established themselves through nomination.²⁰³ The Bhuktis were sub-divided into units called Viṣaya or Vīthī. Among the viṣayas, some have been continued as an administrative division till the Pāla reign; such as Koṭivarṣaviṣaya which was referred to in the Bangarh and Biyala copperplate of Mahīpāla in the late 10th century, Bogra copperplate of Vighrapāla III in the mid-11th century, Manhali and Rajibpur copperplates of Madanapāla in the late 12th century. The Kuddālakḥāaviṣaya was also referred as an administrative unit right from the Gupta record of 159 GE till the Pāla records in 11th century CE.²⁰⁴ The governor of the Viṣayas was kumārāmātya. Variation is seen in the case of the officers of different viṣayas under Puṇḍravardhanabhukti. While administrators appointed by uparika governed Koṭivarṣaviṣaya, Pañcanagarīviṣaya and Śrngaveravīthī were administered by the officials selected by the king.²⁰⁵ This difference is also seen in the case of different levels of administration or adhikaraṇas in varied localities. Adhikaraṇa was the local administrative body of different viṣayas and vīthī. Such as Adhiṣṭhānādhikaraṇa of Koṭivarṣaviṣaya was a regular

²⁰² Furui, ‘Variegated Adaptations’, p. 77.

²⁰³ Furui, *Land and society*, p.46.

²⁰⁴ Chakravarti, ‘State Formation and Polity’, p.890.

²⁰⁵ Furui, ‘Variegated Adaptations’, p.77.

organization, constituted of urban influential members like an eminent merchant ('Śreṣṭhīn'), caravan trader ('Sārthavāha'), chief artisan ('Prathamakulika'), and chief scribe ('Prathamakāyastha'). On the other hand, Vithyādhikaraṇa of Śrīngaveravīthī was constituted of peasant householders called Kuṭumbins and their upper section named Mahattaras.²⁰⁶ Aṣṭakulādhikaraṇa or Grāmāṣṭakulādhikaraṇa at the village level was constituted of Kuṭumbins and Mahattaras. A new copperplate inscription of Mahārājādhirāja Pradyumnabandhu, dated between 550 and 650 CE recorded that the Ghoṇādvīpakaviṣaya of Puṇḍravardhanabhukti was governed by mahāpratīhāra Avadhūta. Its adhikaraṇa was constituted by viṣayādhikaraṇikas, kāraṇika Śambudatta and pustapāla Kṛṣṇadatta and others.²⁰⁷ All the adhikaraṇas were responsible for deciding on the petition for land purchase. This was further verified by the record keeper or pustapālas referred to in the inscriptions. Thus, a large body of administrative cadres mediated in the interest of both rural society and royal benefit and facilitated the land donation process. Such complex processes indicated the dependence of the state on these influential people and officials who formed the very basis of power in the local areas. With the rise of the Pālas, these local agents seem to have enhanced their position in the society. References may be drawn from the early Pāla charters which mention the local eminent groups like the Viṣayavyavahārins. The adhikaraṇas comprised of local residents like Jyeṣṭhakāyastha, Mahattaras, Mahāmahattaras, Dāśagrāmika, etc,²⁰⁸. The rise of some local powerful personages as sāmanta have been noted in epigraphic records of the period. For example, Ryosuke Furui refers to the Indian Museum copperplate of Dharmapāla which informs about mahāsāmanta Bhadrānāga who belonged to the family of caravan traders.²⁰⁹ In the Bangladesh National Museum inscription of Pāhila, the predecessors of subordinate ruler Pāhila held the titles like Adhipa and Nāyaka as local chiefs of Bhaṭṭala Maṇḍala or deśa, located in the southeastern corner of Varendra.²¹⁰ In the Jagajjibanpur copperplate of Mahendrapāla, the royal messenger of the charter Mahasenāpati Vajradeva's father Nārāyaṇadeva was an appointed ruler ('adhipati') of Dardaraṇḍī maṇḍala under king Dharmapāla.²¹¹ Vajradeva

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.* p.77.

²⁰⁷ Griffiths, 'Sale deed of the village Mastakaśvabhra', pp.29-30.

²⁰⁸ Furui, 'Variegated Adaptations', p.84.

²⁰⁹ Ryosuke Furui, 'Subordinate rulers under the Pālas: Their diverse origin and shifting power relation with the king', *The Indian economy and social history review*, 54, 3, 2017, p.341.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.* p.342.

²¹¹ Ramesh and Iyer, 'The Jagjivanpur Copperplate', pp.27-29.

upgraded his position to that of the trusted chief military officer who was also a royal messenger of the grant. The eulogistic description of his lineage indicates the esteemed status that some of these officials and members of important families enjoyed. The Badal pillar inscription of Guravamiśra records the panegyric of his family which served the Pāla kings for six generations.²¹² They were mentioned as brāhmaṇas of Sāṅḍilya gotra. We get the names of his ancestors, Vīradeva, Pāñcāla, Garga, Darbhapāṇi, Someśvara, Kedāramiśra, and Guravamiśra.²¹³ Garga was a minister under Dharmapāla. Darbhapāṇi worked under Devapāla. Kedāramiśra was the advisor of Surapāla. His son Guravamiśra was associated with Gopāla II and Nārāyaṇapāla and was the royal messenger under the latter ruler. According to the Bhaturia inscription of Yaśodāsa, Yaśodāsa was a member of a non-brāhmaṇa literate family, who were hereditarily in the service of the Pāla kings.²¹⁴ Yaśodāsa had been appointed as a mantrīn and then promoted to Tantrādhikārin, an officer in charge of administration by king Rājyapāla. Local chiefs and notables had also served under the Pāla kings, like the Rāṣṭrakūṭas of Aṅga, Āṭavikas of the forest region etc. The Pāla kings seem to have had to rely heavily on the sāmantas even after the sāmanta revolt led by the kaivartas. During the reign of Rāmapāla, a subordinate ruler called Aśvapati helped him in a battle.²¹⁵ Mahāsāndhivigrahika Bhīmadeva, the messenger of the two Rajibpur plates and Manhali plate of Madanapāla, restored the eroded kingdom of Gauḍa-Varendra under the Pālas.²¹⁶ Under the reign of Kumārapāla, subordinate ruler Vaidyadeva was appointed as the ruler of Kāmarūpa who enjoyed titles like ‘mahārājādhirāja’, ‘parameśvara’, and ‘paramabhaṭṭāraka’.²¹⁷ Ultimately, Vijayasena, one of the sāmantas, ousted the Pālas from Varendra sometime after 1165 CE. During the Sena rule, the power of the subordinates happened to be much limited. The only exception was seen regarding Ḍommaṇapāla who issued the Rakshaskhali grant. He was the son of a mahāmāṅḍalika.²¹⁸ This was because the conditions of the Sena rulers were not one that they

²¹² Kielhorn, ‘Badal Pillar Inscription’, pp.160-67.

²¹³ *Ibid.* p.161.

²¹⁴ Sircar, ‘Bhaturiya Inscription’, pp.150-54.

²¹⁵ Furui, *Land and society*, p.190.

²¹⁶ D.C.Sircar, ‘Rajghat Inscription of Bhīmadeva’, *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol.XXXII, 1957, lines 6-8, p.281.

²¹⁷ Venis, ‘Copper-plate Grant of Vaidyadeva’, lines 47-49, p.353.

²¹⁸ Ramesh K.Ghoshal, ‘Rakshaskhali Island plate of Madommaṇapala’, *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. XXVII, 1947, lines 1-3, p.122.

could wield authority over smaller polities and chiefs. The simultaneously ruling Varmans supply the evidence of the limited power the Senas enjoyed.

The elaborate list of royal functionaries in the Pāla and Candra inscriptions ('rājapādopajīvin')²¹⁹ indicate greater statal organization incidental to the rise of the political rule of these dynasties. The Pāla rule in their heydays reached a supra-regional status and the impact of these political developments were also felt within the region. Puṇḍravardhanabhukti or Pauṇḍravardhanabhukti got expanded as the largest administrative division and incorporated the areas of Vaṅga, Śrīhaṭṭa, Samataṭa and Harikela.²²⁰ The viṣayas were merged to structure an extended unit. Such restructuring of administrative divisions is evident from the Candra and Pāla charters.²²¹ In the Pāla records we observe that units of vīthī and viṣaya had been amalgamated together as a singular administrative unit.²²² Similar restructuring and reshuffling of units and their geographical extents were evident throughout the entire period in Puṇḍravardhanabhukti and Vaṅga - Samataṭa.²²³ What such reorganization indicated was a changing rural scene with shifts in local administrative structure, and status of the rural society as well as administrative agents.

²¹⁹ Furui, *Land and society*, p.133.

²²⁰ Chakravarti, 'State Formation and Polity', p.889.

²²¹ For the Candra example, see Sircar, 'Paschimbhag plate', p.30

²²² Chakravarti, 'State Formation and Polity', p.891.

²²³ For example, Khaṇḍala had emerged as a local unit under Maṇḍala as reflected in the Belava copperplate of Bhojavarman in the mid-12th century. This plate referred to Kauśambī-aṣṭagacchakhaṇḍala in the Adhaḥpattana Maṇḍala of the Pauṇḍrabhukti.²²³ The Mehar copperplate of Dāmodaradeva of the 13th century mentioned Vāyisagrāmakhaṇḍala of the Samataṭa maṇḍala within Pauṇḍravardhanabhukti. Later, in the Sena period, Pāṭaka has also emerged as a sub-division of maṇḍalas reflected from the references of Dāpanīyapāṭaka in the Madhainagar copperplate of Lakṣmaṇasena, Talapāḍapāṭaka in the Idilpur copperplate and Rāmasiddhipāṭaka, Ajikulapāṭaka and Ghāgharākāṭṭipāṭaka in the Sahityaparishad copperplate of Viśvarūpasena. The fact that Puṇḍravardhanabhukti included other sub-regions in his territorial zone is evident from the land grants of these Sena charters. Here, the granted land Talapāḍapāṭaka in the Idilpur copperplate within Vikramapura in Vaṅga belonged to the Pauṇḍravardhanabhukti. The Rāmasiddhipāṭaka and Ajikulapāṭaka of the Vangiya Sahitya Parishad copperplate of Viśvarūpasena were situated in Vaṅga within the Puṇḍravardhanabhukti. For references see Majumdar, 'Belava Copper-plate', p.15; Barua and Chakravarty, 'Mehar Plate', p.185; Majumdar, 'Edilpur Copper-plate', p.130; and Majumdar, 'Calcutta Sahitya-Parishat Copper Plate', p.141.

Rāḍha:

We come to be informed of the two administrative divisions of Vardhamānabhukti and Daṇḍabhukti of Rāḍha from the Jayarampur and Mallasarul copperplates of Gopacandra. Ryosuke Furui interpreted that Vakkattakāvīthī of Vardhamānabhukti and Śvetavālikāvīthī of Daṇḍabhukti constituted of the following social categories, kāyasthas, karaṇikas Mahattaras and other landed magnets, separately mentioned with their village names.²²⁴ The in-charge of Daṇḍabhukti and Śvetavālikāvīthī were mahāsāmantamahārāja and kumārāmātyarājanaka as referred to in the Jayarampur copperplate of Gopacandra.²²⁵ On the other hand, Vardhamānabhukti was constituted of various functionaries of the provincial administration under the authority of a subordinate ruler (mahārāja Vijayasena) which was evident from the Mallasarul copperplate.²²⁶ Later during the 7th century diversities have been seen among the local administrators and their powers under Śaśāṅka and Jayanāga. Gauḍa had emerged as central to their polities. The landed magnets seem to have held significant status in the vīthī administration. Daṇḍabhukti had emerged as an important administrative division ruled by governors with brāhmaṇas and pradhānas functioning as responsible office-bearers.²²⁷ But shortly we also note the rise of local level units of viṣaya and sāmantas were found to be active.²²⁸

Later, during the 10th century, forest chieftains appeared in Rāḍha as reflected in the *Rāmacarita*.²²⁹ During the 11th century, Daṇḍabhukti of Rāḍha got included within Vardhamānabhukti as a maṇḍala as evidenced by the Irda copperplate of the Kāmbhoja ruler Nayapāla.²³⁰ During the Sena rule, pāṭakas appeared as a sub-unit of Rāḍha maṇḍala²³¹ and the Kaṅkagrāmabhukti formed a distinct bhukti to the west of the Bhāgīrathī.²³²

Vaṅga:

²²⁴ Furui, 'Variegated Adaptations', p.81.

²²⁵ Tripathy, 'Jayarampur copper plate', p.178.

²²⁶ Majumdar, 'Mallasarul copper plate', p.157.

²²⁷ Majumdar, 'Two Copper Plates of Śaśāṅka: Text No.II', p.9.

²²⁸ Lionel, 'Vappaghoshavata Grant of Jayanāga', lines 2-4, p.63.

²²⁹ Chakravarti, 'State Formation and Polity', p.886.

²³⁰ Majumdar, 'Irda copperplate', p.151.

²³¹ Dharendra Chandra Ganguly, 'Saktipur Copper Plate of Lakṣmaṇasena', *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol.XXI, 1931, p.212.

²³² Chakravarti, 'State Formation and Polity', p.889.

Vaṅga was under a continued political experience from the time of the Gupta rulers. During the rule of Dharmāditya, Dvādaśāditya, Samācāradeva, and Gopacandra, organized with local to sub-regional units of administration as evident by their copperplate grants.²³³ The division of Navyāvakāśikā was ruled by the governor appointed by the king who held the titles like mahārāja, mahasāmanta, mahāpratihāra, uparika, etc. (‘mahāpratihāroparika-nāgadevasya’).²³⁴ Vārakamaṇḍalaviṣaya was a sub-unit within Navyāvakāśikā.²³⁵ Presence of royal officials like rājanaka, viṣayapati, vyāpāra-kāraṇḍaya and viniyuktaka in the local viṣayas is also quite apparent, along with prominent representations of scribes. An elder scribe (‘jyeṣṭhakāyastha Nayasena’), other kāyasthas and karaṇikas constituted the adhikaraṇa of Vārakamaṇḍalaviṣaya. According to Furui subordinate rulers were employed as administrators in Vaṅga.²³⁶ Later, Vaṅga, as an administrative division had been incorporated within Puṇḍravardhanabukti.

Samataṭa:

Contemporary Samataṭa also witnessed some other types of officials who were involved at the local administrative level. Maṇḍala emerged as the major administrative division as referred to in a new copperplate inscription of Vainyagupta dated 502-03 CE and his Gunaighar plate dated 188 Gupta era.²³⁷ Vainyagupta was a subordinate ruler under an overlord which is reflected in the use of titles like pañcādhikaraṇoparika, mahāpratihāra and mahārāja.²³⁸ Later, his enhanced position was reflected in the mention of subordinate rulers who functioned under him. For example, mahārāja Rudradatta who served under him and dūtaka Vijayasena who held the titles of mahāpratihāra, mahāpīlupati, pañcādhikaraṇoparika, pātyuparika, purapāloparika, mahārāja and mahasāmanta.²³⁹ The rise of superior political functionaries is evident. For example, the copperplate inscription of Vainyagupta dated 502-03 CE mentions one Mādhavadatta who had held the titles of mahāsāndhivigrahika and kumārāmātya. In Samataṭa thus we see the subordinate

²³³ Pargiter, ‘Grant of the time of Dharmāditya’, line 3, p.195.

²³⁴ Pargiter, ‘Second Grant of the time of Dharmāditya’, lines 3-4, p.200.

²³⁵ *Ibid.* p.201.

²³⁶ Furui, ‘Variegated Adaptations’, p.81.

²³⁷ Furui, ‘Ajīvikas, Manibhadra’, lines 15, 43, pp.660,662; Bhattacharya, ‘A Newly discovered copper-plate from Tippera’, line 7, p.54.

²³⁸ Furui, ‘Ajīvikas, Manibhadra’, line 1, p.659.

²³⁹ Bhattacharya, ‘A Newly discovered copper-plate’, lines 3,15,16, pp.53,55.

rulers mostly dominating the local administration as state functionaries, while local people did not feature as representatives in local administration unlike the situation in Puṇḍravardhana.

The semi-independent status of the Rāta and Nātha rulers, is reflected in their use of the title 'prāptapañcamahāśabda' held by Śrīdhāraṇarāta.²⁴⁰ Although they were semi-independent rulers, they issued the copperplates in their own name while acknowledging their overlord. Subordinate rulers were also appointed under these local rulers. kumārāmātya, mahāsāmanta and mahāsāndhivigrahika were subordinate rulers who made the grants.²⁴¹ They were involved in the administrative matters of viṣaya. The importance of viṣaya as administrative unit under the viṣayapati and transactions of land administration in the viṣayādhikaraṇas gets reflected in Ānanadadeva and Bhavadeva's copperplates of the 8th century and Mainamati copperplates of Laḍahacandra of the 11th.²⁴² Power of the local rulers grew in Samataṭa and their control over the subordinates increased during the Khaḍga rule and later under the Devas. Later, however, Samataṭa and Śrīhaṭṭa, has also got incorporated as a maṇḍala into the Puṇḍravardhanabhukti.

Harikela:

In the trans-Meghna sub-region of Harikela, we note the first evidence of organized administration from the 8th century onward in the copper vase inscription of Devātideva. It mentions the chief administrator (mahāpradhāna) and chief minister (mantrīmukhya) along with a list of royal officers like kumārāmātya, mahābalādhikṛta, mahāmahattara, dharmapāṭha, sāndhivigrahika, mudrapāla, kāyastha and mahāvārika.²⁴³ This charter records the grant of a village Chandrabhattārikāgrāma situated in Khaṣa-maka belonging to Harikelā. Interestingly, we get the hint of the ethnic communities of khaṣa and maka in connection to a local division, which indicates them as the primary and distinctive residents of the sub-region. We come to know of other potentates from the region of Harikelā-maṇḍala in the 10th century CE²⁴⁴

The above survey illuminates the complex and dynamic political-administrative history of Bengal since the 5th century CE. This history is characterized by the rise and fall of various political powers and the empowerment of high- and - low ranks ruling groups. We have noted the continuous shifts

²⁴⁰ Law, 'The Kailan Copper plate', line 14, p.238.

²⁴¹ Furui, 'Variegated Adaptations', p.83.

²⁴² Chakravarti, 'State Formation and Polity', p.890.

²⁴³ Bhattacharya, 'Note on an Inscribed Copper vase', pp.439-40.

²⁴⁴ Bhattacharya, 'A preliminary report', p.475.

in the political and administrative structures and reshuffling of various administrative divisions and the functionaries in each sub - region.

Social scene:

This rich and complex history also bore impact on social life, not only in the upper structure of political states or polities but down to the level of the rural and producing society and the peripheral society of the autochthonous people. We do not have much evidence to track the history of the latter but we shall discuss a few aspects of the royal, administrative orders of society as well as the rural society. Here we note that the social matrix had evolved in the different sub-regions in different ways. According to Ryosuke Furui, this complex society was structured on the basis of power relations and control over the land, starting with the sovereign king, his subordinate rulers and the landed magnets, to the cultivators and laboring classes.²⁴⁵ Society was also undergoing the proliferation of caste which arose out of incorporation of new social groups, especially the hitherto non-sedentary and autochthonous people. Furui has observed four historical phases through which this complex social structure emerged in rural Bengal in the early medieval period. Each phase witnessed evident regional variations in the processes of social formation. In the first phase ranging between 400-550 CE the power relations surrounding the basic unit of local administration, the *adhikaraṇa* especially in the Puṇḍravardhana witnessed the *kuṭumbins* as peasant householders playing important role in the agrarian world. The *adhikaraṇas* as the administrative office of the different *viṣayas* or *vīthīs* of Puṇḍravardhanabhukti were functioning on the basis of mutual relations, and cooperation between the dominant *kuṭumbins*, the urban elite, the scribal elites, *karaṇa* or *kāyasthas*, the local influential persons or other rural groups of the society. A different scene of state formation and agricultural growth was emerging in contemporary Samatāṭa.²⁴⁶ A less stratified landholding society was emerging in the rural society of Samatāṭa, which was apparently a developing agricultural domain in the riverine tracts, under smaller polities. Here the political power and the religious institutions patronized by them were gaining ground. The period between 550-800 CE saw social change unfurling differently in two different locales. The situations were alike in the sub-regions of Vaṅga, Rāḍha, and Puṇḍravardhana in comparison with

²⁴⁵ Furui, *Land and society*, pp.1-2.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.* p.15.

what was happening in the sub-regions of Samatāṭa, Śrīhaṭṭa, and Harikela. In the first cluster of sub-regions, we find that the control of the landed magnet, the mahattaras continued to prevail over the affairs of the adhikaraṇa. Simultaneously however, we also note the emergence of sāmantas or subordinate rulers in larger units. Thus Vaṅga, Rāḍha, and Puṇḍravardhana witnessed the extended power of subordinate rulers and officials over rural society on one hand and the collaboration between the landed magnets and literate groups on rural level matters on the other. The sub-regions of Samatāṭa, Śrīhaṭṭa, and Harikela saw the rise of widespread landholders emerging as a result of religious land grants with royal patronage, which unfurled the process of incorporating large forest tracts into the agrarian circle.²⁴⁷ In the next and the fourth phase between 9th and the 12th/13th centuries CE, the regional powers extended over several sub-regions, with subordinate rulers strengthening their power through negotiation with their king. The state machinery was getting enlarged with numerous royal officials and functionaries on the rise. Brahmanical networks were established and cooperation between agricultural development and rural commercialization gave rise to new occupation groups. The expansion of state control over the rural society and resulting social stratification among the rural residents was reflected clearly in the epigraphic records of various dynasties. Lands were increasingly being donated to individual brāhmaṇas which paved the way for building strong networks and Brahmanical centers, especially in Rāḍha and Varendra. In these two subregions in fact, we note some mobility and economic growth based on the surplus wealth acquired from the land possessed by the landed magnets, subordinate rulers, Brahmins and other influential people. Demand for commodities from outside the local and subregional units paved the way for rural commercialization. With the changing pattern of the land transaction from the 10th century onwards and with rising royal monopoly over rural society, the power of the subordinates got weakened. Furui has pointed out how land donation to highly qualified brāhmaṇas and their increasingly dominant position and encroachment into rural areas might have been accompanied by social tension which paved the way for the revolt of sāmantas against the Pālas in late 11th and early 12th centuries CE.²⁴⁸ According to him the rebellion by the subordinate kaivartas had turned out into a popular uprising.²⁴⁹ Amidst the raging

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.* p.15.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.* pp.169 -73.

²⁴⁹ This part of Bengal's history has raised attention from a number of stalwart historians like R.S. Sharma who considered it as a popular uprising, while Romila Thapar also put it as a peasant rebellion. Newer studies like that of Furui lends more substance to this while presenting

debate over the nature of this revolt or uprising, we can tease out the important fact about the rising power of the subordinate rulers or the *sāmantas*. The resistance of the *sāmantas* and the increasing dependence of the Pālas on them paved the way for the rise of the subordinate Sena as a political force. On the other hand, the limited availability of land plots in the sub-regions of Vaṅga, Samatāṭa and Śrīhaṭṭa indicate the constrictions in agrarian development here. However, the inclusion of merchants as rural residents in these areas indicates some level of commercialization.²⁵⁰ The assessment of land plots in a uniform currency unit over all of Bengal from the 12th century CE indicates the progress in the spread of monetary transactions and commercialization of the rural economy which gave rise to various occupational groups. Apart from the *sāmantas* rising at the higher strata of political power and control over rural production, we also note that this changing power relation between king and subordinate rulers, led to the enhancement of the position of the already emerging *brāhmaṇas* both in royal courts and rural society. Their role in the legitimization of political authority had been an important factor in this setting but more than that their presence as dominant rural residents facilitated political control leading to social stratification and systematization of *varṇasamkara* in different sub-regions in this phase.²⁵¹ It is within this socio-political context that we need to look into the social scene more particularly to locate the peripheries of the outreach which the inscribed words attained.

a more nuanced reading and deeper interpretations of the historical processes operating behind the event. Furui's perspective may be put alongside those of Kunal Chakravarti and Sayantani Pal in whose opinion the factor of the Kaivarta social mobility and their political contestation might have been more significant factors. Chakrabarti sees it as a *sāmanta* uprising and Pal reads it as a political uprising. R.S. Sharma, *Early Medieval Indian Society*, (Kolkata: Orient Longman, 2001), pp. 224 – 225; Romila Thapar, *Early India: From the Origins to AD 1300*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), p. 410; Kunal Chakrabarti, 'Brhmanical Hegemony and the Oppressed Social Groups: Rethinking the Kaivartta Revolt', in *Early Indian History and Beyond*, eds. Osmund Boppearachchi and Suchandra Ghosh, (Delhi: Primus Books, 2019), pp. 477 – 501; Pal, 'Revisiting the Kaivartta Revolt', in Boppearachchi and Ghosh, eds., *Early Indian History*, pp. 502 – 517.

²⁵⁰ Furui, *Land and society*, p.162.

²⁵¹ Niharranjan Ray has also dwelt on this in a discerning interesting way. Ray, *Bangalir Itihas*, p. 241.

Various social groups:

Society is usually determined by the variable position of people and their relationships and interactions in the social sphere. We observe primarily a rural society based on agriculture to have evolved in Bengal in the early medieval times. The social frame of Bengal was built on the dynamic process of developments in landholding patterns and changing power relations between the king, the subordinate rulers, the local influential groups and the primary producing people. We have observed some aspects of this history above. The relations in our context were centered on land rights and these were emerging differently in different sub-regions, as we have seen. It is through this process that different social classes emerged and the possibilities of their changing position centered on land rights, were set in motion. Later, in connection with the development of agriculture, various professional groups emerged through rural commercialization. These processes led to the formation of hierarchical order and the proliferation of the castes at the base reflected in the puranic structure of varṇasaṁkara.

Social categories

We shall now briefly review the general fabric of the early medieval society in Bengal and look into the conditions of the social categories in terms of caste and occupation.

The brāhmaṇas:

The role of the brāhmaṇas in early medieval Bengal was very significant. We have already observed the gradual processes through which the Brahmins, as a caste group were emerging significantly on the social scene especially in the rural world. Many were recorded in inscriptions to have migrated from Madhyadeśa, who got incorporated into the rural society and were settled by land grants and comprised the category of kuṭumbin. Gradually, they developed into the position of influential landholders. Their distinct identity as mentioned in the epigraphic records in terms of their gotra, their affiliation to distinct Vedic lines of scholarship and places of origin emerged as significant indices for a social and ritual status beyond their power as landed magnates. This phenomenon was very evidently developing in the sub-regions of Puṇḍravardhana, Vaṅga

and Rāḍha during the 6th to 7th century CE.²⁵² During the Pāla phase, they were found to have been in enhanced position as royal subordinates and officials providing various services and in exalted court positions. Thus, they had gained entry into the nodal sectors and royal orbits on the one hand and were mentioned as the foremost member of the rural society, on the other.²⁵³ Again, the sub-regions of Śrīhaṭṭa and the fringes of Samataṭa witnessed the emergence of a large number of brāhmaṇas as landholders in the 7th century. Subsequently, the emergence of new settlements by the brāhmaṇas was reflected in the various copperplate charters of the Candras during the 10th-11th centuries CE.²⁵⁴ From the 10th century onwards, acknowledging brāhmaṇas of high qualifications as superiors in both the courtly and rural worlds had become the overall trend. In the sub-regions of Vaṅga, Samataṭa and Śrīhaṭṭa, lands were also given to brāhmaṇas as a reward by political potentates for the ritual services they rendered.²⁵⁵ Suchandra Ghosh and Sayantani Pal have also seen how they had become indispensable in everyday life in the common man's society too.²⁵⁶ By the 12th century CE, especially under the Varman and Sena rulers, the brāhmaṇas had gained high status and the Brahmanical culture was seen to flourish with royal favour. They had also consolidated their position in rural society by developing strong networks. They sought to impose and acculture the regional society in the well-known and set Brahmanical traditions by composing various dharmanibandhas, ritual texts and upapurāṇas.²⁵⁷ Their journey from the rural society to the royal court is indicative of the growing power they increasingly wielded through the strong economic base they enjoyed, their ritual functions and scholarly accomplishments, literary activities emerging as a prominent function.

Kāyasthas:

Kāyasthas were found to have been an important social and occupational group in the urban and rural worlds of early medieval Bengal. They were mentioned as draft writers in several

²⁵² Majumdar, 'Mallasarul copper plate of Vijayasena', line 6, p.159.

²⁵³ Furui, 'A new copperplate inscription of Gopāla II'. *South Asian Studies*, Vol. 24, 2008, line 46, p.73.

²⁵⁴ Sircar, 'Paschimbhag plate'.

²⁵⁵ Furui, *Land and Society*, p.147.

²⁵⁶ Ghosh and Pal, 'Everyday life', p.12.

²⁵⁷ Majumdar, 'Bhuvaneshvara Inscription', verse 16, p.38; Furui, *Land and Society*, p. 203; Chakrabarti, *Religious Process*.

inscriptions. In addition, they were mentioned as key figures in administration during all the phases but especially in the earlier ones. It has been pointed out that as an occupational category, the k̄ayasthas had been emerging on the scene from the Gupta period as skilled literate officials in local and provincial administration.²⁵⁸ Their powers increased over time, as they negotiated the intermediate functional spaces, conducting intellectual and administrative matters side by side with the merchants, brahmanas, and high officials.²⁵⁹ Some records from early medieval Bengal mention the two designations of karaṇa-k̄ayastha in the same breath. In this regard Chitrarekha Gupta pointed out that k̄ayastha and karaṇa were interchangeable designations.²⁶⁰ The phenomenon of their rise in politico-administrative affairs is indicated in an epigraphic record from Samatāṭa, viz., the Tipperah copperplate of Lokanātha. Although a lone example, the hint that this record carries has led to deeper analysis about the growing status of this occupation – caste. Here Lokanātha, although born in a brāhmaṇa family, was referred as a karaṇa and held the status of kumārāmātya at the time that this record was posted. It has been surmised that Lokanātha had risen to be a provincial lord from the position of a karaṇa. It is also important to note that Lokanātha was praised for his sharp intellect in this record. Based on all these facts it was pointed out that karaṇas had indeed possessed the potential for gaining higher positions and that individuals from brāhmaṇa lineage chose to enter this profession.²⁶¹

A K̄ayastha was first mentioned in an early inscription as a petitioner along with a kulika and pustapāla in the Śrīṅgaveravīthī of Puṇḍravardhanabhukti.²⁶² A similar scenario is attested in a copperplate inscription of mahārājādhirāja Pradyumnabandhu dated between 550-650 CE.²⁶³ The adhikaraṇa of ghoṇādvīpakaviṣaya of Puṇḍravardhanabhukti comprised of the k̄araṇika Śambudatta and the pustapāla Kṛṣṇadatta. The reference to jyeṣṭha (elder) k̄ayastha implied the prevalence of guilds or organizations of scribes and their representational function in local administrative body. In this instance, the jyeṣṭha k̄ayastha was functioning as the head of the viṣayādhikaraṇa of Vārakamaṇḍalaviṣaya under Navyāvakaśīkā division in Vaṅga as evident from

²⁵⁸ Gupta, *The K̄ayasthas*, p.28.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.* p.29

²⁶⁰ Gupta, *The K̄ayasthas*, p. 55.

²⁶¹ Gupta, *The K̄ayasthas*, p. 55.

²⁶² Sanyal, ‘Sultanpur Copper plate’.

²⁶³ Griffiths, ‘Sale deed of the village Mastakaśvabhra’.

the Faridpur copperplates of Dharmāditya and Gopacandra and Ghugrahati copperplate of Samācāradeva.²⁶⁴ They were the custodians of accounts. The rest of the clerical members of the viṣayādhikaraṇa, located outside the rural society had worked under this elderly supervision. Large groups of such functionaries like the kāyasthas (kāyata), karaṇikas, pustapālas and sthāyīpālas were constituents of adhikaraṇas in the viṣayas and vīthīs of Rāḍha during the time of Gopacandra and Śāśāṅka.²⁶⁵ Hence, it is evident that the kāyasthas were the main constituents of the adhikaraṇas of Puṇḍravardhana, Vaṅga and Rāḍha during the 6th-7th century.

During the Pāla period the designation of jyeṣṭhakāyastha has been mentioned as an important participant in administrative procedures among the rural residents along with the mahattaras and kuṭumbins as a constituent of viṣayavyavahārins. By the 10th century, they had acquired a distinct hereditary identity or status. Sandhyākaranandin, the author of *Rāmacarita* came from this social group or caste. He was the son of an exalted royal functionary, designated as sāndhivigrahika karaṇa Prajāpati. It is clear from Sandhyākaranandi's example, that not only as clerical figures, they had also grown as scholars and authors in society. A section of this literate group, engaged in engraving the copperplates, were distinctly identified with reference to their origin from the other sub-regions ranging from Varendra to Samatāṭa, which indicates their migration from distant homes. This geographical mobility may have been based on demand. Kāyasthas were indeed proficient as both scribes and administrators. Thus, there is ample indication of how this occupation – caste had been rising in importance through their skill and learning as important and indispensable functionaries in royal affairs and literate culture.

The pustapālas:

The pustapālas as a record – keepers were members of the royal court and their range of operation extended to local administration in connection with revenue administration. As such, they featured like the other officers of state as mediators between the state and the rural society. They were associated with the kāyasthas as both were having a clerical position, but were assigned with different functional jobs.²⁶⁶ Their role in land record keeping and transactional procedures

²⁶⁴ Pargiter, 'Second Grant of the time of Dharmāditya', line 7, p.200; Pargiter, 'Grant of the time of Gopacandra', line 6, p.204; Bhattasali, 'The Ghugrahati Copper Plate', lines 5-6, p.76.

²⁶⁵ Furuī, *Land and Society*, p.88.

²⁶⁶ Gupta, *The Kāyasthas*, p.70.

included verification of the petitions of land sale and donation²⁶⁷ in collaboration with the other occupational groups like kulika and kāyasthas. This is quite apparent from the early land records connected to the Śrīngaveravīthī of Puṇḍravardhanabhukti.²⁶⁸ They were also privy to record and control price of the land following the local custom of the area. The role of the Pustapālas were so important that in order to stop malpractices sometimes two or three pustapālas were appointed for approving the same transaction. For example, during the 5th century CE in Koṭivarṣa three pustapālas were appointed.²⁶⁹ They were mentioned along with sthāyīpālas, karaṇas and kāyasthas as part of clerical groups or members of adhikaraṇas in Rāḍha during the 6th-7th century as mentioned in the Jayrampur copperplate of Gopacandra and Panchrol copperplate of Śaśāṅka.²⁷⁰ Clerical groups like kāyastha and pustapāla also constituted the viṣayādhikaraṇa of Puṇḍravardhana during the 6th-7th century. We incorporate them into the broader range of literates as a group of especially skilled officials who had been, since early historical times, invested with the business of recording the administrative information and maintaining the books, perhaps both fiscal accounts as well as revenue and other documents for the state. In the early phases on the history of our context the pustapālas continued appearance seems to have derived from the traditions of administration set down by the Gupta rule. However, the importance of pustapālas in terms of land-related issues gradually began to reduce, which is evident from their absence in the later epigraphic records. They were supplanted probably by the kāyasthas.

Kulikas:

We encounter the kulikas in the Kalaikuri plate acted as a petitioner in the Śrīngaveravīthī of Puṇḍravardhanabhukti. The Jagadishpur plate mentioned kulika Bhīma as a cashier, receiving money from the petitioner in the same vīthī of Puṇḍravardhanabhukti.²⁷¹ They have always incorporated the kāyasthas and karaṇas in terms of land transaction procedures and other matters. No further mention was made of the kulikas as such. Later in the mid-12th century, there was a reference to pāñcakulika Hāsī in Sujanagar stone inscription of Bhojavarman.²⁷² He was a member

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.* p.26; Sanyal, ‘Sultanpur Copper plate’.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.* lines 3-4, p.63.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.* p.70.

²⁷⁰ Tripathy, ‘Jayrampur copper plate’; Furui, ‘Panchrol (Egra) Copper-plate’.

²⁷¹ Sircar, ‘Jagadishpur Plate’, line 16, p.62.

²⁷² Islam, ‘Unpublished Stone Inscription’, lines 3-4, p.117.

of an urban administrative organization named pañcakula situated within Vaṅga. This organization was constituted of urban influential members in charge of documentary works and custom houses.

Vaidyas:

As an occupation caste category, the vaidyas, emerged as a significant professional group, doubling as a scribe and as medical practitioner. Their emergence as a literate group is also evident from various Pāla inscriptions. We come to know about vāji-vaidya Sahadeva, who had composed the wonderful praśasti of Gaya Krsnadvarika Temple Inscription of Nayapāla, whereas the Gaya Gadadhar Temple rock inscription of Nayapāla was composed by vaidya Vajrapāṇi.²⁷³ It is clear from these evidences that vaidyas were engaged in literary activity and were definitely a part of the literate class.

Mercantile groups:

The presence of mercantile, artisanal and scribal groups in urban settlements in Vaṅga-Puṇḍravardhana sub-regions is evident from the Damodarpur copperplates of the post-Gupta phase. Eminent urban merchant (nagaraśreṣṭhīn), caravan trader (sārthavāha), chief artisan (prathamakulika) and chief scribe (prathamakāyastha) were the members of adhiṣṭhānādhikaraṇa of Koṭivarṣaviṣaya. They were involved in the administrative matters of this viṣaya as members of this local body and were part of the urban society. Interactions between these professional groups appears to have been regular for the purposes of their respective professional requirements.²⁷⁴ There is a reference to āryanagaraśreṣṭhīn as members of adhiṣṭhānādhikaraṇa in dakṣiṇāṃśakavīthī of Puṇḍravardhanabhukti in Paharpur plate of 159 GE.²⁷⁵ They collaborated with the governor of the vīthī Āyuktaka to issue the grant. From the 6th century onwards, however, the categories of śreṣṭhī and kulika were absent from the epigraphic records. There are possible clues to some members of the mercantile class shifting to the rural world in some image inscriptions of the time of the Pāla rule. R.D. Banerji cited the Chandimau image inscription of

²⁷³ D.C. Sircar, 'Inscriptions of Two Brāhmaṇa Rulers of Gayā', *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XXXVI, 1965, pp.84, 86.

²⁷⁴ Furui, *Land and Society*, p. 48.

²⁷⁵ Dines Chandra Sircar, ed., 'Paharpur copper plate grant of the Gupta year 159', *Select Inscriptions*, Vol.I, 1942, line 1, p.346.

Rampāla, referring to sādhu Saharaṇa who hailed originally from Rājagṛha and settled down in a rural space called Etrahāgrāma.²⁷⁶ The reference to vaṇiggrāma in the Rajbhita stone inscription of Mahīpāla I indicates organizations of merchant groups or mercantile centres.²⁷⁷ The connotation of the terms has been explored by Ranabir Chakravarti²⁷⁸ and Ryosuke Furui and tentatively suggests the existence of an important association of merchants projecting their collective interest. They were associated with different categories of markets or haṭṭas, identified with localities to which they belonged and to functional aspects. Haṭṭas were frequently referred to in epigraphic records of Bengal from the 9th century as pointed out by Furui. The term clearly denoted village level local markets or exchange centres.

In the context of Samataṭa we come across another evidence in the form of the Baghaura narayana image which refers to a merchant, vaṇika Lokadatta as the resident of the village Bilakīndaka.²⁷⁹ The Mandhuk image inscription from Samataṭa again refers to a vṛddhasārtha (a senior trader) the donor. This is a record that was palaeographically dated to the 10th century CE by D.C. Sircar.²⁸⁰ Furui finds the evidence from the later period to indicate a gradual ruralization of the merchants and their activities where we come hereditary identity of the vaṇikakūla. We may not be wrong to assume hereditary occupational groups of merchants prevailing in the regions from Bihar to Bengal between the 9th and 12th centuries. Shifting status and identities became regular in the case of the merchant communities in this later context of Bengal's history. For example, we note that some of the sārthavāha merchants were upgraded to subordinate rulers. Furui points to the Sujanagar stone inscription of Bhojavarman, which records land donation by mahāsāmanta Avūdeva who could have belonged to a merchant family.²⁸¹ However, the social status of specific merchant categories got gradually degraded. As Furui mentions, restrictions were imposed upon the suvarṇavaṇikas

²⁷⁶ R.D. Banerji, 'The Pālas of Bengal', *Memoirs of Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. V, Calcutta, 1917, pp.93-94.

²⁷⁷ Ryosuke Furui, 'Merchant groups in early medieval Bengal: with special reference to the Rajbhita stone inscription of the time of Mahīpāla I, year 33', *Bulletin of the school of oriental and African studies*, Vol. LXXVI, issue 3, 2013, pp.395-97.

²⁷⁸ Ranabir Chakravarti, cited in Furui, 'Merchant Groups', p. 396.

²⁷⁹ N.K. Bhattasali, 'The Baghaura narayana image inscription', *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XVII, 1923, p.355.

²⁸⁰ D.C. Sircar, 'Pāla Rule in the Tippera District', *Indian Historical Quarterly*, Vol. XXVIII, No. 1, March, 1952, pp. 51- 57.

²⁸¹ Furui, *Land and Society*, p.192.

during the 12th century.²⁸² The final outcome came during the time of Vallāla Sena. According to Abdul Momin Chowdhury and Chitta Ranjan Misra, during his reign, the merchants were forced to migrate away from Bengal.²⁸³

Artisanal groups:

The artisans who were engaged in engraving copperplates were often identified by the artisanal centres they hailed from. In the Pāla period, many artisans who worked as engravers hailed from Poṣaligrāma situated within Bardhaman district during the reign of Mahīpāla I and Vīgrahapāla III. Furui notice that this was a centre of artisans with special skills and literacy.²⁸⁴ This trend was further noticeable during the reign of the Senas. But now the centre seems to have shifted. Rāṇaka Śūlapāṇi, the engraver of the Deopara inscription of Vijayasena was lauded as the crest jewel of the śilpīgoṣṭhī of Varendra. Besides the literate community of the engravers, there were many artisanal groups who featured in the different kinds of sources, epigraphic and literary. We hear of the tailika (oil presser), kumbhakāra (potter), carmakāra (leather worker), suvarṇakāra (goldsmith) and śauṇḍika (distiller and vendor of liquid) during the Pāla reign. They could be primarily located within the rural society. Various communities of artisans with distinct identities were referred to as service providers for the maṭha which was the grantee in the Paschimbhag copperplate of Śrīcandra. They comprised of mālākāras (garland makers), tailikas, kumbhakāras, and sūtradhāras (carpenters). A class of highly skilled literate artisan would be the sthapatis (architect). Besides, there were the specialist service providers and performers like gaṇaka, kāhalikas (kahala drum player), śaṅkhavādakas (conch blowers), naṭa (dancer), ceṭṭikas (female servants) etc.²⁸⁵ Everyday service providers at the end of the ladder were further present in the Bhatara plate of Keśavadeva dated 13th century CE. Here we come across the indispensable nāpita (barber), rajaka (washerman) and also a luxury item maker, the dantavāra or dantakāra (ivory worker) who were mentioned as occupational groups.²⁸⁶

²⁸² Furui, 'Social Life', p.62.

²⁸³ Chowdhury and Misra, 'The Sena Rule', p. 844.

²⁸⁴ Furui, *Land and Society*, p.167.

²⁸⁵ Sircar, 'Paschimbhag plate', lines 36-51, pp. 67-68.

²⁸⁶ Gupta, 'The Bhatara Copper plate', lines 49,51, p.282.

Cultivators and farm labourers:

Among the rural residents, stratifications were also seen among the cultivators, which was reflected in the verses depicting rural life compiled in the anthologies like the *Saduktikarṇāmṛta* and the *Subhāṣitaratnakoṣa*. It is discernible here that the hālikas were the peasant householders.²⁸⁷ Pāmaras were agricultural labors working under the hālikas. Pāmaras were stated to be different than the other cultivators (karṣakajana).²⁸⁸ Furui showed that the karṣakajana was a term that could indicate labourers employed as subordinates to peasant householders or the hālikas.²⁸⁹

Other degraded classes:

The continuation of social perception is observable in how the age - old conventional categories of caṇḍāla, ḍom, śabara, were still mentioned as peripheral in the rural society repeatedly in the early medieval Bengal land charters. Medas and andhras are encountered in the early medieval Bengal inscriptions during the Pāla period and they were mentioned in the same bracket with the caṇḍālas, at the end of the list of addressees, among the rural residents in Varendra and Magadha. Clearly, they represented the rear end of the rural society who were still important to address formally and legally, for them to heed to the instructions, although in the classical prescriptions they were kept out of the village.²⁹⁰ Among this enclave of lower categories, however, each of them, the caṇḍāla, ḍom, śabara, meda, andhra represented completely distinct social categories and the indications speak for a progressive recognition of them as a part of the rural society, although degraded and untouchable in the Brahmanical parlance. This was evident also from the *Caryāgītīs*, where the ḍomba women appeared to be recognized as a part of the rural society, selling loom products and bamboo baskets, and working as ferry women.²⁹¹ They got

²⁸⁷ D.D. Kosambi and V.V. Gokhale, eds. *The Subhāṣitaratnakoṣa*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1957), verse 314, p.58; Banerji, *Sadukti-karṇāmṛta*.

²⁸⁸ Kosambi and Gokhale, *The Subhāṣitaratnakoṣa*, verse 300, Banerji, *Sadukti-karṇāmṛta*.

²⁸⁹ Furui, 'Social Life', p. 56.

²⁹⁰ Furui, *Land and Society*, p.136.

²⁹¹ Per Kvaerne, *An anthology of Buddhist tantric songs: A study of the Caryāgītī*, (Bangkok: Orchid Press, 2010), caryā 10, 14, pp.113, 131.

immortalized as symbols of divine power in the dohās of the siddhācāryas, but, in reality, remained beyond the pale of even the conventional world rural life.

There are references to various social groups which influenced society and clues to the processes of construction of categories and their identities in the early medieval times since the 5th-6th century. Since the society of Bengal was based on agricultural growth, the rural society was the most important and major part of the social fabric and their involvement in the land acquisition and land management system had a significant impact on processes of state formation. Diversity in agricultural patterns and statal management of land produce and its distribution had led to major changes not only in the socio - economic but also political and cultural life in various sub-regions of Bengal throughout our timeframe. These dynamics were felt strongly in the rise and fall of various social groups and their status in society. Among them, the brāhmaṇas were seen to rise steadily to the positions of eminence in social and economic terms, with a steady influence of the Brahmanical culture, which got more crystallized in the 12th century. This facilitated not only the formation and deepening of monarchical polities but also unfurled social processes which led to the imposition of the varṇasaṁkara custom and the proliferation of jāti. Internal stratifications within the broader social groups were also perceivable. Socio-political hierarchy operated not only economic and political but deep social terms.

Out of these diverse social classes emerged a group of literates who contributed to the development of the regional literary culture. This development in a sense highlights the intense build – up of the state authority, state patronage and rise of higher classes and castes under the umbrella of state. At another end, this literary efflorescence also glaringly brought alive the gulf between the literate and the non – literate. From a caste angle, the reference to brāhmaṇas, kāyasthas, and vaidyas among the former privileged enclave are significantly dominant. Among them especially the brāhmaṇas flourished as eminent composers. The kāyasthas, appointed to important administrative positions and mentioned as a group, gradually gained a literati status. In the beginning, only a group of scribes were found responsible for the drafting of the inscriptions. But later the reference to some eminent composers provides pointers to this history of literary culture, which we shall attempt to trace through these inscribed words in the later chapters.

CHAPTER II

Period of Genesis of the regional literary trend (6th – 8th century CE)

The general political trends in early medieval Bengal since the 6th century CE can be gauged only from epigraphic references, which, however, provide substantial information. They can be categorized as copperplate land charters, eulogies, votive and image inscriptions. Copperplate inscriptions, considered the most important among them, comprise two parts- the praśasti and the donative details. These were usually composed in a specific format. The praśasti part portrays the charming delicacy of literary style. It contains the genealogical descriptions of the ruling authority. The donative part of the inscription records the details of the land grant to eminent brāhmaṇas or religious institutions, issued either by the local body of administration called adhikaraṇa or by the kings or subordinate rulers. The changing power relation between the issuing authorities can be delineated through the land assessment process. The eulogies record the pious deeds of kings, subordinate rulers or eminent individuals in lengthy embellished verses. Though small, the dedicative and donative inscriptions engraved on images, rocks and other objects portray a very precise and subtle description of the donors, reigning kings and various social groups.

The politico, administrative and social picture of early medieval Bengal has emerged with distinct sub-regional variations, glimpses of which can be traced from the Gupta rule in Bengal. The Guptas were visible in the Puṇḍravardhana during the reign of Kumāragupta I and his successors from the first half of the fifth century CE. Subsequently, Bengal witnessed the formation of various local kingdoms on the remnants of the Gupta rule, evident from a series of copper-plate inscriptions.¹ Vaṅga, for example, saw the rise of petty local rulers like Dharmāditya, Dvādaśāditya, Gopacandra and Samācāradeva during the 6th century CE. Amongst them, Gopacandra's political

¹ Pargiter, 'Grant of the time of Dharmāditya', pp.193-198; Pargiter, 'Second Grant of the time of Dharmāditya', pp.199-202; Islam, 'Kotalipada Copper-plate', pp.72-82; Pargiter, 'Grant of the time of Gopacandra', pp.203-05; Tripathy, 'Jayrampur copper plate', pp.174-79; Majumdar, 'Mallasarul copper plate', pp.155-61; Bhattasali, 'The Ghugrahati Copper Plate', pp.74-86.

domain possibly had a wider extent covering the Vardhamāna bhukti and the Daṇḍabhukti of Rāḍha. Again, a copperplate inscription indicates the reign of one Mahārājādhirāja Pradyumnabandhu in Puṇḍravardhana during the 6th century CE.² The first clear indication of an independent ruler in early medieval Bengal came with the rise of Śāśānka in power, attested by textual references as well as inscriptions and coins.³ His monarchical rule was firmly established in the first quarter of the 7th century CE in northern Rāḍha - Gauḍa. The Medinipur and Egra copperplates bear evidence of his rule in the district of Midnapore. Feudatory Jayanāga, a probable successor of Śāśānka, can be traced back sometime between 550 and 650 CE.⁴ After Śāśānka, Karṇasuvarṇa possibly witnessed the reign of Bhāskarvarman, the king of Kāmarūpa for a short period, as indicated in the Nidhanpur copper plate.⁵

Subordinate rulers under the Guptas seem to have already emerged in Samataṭa and Śrīhaṭṭa from earlier times culminating into the rise of a semi-independent polity under Vainyagupta from the early 6th century CE as evident from his copperplates.⁶ This was a localized phenomenon. Later, close to the middle of the 7th century CE, Bhāskarvarman seems to have extended control over Śrīhaṭṭa as well as the Karṇasuvarṇa area.⁷ His Nidhanpur copperplate referred him as the overlord

² Griffiths, 'Sale deed of the village Mastakaśvabhra', pp. 27-38.

³ Beal, *Si-Yu-Ki*; Beal, *The Life of Hiuen Tsiang*; Watters, *On Yuan Chwang's Travels*; Devahuti, *The Unknown Hsuan Tsang*; Singh, *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India*, p.563; Parab, *The Harṣacharita*; Kane, *The Harṣacharita*; Thakur, *Harṣacarita*; Chaki and Acharya, *Harṣacarita*; Cowell & Thomas, *The Harṣa-Carita of Bāṇa*; Sastri, *Ārya-Maṅju-Śrī-Mūlakalpa*; Majumdar, 'Two Copper Plates of Śāśānka: Text No.II', pp.1-9; Sircar, 'Egra Plate', p.38; Sircar, 'Śāśānker Śāśanakālin Egrā Tāmrapatra', pp.59-64; Furui, 'Panchrol (Egra) Copper-plate', pp.119-30; E. Hultzsch, ed. 'Plates of the time of Śāśānkarāja; Gupta-Samvat 300', *EI*, Vol.VI.

⁴ Barnett, 'Vappaghoshavata Grant', pp.60-64.

⁵ Bhattacharya, 'Nidhanpur Copper Plates', pp.1-43.

⁶ Furui, 'Ajīvikas, Manibhadra', pp.1-25; Bhattacharya, 'A Newly discovered copper-plate', pp.45-60; Sircar, 'Gunaighar copper plate', pp.331-334.

⁷ Bhattacharya, 'Bhāskarbarmār Tāmraśāsan', pp.1-43.

of the Rāta and Nātha rulers, who were sub-regional chiefs. Yet, we find the Nāthas and Rātas issuing their own grants almost at the same time (middle of the seventh century CE), which might indicate their local autonomy.⁸ Again, during the middle of the same century, records indicate the Khaḍgas ruling in eastern Vaṅga and Samatāṭa, and the Devas in Samatāṭa during the eighth century CE.⁹ They seem to have emerged as locally autonomous rulers. It appears that, in spite of exaggerated claims to overarching authority by many, a number of political houses were simultaneously wielding power in certain pockets of the Vaṅga, Samatāṭa and Śrīhaṭṭa areas. On the other hand, a bronze vase inscription of Devātideva indicates the emergence of a small polity in the sub-region of Harikela during the eighth century CE.¹⁰ State formation or the rise of polities was a process which was in a state of some fluidity and would eventually crystallize in later times.

We have to note that this history of early medieval Bengal has to be studied primarily through the epigraphic sources as literary works are rather scanty. The inscriptions seem to have evolved through phases of development in their literary and informative forms and as D.C. Sircar pointed out, these mostly followed a somewhat standardized format, only varying according to the issuing authority.¹¹ The style of writing, poetic tradition, paleographic and orthographic features, political-social and cultural records of the inscriptions as a whole display a literary cultural milieu in early medieval Bengal. The medium of these inscriptions being Sanskrit, we may refer to the comment of Van Buitenen who had declared Sanskrit to be the language of culture requiring an intense cultivation and learning process.¹² A survey of the regional epigraphic sources alongside the varied Sanskrit

⁸ Basak, 'Tipperah Copper Plate', pp.301-315; Gupta, *CopperPlates of Sylhet*, pp.68-80; Law, 'The Kailan Copper plate', pp.221-41; Islam, 'Uḍiśvara Copper-plate', pp.61-72.

⁹ Laskar, 'Ashrafpur Copper Plate', pp.85-91; Rashid, 'The Mainamati Inscriptions', pp.201-02; Sircar, 'Copper-plate Inscription of king Bhavadeva', pp.83-95; Gupta, 'Mainamati copper-plate', pp.145-48.

¹⁰ Bhattacharya, 'A preliminary report', pp.237-47; Furui, 'Bangladesh national museum', pp.46-47.

¹¹ Sircar, *Indian Epigraphy*, pp.120-50.

¹² Buitenen, *Two Plays*, p.11.

literature in texts in early medieval Bengal indicates that a class of people had grown to be proficient in this language in early medieval Bengal. This class would have comprised of layers of literate and intellectual communities who had formed the upper echelons of the society, including the brāhmaṇas, the kāyasthas, other eminent and influential residents of the rural society etc. We encounter them as composers of ‘inscriptional kāvya’, creative literature in texts, other literary works, scribes, addressees and issuers of the inscriptions in several places.

Creative literary texts are found to have been composed from the 11th century CE and we can refer to the magnificent works like *Rāmacarita* of Sandhyākara Nandi (11th-12th century C.E.), *Subhāṣitaratnakoṣa* of Vidyākara (c.11th-12th century), *Saduktikarṇāmṛta* by Śrīdharadāsa (1205 CE), *Āryāsaptaśatī* of Govardhanācārya (c. 12th century CE), *Pavanadūta* by Dhoyī (c.12th century CE), and *Gītagovinda* by Jayadeva (12th century CE) etc. However, it was mainly through the inscribed words that one can draw some inference of what the literary style of this whole period was like and especially how it progressed and matured along historical time. The overwhelming majority of the inscriptions are royal records or administrative documents. This trend of documenting royal records or inscriptions was initiated in the late Gupta period. The late Gupta copperplates such as the Dhanaidaha, Kalaikuri-Sultanpur, Damodarpur, Jagadishpur, Baigram, Raktamala, Paharpur, Nandapur and Gunaighar furnish the earliest evidence for the emergence of Sanskrit in Bengal as a literary medium. However, we get actual glimpses of literary creativity in inscriptions only from the 6th century CE onward and this trend reached its highest watermark of excellence during the 12th-13th centuries CE. The inscriptions of this period may be divided into three distinct phases through which this literary evolution may be noted. The first phase begins with the post Gupta times in the 6th century CE and goes up to the 8th century CE. This marks the phase of the origin and initial development of the literary formations, including the incipient rise of a poetic genre and literary innovation. The next phase between the 8th and the 10th centuries could be regarded as the major phase which witnessed the real efflorescence of a literary flourish in epigraphic compositions when literary creativity was truly formed and moved towards greater developments. The last phase is rounded off with the inscriptions of the 11th century to the first decade of the 13th century. However,

this was not a phase marking a dissolution or decline, an idea which is usually understood to define the last phase in the evolution of any phenomenon. In fact, on the other hand, this phase may be regarded as one of exuberance and maturity in literary style.

The inscriptions of all the phases reflect the mark of the pan-Indian Sanskrit literary style and form. The Sanskrit literary trend, in general, took a somewhat artificial turn from the 6th century onwards with the features of verbal stentorian, long compounds and atiśayokti.¹³ The works of eminent poets who followed in the footsteps of Kalidāsa introduced more exaggerated and elaborate forms and devices of writing. V. Raghavan points to the eminent poets, the bearers of this pan-Indian Sanskrit trend. The names of Bhāravi (c. 6th century CE), Māgha (c.7th century CE) Subandhu (7th century), Bāṇabhaṭṭa (c.7th century CE), Bhāmaha (c.7th century CE), and Daṇḍin (c.7th-8th century CE) are significant among them. The tradition of classical poetry was somewhat sustained by poets like Bhāravi and Māgha in their poems the *Kirātārjunīya* and the *Śiśupālavadhā*.¹⁴ Subandhu, Bāṇabhaṭṭa and Daṇḍin were renowned for their prose - kāvyas like the *Vāsavadattā*, *Kādmabarī* and *Harṣacarita*, *Avantisundarīkathā* or the *Daśakumāracarita* respectively.¹⁵ Early medieval Bengal also developed a regional literary trend by following these poetic styles. It has particularly been influenced by Bāṇabhaṭṭa's style, his use of śleṣa, long compounds, sonorous passages and grand cadences. The genealogical identity of Bāṇabhaṭṭa has been found among the brāhmaṇas of eastern India during the early medieval period. The reference to brāhmaṇas belonging to the Vātsyāyana gotra and Bhārgava lineage have been found in several early medieval Bengal inscriptions like the Irda copperplate of Nayapāla, the Barrackpore copperplate of Vijayasena, the Govindapur copperplate of Lakṣmaṇasena, the Madanpur plate of Keśavasena and Madanpada plate of Viśvarūpasena.¹⁶

¹³ Dasgupta, *A History of Sanskrit Literature*, p.xiv.

¹⁴ Raghavan, 'Sanskrit Kavya Literature', p.216.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* pp.222-23.

¹⁶ Majumdar, 'Irda copperplate', pp. 63, 96, 125, 137.

In the context of understanding the literary style of early medieval Bengal, the reference to Gauḍī rīti by Bāṇabhaṭṭa can be highlighted here. Gauḍī rīti had the features of gentle and hard words with long compounds, adorning and charming poetry with various ‘upamā, dr̥ṣṭānta and unfamiliar words’, overbearing composition or ‘atīśayokti’.¹⁷ However, as a pattern of literary expression, it has come up as a ‘literary criticism’ as compared to the prevailing Vaidarbhī style. Scholars such as Bāṇabhaṭṭa, Bhāmaha and Daṇḍin have criticized the gauḍī rīti as clumsy, pompous or pretentious with the unreasonable excessiveness of ‘verbal jingles and alliteration’, lack of all the guṇas and an inferior style as compared to the vaidarbhī style.¹⁸ In the background of criticism, gauḍī rīti has come up as a challenging way of literary expression. It has such a charming nature that several authors have followed this style in their writings. It may be surmised that this style of composition was also followed in early medieval Bengal, Gauḍa being a term which was generally taken as eponymous of the cultural and politically visible Bengal as a whole, although it actually denoted only the northern part of Bengal. The term seems to have been used in a cultural sense in the post-Gupta pan - Indian literary world.¹⁹ Here we encounter a point of significance and a matter of a puzzle, especially in our context. This is raised because although Bāṇabhaṭṭa speaks of this gauḍī rīti in the sixth or seventh century, we seem to find no remnants of such literary activity in Bengal either earlier or at that time.²⁰ The only exception in this context was the Nidhanpur copperplate which bears a mark of the early genesis of literary creativity. Yet, it is possible that a class of literary writings had been in vogue which has left no traceable vestiges. In the absence of such evidence, we shall track a few possible clues in the epigraphic records of the first phase of our study and also

¹⁷ Bhattacharya, ‘The Gauḍī Rīti’, p.385.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* p.380.

¹⁹ R.C. Majumdar, *History of Ancient Bengal*, (Calcutta: G. Bhardwaj & Co., 1971), pp. 6 – 8; Rakhal Das Bandopadhyay, *Bangalar Itihas*, (in Bengali), (Calcutta: Sri Haridas Chattopadhyaya, 1330, Bengali year), p. 104.

²⁰ Parab, *The Harṣhacharita*, line 7.

try to relate this evidence to the clues they provide for the existence of a social world as a possible background to this incipient cultural phenomenon.

Although there is no such previous work on the literary style of this period in Bengal, the work of Nupur Dasgupta can be referred in this context. She showed how the rise of Sanskrit literary culture in Bengal was first noticed in the inscriptions.²¹ At the same time, she also mentioned some literature as a medium of this culture. In this connection, Ryosuke Furui's writings provide an indication of the society within which this literary style was practiced, i.e., the author and the addressed community. He showed two different contours of social change during this period between the sub-regions of Vaṅga, Rāḍha, and Puṇḍravardhana and the sub-regions of Samataṭa, Śrīhaṭṭa, and Harikela.²² On one hand, in the sub-regions of Vaṅga, Rāḍha, and Puṇḍravardhana, the landed magnets like mahattaras and literate groups like kāyasthas authorized over rural society and land transaction procedures. On the other hand, Samataṭa- Śrīhaṭṭa sub-region witnessed the rise of widespread landholders under the authorization of kingship and the emergence of Brahmanical settlements. The brāhmaṇas, as the most emergent social being of this period, have been highlighted by Furui. He observed the distinct social identity of brāhmaṇa donee and donors and their rise as a landholder in the rural society.²³

Inscriptions as literary creations: The genesis

The first bud of literary creation may be traced in inscribed texts from the 6th century onwards. Each dynasty had executed individuality in the light of inscriptions. Especially during the 6th-8th century when there was a lack of literature, the inscription was the sole dependency. Only the two

²¹ Dasgupta, 'Sanskrit Literature', pp.536-38.

²² Furui, *Land and Society*, pp.85-129.

²³ Furui, 'Brāhmaṇas in early medieval Bengal', pp. 224-29.

grammatical works of this period, the *Gauḍapāda Kārikā* (c. 5th-6th century CE)²⁴ and *Cāndra-Vyākaraṇa* (c.4th-5th centuries CE)²⁵ of Candragomin, can be mentioned as literature. Among these, Nupur Dasgupta mentioned that *Cāndra-Vyākaraṇa* was considered ‘the refreshed exposition of Sanskrit grammar on the lines of Pāṇinian tradition’.²⁶ Although this was not regarded as the concerned genre of literary creation, it made a great impact on the post-Patañjali phase of Sanskrit grammar. The central element of this stage, however, was the inscriptional resources of various sub-regional kingdoms. The Medinipur copperplate inscriptions of Śaśāṅka and the Nidhanpur copperplate of Bhāskaravarman, among them, were observed as the landmark of literary genesis. The Tipperah copperplate of Loknātha and the Kailan copperplate of ŚrīdhāraṇaRāta also bear testimony to this literary trend as reflected in their rhetorical expressions. It is evident that these inscriptions were mostly inspired by Bāṇabhaṭṭa's style of writing.

A noted feature of this time is that most of the inscriptions were copperplates. Those who wrote them must have been admired and paid in the royal court as poets. Apparently, these court poets were also capable of constructing literature that may not have been copied or circulated outside Bengal or may have remained as court poetries. However, in the absence of literature, the composers brought out literary styles by composing the inscriptions. In terms of the writers of the inscriptions, Meera Visvanathan portrayed different kinds of writers in the context of early Brahmi inscriptions from 300 BCE to 250 CE. One is the author who portrayed his ideology in the text and the other is the scribe who writes down the draft, and finally the engraver who inscribes the record.²⁷ However, the inscriptions in this particular phase referred to the scribes in most cases. For example, the Jayrampur copper plate inscription of Gopacandra referred to kāyastha Mānadatta as the writer

²⁴ Dasgupta, ‘Sanskrit Literature’, p.542.

²⁵ *Ibid.* p. 540.

²⁶ *Ibid.* p.539.

²⁷ Visvanathan, *Writing, Gifting and Identities*, p.82.

(‘likhitam kāyasthamānadatteneti’).²⁸ Yet, we get another interesting piece of evidence from the Mallasarul copper plate inscription. Here, a sāndhivigrahika (a Minister of Peace and War) named Bhogacandra was mentioned as the writer of this text.²⁹ The Tipperah copperplate of Lokanātha was documented by sāndhivigrahika Praśāntadeva.³⁰ The Ashrafpur copperplate inscriptions of Devakhaḍga were written by Pūradāsa.³¹ Most interestingly, we also do have references to dūtakas who played the role of a conveyer. For example, the Mallasarul copperplate recorded Śubhadatta as the dūtaka.³² Laksmīnātha, the son of Lokanātha was the dūtaka of the Tipperah copperplate.³³ The Devaparvata copperplate inscription of Bhavadeva referred to the dūtaka, the chief mahāsāmantādhipati Nandadhara.³⁴

Citing Sheldon Pollock’s view, it can be said that these inscriptions addressed or were associated with particular socio-textual communities.³⁵ Although the existence of an intended audience was obscure in this period, the issuer, petitioner, donor etc. as mentioned in the inscriptions hinted at some social classes who were aware of the literary tones and expressions used here. However, they varied according to different sub-regions of Bengal. Literary analysis of the inscriptions is significant in understanding this overall literary culture at this stage. The political history background was provided by small dynastic rules in different sub-regions of Bengal, marked by the records of mahārājādhirāja Pradyumnabandhu in Puṇḍravardhana, Faridpur copper plate

²⁸ Tripathy, ‘Jayrampur copper plate’, line 50, p.178.

²⁹ Majumdar, ‘Mallasarul copper plate’, lines 24-25, p.161.

³⁰ Basak, ‘Tipperah Copper Plate’, line 55, p.309.

³¹ Laskar, ‘Ashrafpur Copper Plate’, pp.88-89.

³² Majumdar, ‘Mallasarul copper plate’, lines 24-25, p.161.

³³ Basak, ‘Tipperah Copper Plate’, line 17, p.307.

³⁴ Sircar, ‘Copper-plate Inscription of Bhavadeva Abhinavamṛgāṅka’, p. 744.

³⁵ Pollock, ‘The Cosmopolitan Vernacular’, p.8.

Inscriptions of Dharmāditya, Gopacandra and Samācāradeva, the Kotalipada copperplate of Dvādaśāditya in Vaṅga and the Mallasarul copperplate of Gopacandra in Rāḍha. The inscriptions which testify to this political scene also bore the evidence for the beginnings of a process of literary creativity.

The copperplate inscription of Pradyumnabandhu:

This copperplate inscription recorded a previously unrecorded king named mahārājādhirāja Pradyumnabandhu who ruled in Puṇḍravardhana in between 550-650 CE. Arlo Griffiths has given a detailed description and translation of this text. The script of the copperplate is a variety of late eastern brāhmī which is assigned to about 6th century CE.³⁶ In terms of orthography, in many cases, it is similar to the text of Kotalipada copperplate of Dvādaśāditya. Being only a land grant document, it bears no trace of any literary style. Rather, clean documentation of some technical facts, for example, land measurement, land sale price etc. is reflected here. This copperplate records the donation of a village Mastakaśvabhra to the Brahmin Jayadeva, belonging to kātyāyana gotra, student of the vājasaneyā and son of Bhogadeva.³⁷ References to the administrative head and functionaries of Puṇḍravardhana are somewhat apparent in this inscription. Cellaka was the uparika of Puṇḍravardhanabhukti, appointed by mahārājādhirāja Pradyumnabandhu.³⁸ Mahāpratīhāra Avadhūta was the governor of Ghoṇādvīpakaviṣaya, the administrative division of Puṇḍravardhanabhukti.³⁹ He was the petitioner of the grant. He requested for the purchase of land to the notables of the village. Among them, Śambudatta and Kṛṣṇadatta were the viṣayādhikaraṇikas (district councilors).⁴⁰ They were also referred as the kāraṇika (scribe) and pustapāla (record

³⁶ Griffiths, 'Sale deed of the village Mastakaśvabhra', p. 29.

³⁷ *Ibid.* lines 14-16, p.30.

³⁸ *Ibid.* lines 1-2, p.29.

³⁹ *Ibid.* line 2, pp.29-30.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* line 9, p.30.

keeper).⁴¹ Hence, the viṣayādhikaraṇikas are to be considered the draft writer of this inscription. It is to be noted here that this charter is simply a land deed that the viṣayādhikaraṇikas themselves have drafted and inscribed.

Inscriptions of Dharmāditya, Dvādaśāditya, Gopacandra and Samācāradeva:

These inscriptions attest to the contemporaneous reign of Dharmāditya, Dvādaśāditya, Samācāradeva and Gopacandra in the sub-region of Vaṅga and the reign of Gopacandra in Rāḍha during the 6th century. The script of these inscriptions was considered as reflecting the eastern Indian development of late brāhmī script.⁴² Thus, we find the initial tendency toward an eastern style of script in these early days. But in terms of literary signs, these copperplates portrayed similar use of upamā and dṛṣṭāntas as noted in the earlier Gupta inscriptions. According to the provenance, style and contents of the inscriptions, the Faridpur plates of Dharmāditya and Gopacandra, Kotalipada copperplate of Dvādaśāditya and The Ghugrahati Copper Plate of Samācāradeva were very much similar. On the other side, the Jayrampur and Mallasarul copperplate of Gopacandra were distinct due to their provenances in Rāḍha. The sub-regional diversity, therefore, determined the distinct style of writing. However, it is noted that the Sanskrit language used here contains grammatical errors. These inscriptions were significant for providing an insight of knowledge regarding the amount of crop plantation on a plot, the inferred measurement of the land and accordingly the determined price of the land.

Faridpur plates of Dharmāditya and Gopacandra, Kotalipada copperplate of Dvādaśāditya and the Ghugrahati copper Plate of Samācāradeva:

These compositions were mostly prose writing except for the Faridpur copper plate of Dharmāditya which is regarded as poetry-based. Many new words have been added to the vocabulary through these inscriptions which might have some literary-material value. In the Faridpur copperplate

⁴¹ *Ibid.* line 18, p.30.

⁴² Pargiter, 'Grant of the time of Dharmāditya', p.194.

Inscription of Dharmāditya, new words got added to the vocabulary such as sādhanika, apaviñcya, kṣeṇī, kāraṇḍaya, vijñāpa, mṛddha etc.⁴³ vyāpāraṇḍya occurred as a new word in the Faridpur copperplate Inscription of Gopacandra.⁴⁴ Some of the Sanskrit terms derived from Prākṛt such as laddha and jaṁma appeared in the Second Faridpur copperplate of Dharmāditya.⁴⁵ Some words had a different meaning in some of the inscriptions; viz. daṇḍaka meant a ship as referred to in the Faridpur copper plate Inscription of Dharmāditya.⁴⁶ The word kulavāra meant a chosen man of good family as reflected in the Faridpur copper plate Inscription of Gopacandra.⁴⁷

When we come to the literary aspect of these inscriptions, it has been found that different analogies have been used for the local rulers as reflected in the inscriptions of Dharmāditya, Dvādaśāditya, Gopacandra and Samācāradeva. The local kings had been compared to those who were generally considered Hindu mythological kings. For example, in the Faridpur copperplate Inscription of Dharmāditya, the supreme king of great kings Śrī-Dharmāditya is compared to the loyal and dedicated Yayāti, Nṛga, Naghuṣa and Ambarīṣa. ('svasty-Asyām-pṛbhivyām-apratirathe Nṛga-Naghuṣa-Yayāty-Ambarīṣa-sama-dhṛtau mahārājādhirāja- Śrī- Dharmmāditya -bhaṭṭāraka-rājye').⁴⁸ The same analogies have been reflected in the copperplates of Dvādaśāditya, Gopacandra and Samācāradeva.

The appearance of various literary terms is noteworthy if we look into the land donative portions. Faridpur grant of Dharmāditya referred to a custom duty supervisor Brahmin Vasudeva svāmin.⁴⁹

⁴³ *Ibid.* p.194; Pargiter, 'Second Grant of the time of Dharmāditya,' , lines 1-2, p.200.

⁴⁴ Pargiter, 'Grant of the time of Gopacandra', p.203.

⁴⁵ Pargiter, 'Second Grant of the time of Dharmāditya', lines 3, 18, pp. 200-201.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* lines 1-2, p.354.

⁴⁷ Pargiter, 'Grant of the time of Gopacandra', p.205.

⁴⁸ Pargiter, 'Second Grant of the time of Dharmāditya', lines 1-2, p.200.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* line 6, p.200.

He donated the land to brāhmaṇa Somasvāmin belonging to lauhitya gotra and Kāṇva-Vājasaneyya school. In the Faridpur copper plate Inscription of Dharmāditya, the donor sādhanika Vātabhoga purchased a triple kulya sowing area of cultivated land from the local government and bestowed the land to Candrasvāmin who is a vājasaneyya and belonged to bharadvāja lineage.⁵⁰ The Kotalipada copperplate of Dvādaśāditya referred to a donation of land by rājanaka Viviktasoma to fourteen or more noble brāhmaṇas of various school, gotra, asceticism, Veda, Vedāṅga etc.⁵¹ Another reference can be drawn from the Faridpur copperplate of Gopacandra. Here the donor Vatsapāla svāmin who was apparently a brāhmaṇa, bestowed one kulyavāpa of cultivated land to kāṇva-lauhitya brāhmaṇa bhāṭṭa Gomidatta Svāmin.⁵²

As land grant charters, these inscriptions record the process of land transactions. It is notable, that the names of the authors are obscure in these copperplates. However, local influential people in the rural society and administrative heads and functionaries engaged in each administrative layer of the sub-region of Vaṅga have been portrayed here. They were involved in the whole process of documenting the inscriptions. Uparika Nāgadeva (‘mahāpratihāroparika-nāgadevasya’) and uparika Jivadatta were entrusted as governors of Navyāvākāśikā, the local administrative body of Vaṅga.⁵³ Viṣayapati Jajāva, vyāpārakāraṇḍaya Gopālasvāmin, viniyuktaka Vatsapālasvāmin, rājānaka Kṣasāma and viṣayapati Pavitraka were the governors of Vārakamaṇḍalaviṣaya, an administrative unit under Navyāvākāśikā.⁵⁴ They collaborated with the adhikaraṇas of Vārakamaṇḍalaviṣaya, which was constituted by the influential peoples of the rural society. They were elder scribe

⁵⁰ Pargiter, ‘Grant of the time of Dharmāditya’, lines 16-19, p.196.

⁵¹ Furui, ‘The Kotalipada Copper-plate’, lines 20-24, p.92.

⁵² Pargiter, ‘Grant of the time of Gopacandra’, lines 5-13, p.204.

⁵³ Pargiter, ‘Grant of the time of Dharmāditya’, lines 3-4, p.195, Pargiter, ‘Grant of the time of Gopacandra’, lines 3-4, p.204; Bhattasali, ‘The Ghugrahati Copper Plate’, line 4, p.76.

⁵⁴ Pargiter, ‘Grant of the time of Dharmāditya’, lines 3-4, p.195, Pargiter, ‘Second Grant of the time of Dharmāditya’, line 5, p.200, Pargiter, ‘Grant of the time of Gopacandra’, line 5, p.204; Furui, ‘The Kotalipada Copper-plate’, line 3, p.90; Bhattasali, ‘The Ghugrahati Copper Plate’, lines 4-5, p.76.

(jyeṣṭhakāyastha Nayasena), kāyasthas and karaṇikas. Landed magnets like mahattaras, viṣayamahattaras, pradhāna, vyavahārins etc. referred to the existence of notable people of the rural society who were involved in the land transaction process. The Faridpur copper plate Inscription of Dharmāditya referred to viṣayamahattaras Iṭita, Kulacandra, Garuḍa, Vṛhacaṭṭa, Kulasvāmin, Aluka, Anācāra, Bhāśaitya, Śubhadeva, Ghoṣacandra, Kālasakha, Durlabha, Satyacandra, Arjuna, Bappa, Kuṇḍalīpta, Animitra and Guṇacandra.⁵⁵ Pustapāla Vinayasena was mentioned as the keeper of the record.⁵⁶ The oldest kāyastha Nayasena as the chief and leading men of the district was referred to as the constituent of adhikaraṇa in another Faridpur copper plate Inscription of Dharmāditya.⁵⁷ Mahattaras of viṣayas accompanied by mahattara Somaghoṣa, mahattara Thoḍa or Thoḍasa have been mentioned here as the notable people of the rural society.⁵⁸ Mahattara Thoḍa was the owner of a particular land plot. In the Kotalipada copperplate inscription of Dvādaśāditya, reference to viṣayamahattaras, mahattaras, phalkas and one yājñīya laid out the same scenario.⁵⁹ The Ghugrahati copperplate of Samācāradeva referred to the members of adhikaraṇa headed by jyeṣṭhādhikaraṇika Dāmuka, and local influentials like viṣayamahattara, mahattaras and many other pradhānā vyavahārins.⁶⁰ The adhikaraṇikajana in the Faridpur copperplate of Gopacandra and the karaṇika Nayanāga, Keśava and others in the Ghugrahati copperplate was appointed as arbitrators (kulavāras) by the adhikaraṇa executing things like land measurement.⁶¹ It is also apparent that the distinct identity of brāhmaṇas as donee became clearer in this period. Titles ending with svāmin or prefixed with bhaṭṭa attest to their distinct identity. The brāhmaṇas were referred to separately by their gotra,

⁵⁵ Pargiter, 'Grant of the time of Dharmāditya', lines 4-5, p.195.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* lines 9-10, p.195.

⁵⁷ Pargiter, 'Second Grant of the time of Dharmāditya', line 7, p.200.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* lines 7-8, 17, pp.200-201.

⁵⁹ Furui, 'The Kotalipada Copper-plate', p.92.

⁶⁰ Bhattasali, 'The Ghugrahati Copper Plate', lines 5-9, p.76.

⁶¹ Pargiter, 'Grant of the time of Gopacandra', line 18, p. 204; Bhattasali, 'The Ghugrahati Copper Plate', line 15, p.77.

lineage, Vedic school etc. Possibly, they even have a kinship relation between each other having same gotra, school and lineage. As Ryosuke Furui mentioned that distinct social identities have been claimed by the brāhmaṇa donee and donors.⁶² A tendency had developed between these donees and donors that the donee brāhmaṇas were settled by the donor brāhmaṇas which paved the path for their network-building, particularly in Vārakamaṇḍalaviṣaya of Vaṅga where these land grants had been issued.

The Mallasarul and Jayarampur copperplate of Gopacandra:

The Mallasarul and Jayarampur copperplate of Gopacandra attest to the reign of Gopacandra in Vardhamāna bhukti and Daṇḍabhukti of Rāḍha in the 6th century. The characters of both the copperplates belong to the eastern variety of late brāhmī script, palaeographically datable to 6th century CE. With the exception of two verses in āryā metre at the beginning and eight other verses relating to land grant, the Mallasarul copperplate was composed in prose.⁶³ The Jayarampur copperplate, was also a prose composition throughout except the usual imprecatory and benedictory verses at the end which were in anuṣṭubh and puspitāgrā metres.⁶⁴ The orthographic features were almost same as the Faridpur plates and the Kotalipada plate. The well-known features of the Gupta inscription have been followed here such as the excessive addition of suffix ka in dattaka as evidenced from the Mallasarul copperplate of Gopacandra.⁶⁵ However, these inscriptions contain many literary, linguistic and orthographical errors, grammatical mistakes such as irregularity of sandhi etc.

The donative portions have the usual descriptions of land grants. In Jayarampur copper plate Inscription of Gopacandra, the feudatory ruler mahāsāmanta mahārāja Acyuta purchased the village

⁶² Furui, 'Brāhmaṇas in early medieval Bengal', p.227.

⁶³ Majumdar, 'Mallasarul copper plate', p.156.

⁶⁴ Tripathy, 'Jayarampur Copper Plate grant', p.174.

⁶⁵ Majumdar, 'Mallasarul copper plate', line 12, p.160.

named Śvetavālikā under the province Daṇḍabhukti of Rāḍha, and granted it to the ārya-saṅgha for building a vihāra and an image of ārya Avolokiteśvara at the mahāvihāra Bodhipodraka.⁶⁶ Simultaneously, the Mallasarul copperplate of Gopacandra records the grant of land by mahārāja Vijayasena in the village Vettragarttā within Vakkattaka vīthī of the Vardhamāna bhukti of Rāḍha to a Brahmin named Vatsasvāmin of the kauṇḍinya gotra, belonging to the Bahvṛicha śākhā of the R̥gveda.⁶⁷

Reference to the scribes is apparent here. The Jayrampur copperplate of Gopacandra was written by kāyastha Mānadatta ('likhitam kāyasthamānadatteneti') and heated by pustapāla Bhogadatta.⁶⁸ The Mallasarul copperplate referred to sāndhivigrahika Bhogacandra as the draft writer. This charter also records Śubhadatta as the dūtaka, and pustapāla Jayadāsa as the person assigned to heat the copperplate ('dūtakaḥ Śubhadatto likhitam sāndhivigrahika Bhogacandreṇa tāpitam pustapāla Jayadāsena').⁶⁹

The issuers, petitioners of the inscriptions and other influential people involved in the overall land donation process are evident here. The Jayrampur copperplate of Gopacandra referred to mahāsāmantamahārāja Acyuta as the in-charge of Daṇḍabhukti. kumārāmātyarājanaka Vijayavarman was the in-charge of Śvetavālikāvīthī, an administrative unit of Daṇḍabhukti.⁷⁰ This plate further referred to mahattaras and other notables of the rural society, kāyasthas, karaṇikas and pustapālas. The Mallasarul copperplate of Gopacandra referred to various functionaries of the provincial administration under the authority of a subordinate ruler (Mahārāja Vijayasena) within the administrative division Vakkattakavīthī of Vardhamānabhukti. Those are kārttākṛtika, kumārāmātya, chauroddharaṇika, uparika, audraṅgika, āgrahārika, aurnasthānika, bhogapatika,

⁶⁶ Tripathy, 'Jayarampur Copper Plate grant', p.178.

⁶⁷ Majumdar, 'Mallasarul copper plate', p.157.

⁶⁸ Tripathy, 'Jayarampur Copper Plate grant', line 50, p.178.

⁶⁹ Majumdar, 'Mallasarul copper plate', lines 24-25, p.161.

⁷⁰ Tripathy, 'Jayarampur Copper Plate grant', lines 23-24, p.176.

viṣayapati, tadāyuktaka, hiranyasāmudāyika, pattalaka, āvasthika, devadroni etc⁷¹. Their official designations were sought to be identified by Nihararanjan Ray.⁷² According to him, kārttākṛtika was probably considered as a craft master or a Royal East Division Officer; kumārāmātya was genealogically appointed royal officer directly employed by the king or prince; chauroddharaṇika was in charge of collecting taxes from the tenants to protect them from thieves; audraṅgika collected a tax named udraṅga from the permanent subjects; āgrahārika was the supervisor-observer of the dharmadeya- brahmadeya land; aurnasthānika was probably a regulatory governor of silk clothing craft; devadronīsammandha was the supervisor and observer of the temple, pilgrimages etc., bhogapatika was probably a tax collector of a tax named bhoga; tadāyuktaka was probably an officer appointed by the uparika and similar to viṣayapati, hiranyasāmudāyika was the governor of the tax collection, collected in coins; āvasthika was the governor of the royal palace, royal house and rest house.⁷³ Pattalaka was entrusted with the area called Pattala. Other than the appointed functionaries, there were references to mahattaras, khāḍgi and vāhanāyaka as notable landholders of the rural society.

Inscriptions of Śaśāṅka and Jayanāga:

The efflorescence of literary style had evolved to a somewhat enhanced form since the seventh century. With the possession of Śaśāṅka 's throne, elevated royal power and status were embedded in Bengal. As far as the inscriptions are concerned, they gleamed high exaggerated terms and eloquent words. The two Medinipur Copper Plate Inscriptions of Śaśāṅka portrays the same. They

⁷¹ Majumdar, 'Mallasarul copper plate', lines 3-4, p.159.

⁷² Ray, *Bangalir Itihas*, p.322.

⁷³ Note that D.C. Sircar had discussed in some details many of these designations mentioned also in the copper plate charter issued by Viṣṇusena, a sub – regional/feudatorial ruler from the region of Gujarat, possibly ruling under the Maitrakas of Valabhi. See D.C. Sircar, 'Charter of Viṣṇusena, Samvat 649', *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol 30, 1987 (rpt.), pp. 163 – 181.

were verse compositions and written in anuṣṭubh metre.⁷⁴ The first glimpse of a high literary tone is found in these inscriptions. These were adorned with literary traits like metaphor (rūpaka), similes (upamā) and ornate tones or dhvani. In the Medinipur Copper Plate Inscription of Somadatta, Śaśānka has been highly praised. It has been said that Śaśānka's body has been encircled by the four oceans ('Śrī-Śaśānke mahīm-pāti catur-jaladhi-mekhalām').⁷⁵ The use of high metaphor can be illuminated in the verse 'Viṣṇoḥ pottr-āgra-vikṣepa-kṣaṇabhā (vita-sādhvasām) śeṣa-śiro-madhyam=adhyāsīna-mahā-tanuḥ Kām-ārāti-śiro-bhraṣṭa (gaṅgaugha-dhvasta-kalmaṣām)'.⁷⁶ By the radiance of Śaśānka, his feudatory, Somadatta has been glorified ('tasya pāda-nakha- jyotsnā-vibhūṣita- śiro- maṇau- Śrī- sāmanta- mahārāja- Somadatte- guṇādhike').⁷⁷ He had the morality of truth, honesty, and command over arms, learning skills that were individually acquired by the Pāṇḍavas ('Somadatte guṇādhike sagama- otsanna- kāleya- dhvānta- saṁhatau- sahitām= Utkala-deśena- Daṇḍabhuktiṁ praśāsati- satya- śaurya- kṛtāstratva- rūpa- vidyādayaḥ pṛthak pāṇḍaveṣu sthitāḥ santi yasminn ekatra te guṇāḥ').⁷⁸ His minister Prakīrṇadāsa was daily worshipped by the brāhmaṇas for the expertise of his actions.⁷⁹

The inscriptions of Śaśānka and Jayanāga belong to the type of north-east Indian alphabet of about 6th-7th century CE. Lexically, in the Vappaghosavata copper plate of Jayanāga, tāmpra paṭṭa meant 'an estate granted under a warrant engraved on copper plate' and gaṅginikā which actually means 'dry river bed', meant to be a particular river in here.⁸⁰ As far as the donative portions of the

⁷⁴ Majumdar, 'Two Copper Plates of Śaśānka', p.2.

⁷⁵ Majumdar, 'Two Copper Plates of Śaśānka: Text No.I', line 3, p.7.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* lines 1- 3, p.7.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* lines 3-4, pp.7-8.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* lines 4- 6. p.8.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* verse 6, p.8.

⁸⁰ Barnett, 'Vappaghoshavata Grant', lines 1-2, p.63.

inscriptions are concerned, it is evident that all the charters record the land donation to eminent brāhmaṇas belonging to particular gotra and śākhā. Examples are the Medinipur copperplate of Śubhakīrti which records the grant of 40 droṇas of land and one droṇavāpa of homestead land in the village Kumbhārapadraka within the Tāvīra adhikaraṇa of the Daṇḍabhukti province to the intelligent brāhmaṇa Dāmyasvāmī of bharadvāja gotra and Mādhyandina śākhā.⁸¹

The Panchrol copperplate of Śaśāṅka also referred to the donation of land to bhaṭṭa Dāmasvāmin of kauśika gotra.⁸² Vappaghosavata copperplate of Jayanāga records the grant of a village named Vappaghosavata to the brāhmaṇa bhaṭṭa Brahmavīra Svāmin belonged to kāśyapa gotra and colleague of chhāndogas.⁸³ The Panchrol copperplate of Śaśāṅka referred to the officers associated with Ekatākaviṣaya, as an administrative unit of Rāḍha.⁸⁴ These officers were kārtākṛtika, uparika, bhuktipattalaka, kumārāmātya, viṣayapati and bhāṇḍāgāra (officials of treasury).⁸⁵ This plate further referred to mahāmahattaras, mahattaras, mahāpradhānas, and pradhānas as local landed magnets and karaṇika, pustapāla and sthāyīpāla as the clerical group of the viṣaya. The clerical group seems to have been the member of the adhikaraṇa. Reference to bhaṭṭa Dhanapāla, bhaṭṭa Gopāladeva and Raithisvāmin hinted to the existence of brāhmaṇas as landholders.⁸⁶ Two Midnapore copper plate of Śaśāṅka referred to Mahāpratihāra Śubhakīrti and Mahārāja Somadatta as the governor of Daṇḍabhukti. Brāhmaṇas and pradhānas were responsible office bearers of Tāvīra adhikaraṇa under the authority of Mahāpratihāra Śubhakīrti.⁸⁷ They, as landed magnets, were

⁸¹ Majumdar, 'Two Copper Plates of Śaśāṅka: Text No.II', lines 9-11, p.9.

⁸² Furui, 'Panchrol (Egra) Copper-plate', lines 19-20, p.122.

⁸³ Barnett, 'Vappaghoshavata Grant', lines 4-6, p.63.

⁸⁴ Furui, 'Panchrol (Egra) Copper-plate', lines 5-6, p.121.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* lines 6-7, p.121.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* lines 13-14, p.122.

⁸⁷ Majumdar, 'Two Copper Plates of Śaśāṅka: Text No.II', lines 7-8, p.9.

involved in the process of land sale and donation. While in another Medinipur copperplate, the governor of Daṇḍabhukti Mahārāja Somadatta made the grant independently.

It is evident that the inscriptions of Śāśānka were more appealing in terms of literary embellishments. This was probably due to his involvement in North Indian political arena. He emerged as a powerful sāmanta in Bihar under the sovereignty of Later Gupta king Māhasenagupta.⁸⁸ His involvement in struggles with two powerful enemies of northern India, the Maukharīs of Kanauj and the Puṣyabhūti of Sthāṇvīśvara and his conflict with Harṣavardhana, influenced the reconstruction of north Indian political history of 7th century CE. Although he did not have a very positive image in North Indian literature because of their partisan nature, he was certainly influenced by the rich culture of North India which is reflected in his inscriptions to some extent. Moreover, the rise of monarchism in Bengal was first seen in the reign of Śāśānka as a sovereign ruler, which is evident in his inscriptions. However, the most splendid example of the literary style at this phase can be seen in the Nidhanpur copperplate of Bhāskarvarman.

Nidhanpur copperplate of Bhāskarvarman:

Bhāskarvarman, the king of Kāmarūpa extended his control over Śrīhaṭṭa and its adjacent areas in early seventh century. He was likely to be considered the overlord of the early Rāta and Nātha rulers. He had a political alliance with Harṣavardhana against Śāśānka. After the demise of Śāśānka, maybe for a while, the reign of Bhāskarvarman was established in Karṇasuvārṇa, which was evidenced by his Nidhanpur copper plate. This copperplate symbolizes his successful reign in Gauḍa for a short period of time. This plate was issued from the victorious camp at Karṇasuvārṇa. It is especially inspired by Bāṇabhaṭṭa's writing style, who adorned the court of Harṣa. For the pompous diction and the excellence and elegance of the composition, it has appeared as a landmark of literary creation in Bengal.

⁸⁸ Chowdhury, 'Threshold', p. 532.

This copperplate has been edited and translated by several scholars.⁸⁹ This plate was discovered on the eastern fringe of the Sylhet district of Bangladesh in the village of Nidhanpur of Pañcakhaṇḍa parganā.⁹⁰ The script used was the eastern variety of the north Indian brāhmī alphabet of the 7th century. The verses were written in metres like, vaṁśasthāvila, āryā and anuṣṭubh.⁹¹ The inscription exhibits a rich literary style through its elaborate grandiloquent dynastic narrative. The eulogy portion of 25 verses was followed by 14 lines of prose. The literary style of this inscription was composed in gauḍī rīti. It exhibited the literary merits of the gauḍī rīti, for example, pomp of syllables-akṣara dambara, overemphasized terms or śleṣa, rhetorical allusions or use of alaṅkāra etc. Hence, this is one inscription of this time that we can cite as a piece of evidence in favor of gauḍī rīti. It commenced with the panegyric of God. Here, the first ruler Puṣyavarman was considered the lord of the earth (‘devabhūyaṁ kṣhitīśvaraḥ Puṣyavarmma-ābhūt’).⁹² His son Samudravarmman was compared to five oceans (‘pañchama iva hi samudraḥ Samudravarmmmābhava tasya’).⁹³ King Kalyāṇvarman was devoid of every kind of flaw.⁹⁴ King Gaṇapati was endowed with innumerable qualities (‘Gaṇapatim-iva-dāna-varṣaṇam-ajasraṁ Gaṇapatim –agaṇita- guṇa- gaṇam-asūta- kali-hānaye- tanayaṁ’).⁹⁵ There was one Chandramukhavarman, who as charming and resplendent as the moon, was the dispeller of all the gloom (‘Chandramukhas-tasya-sutaś-chandra

⁸⁹ Bhattacharya, ‘Nidhanpur Copper Plates’, pp.65-79; Bhattacharya, ‘Bhāskarabarmār Tāmraśāsan’, pp.1-43; Mukunda Madhava Sharma, ‘Nidhanpur copperplates of Bhāskaravarman’, *Inscriptions of Ancient Assam*, 1978, pp. 38-81.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* p.38.

⁹¹ *Ibid.* p.40.

⁹² Bhattacharya, ‘Nidhanpur Copper Plates’, line 10, p.73; Sharma, ‘Nidhanpur copperplates’, p.41.

⁹³ Bhattacharya, ‘Nidhanpur Copper Plates’, line 11, p.73.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* verse 10, p.73.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.* lines 14-15, p.73.

iva kalā-kalāpa-ramaṇīyaḥ’).⁹⁶ Bhāskaravarman, the main protagonist of this inscription, was like the sun of innumerable rise.⁹⁷ He was like a wish-yielding tree and the controller of the universe (‘ity-api sa jagad-uduya-kalpan-āstemaya-hetunā bhagavatā kamala sambhavenā’).⁹⁸ He ignited the light of the āryadharmā by eliminating the darkness of the Kali age and his prowess was equal to the strength of his feudatories (‘yathāyatham-uchita-kara-nika-vitarāṇ-ākulita-kali-timara-sañchaya-tay prakāśit-āryadharmmālokaḥ sva-bhuja-vala-tulita-sakala-sāmanta-chakra-vikrama’).⁹⁹

This copperplate recorded the donation of unreclaimed agrahāra land of Mayuraśālamala in Candrapuri viṣaya to at least 208 brāhmaṇas.¹⁰⁰ They were mentioned with their gotra, Vedic school and assigned share of lands. The person who wrote the grant (śāsayitṛi) was Vasuvarṇṇa.¹⁰¹ Local notables like the headman of the Candrapuri viṣaya Śrī Kṣikuṇḍa, nyāyakaraṇika Janārdanasvāmin, vyavahārī Haradatta and kāyastha Dundhunātha have also been referred who were involved in the land evaluation process.

It is generally considered that this inscription is an imitation of Bāṇabhaṭṭa’s style and technique. Due to Bhāskaravarman's alliance with Harṣavardhana, the clear influence of Harṣa's poet Bāṇabhaṭṭa's writing style is evident here. Even the verses of the text indicate that Bāṇabhaṭṭa was probably the original composer of this inscription. By analyzing the verses of the text, it can be seen that there was no mention of Bhāskaravarman's success or his political achievements. Only by following the style of alamkāraśāstra and gauḍī rīti, the verses were composed in high figurative

⁹⁶ *Ibid.* verse 15, p.74.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* verse 22, p.74.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.* line 34, pp.74-75.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* lines 36-37, pp.74-75.

¹⁰⁰ Sharma, ‘Nidhanpur copperplates’, p.53.

¹⁰¹ Bhattacharya, ‘Nidhanpur Copper Plates’, lines 45-51, p.79.

language, rhetoric style and śleṣa in praise of the Varman dynasty. Probably under the patronage of Harṣa, Bāṇabhaṭṭa wrote the text. In this context, it is notable that the inscription begins with the hymns of Śīva, where Harṣavardhana himself was originally a follower of Māheśwara. All these hints indicated Bāṇabhaṭṭa as the probable author of this inscription. However, the exalted literary style and kāvyālaṅkaraṇ of the inscription have placed it as the most significant testimony of the time. This may be regarded as the trendsetter of the literary style of that time.

Copperplate inscriptions of the Nāthas and the Rātas

It is interesting to observe in this context the literary trend that we find to be exhibited in the copperplate inscriptions issued by some small dynasties in southeastern Bengal for self-proclamation and for the legitimacy of their rule. Although they were small dynasties, their copperplates adhered to the style of the contemporary literary genre as a composition.

South eastern Bengal indeed saw the emergence of some synchronous line of rulers. Among them, the Nāthas and the Rātas were subordinate rulers of the Varmans of Kāmarupa. Their overlord was apparently Bhāskarvarmana, as mentioned already. They enjoyed a semi-independent status and issued their own grants. Among them, the Nātha realm has been indicated through the discovery of two copperplates- Tippera copperplate of Lokanātha¹⁰² and Kalapur Copperplate of Maruṇḍanātha.¹⁰³ Their reign has been located in the Śrīhaṭṭa region during the middle of the seventh century CE. The Rātas established their power during the middle to the last quarter of the 7th century

102 Basak, 'Tipperah Copper Plate', pp.301-315; Bhattacharya, 'A newly discovered copper-plate', pp.45-60; Sharma, 'Sri-Jīvadhārana of the Tippera Copper plate', pp.326-27; Sircar, 'Tipperah copper plate', pp.28-35.

¹⁰³ Gupta, *CopperPlates of Sylhet*, pp.68-80; Sircar, 'Kalapur Plate', pp.14-18.

CE. The Kailan copper plate¹⁰⁴ and the Uḍiśvara Copper-plate of Śridhāraṇa Rāta¹⁰⁵ illuminate their political history. The Rātas extended their control over Vaṅga, Śrīhaṭṭa and Tippera region of south-eastern Bengal.

Among the above-mentioned inscriptions, the ‘Tipperah copperplate’ of Loknātha issued during the reign of the Nāthas in the middle of the seventh century C.E. stands as a testimony to literary standard, sporting a beautiful composition. It was composed in metres like śārdūlavikrīḍita, sragdharā and vasantatilaka.¹⁰⁶ Again, during the middle to the last quarter of the 7th century CE, the literary layout of the Kailan copperplate of Śridhāraṇa Rāta presents another fine creation. This inscription was composed in āryā, vasantatilaka and anuṣṭubh metres.¹⁰⁷ Except for the imprecatory and initial verses, these inscriptions were mainly composed in prose. Generally, the characters were an adaptation of Nāgarī from the Gupta alphabets. On the basis of characteristic features, Narendra Nath Law placed the Kailan Copper Plate Inscription of Śridhāraṇarāta in the second half of the 7th century CE in terms of palaeography.¹⁰⁸ He compared the character of the inscription to the time of Śaśāṅka, Lokanātha, Rājarāja and Devakhaḍga of the Khaḍga dynasty and Dharmapāla of Pāla Dynasty and noticed that this text belongs to some time frame between Śaśāṅka and Dharmapāla and almost contemporary to that of Lokanātha and Khaḍga rulers. As regards palaeography and

104 Law, ‘The Kailan Copper plate’, pp.221-41; Dinesh Chandra Sircar, ed., ‘Kailan Copper Plate Inscription of Śridhāraṇarāta (c.665-75 AD), Regnal year 8’, *Select Inscriptions*, Vol.II, 1983, pp.36-40; N.K. Bhattasali, ‘The New Kailan Plate of Śridhāraṇa Rāta’, *Indian Historical Quarterly*, September 1946, pp.169-171.

105 Islam, ‘Uḍiśvara Copper-plate’, pp.61-72.

106 Basak, ‘Tipperah Copper Plate’, p.306.

107 Law, ‘The Kailan Copper plate’, p. 237

108 *Ibid.* p.223.

orthography, these eastern Indian inscriptions belonging to seventh and eight centuries bear almost similar features. He observed the style of the composition as gauḍīya.¹⁰⁹

These two inscriptions carried the overwrought rhetoric trend of literary art. As Radhagovinda Basak said, they were composed in gauḍī rīṭī, which exhibited the characteristics of artificial poetry, for example, use of śleṣa, upamā, overbearing composition or atīśayokti etc.¹¹⁰ He also observed that the literary expressions used by the poet were a reflection of Bāṇabhaṭṭa's *Harṣacarita*. Like in the Tipperah copperplate of Loknātha, the literary expression 'aṣṭa-puṣpikā' used by the poet refers to the eightfold offering of flowers. This was a literary term borrowed from the work of Bāṇabhaṭṭa's *Harṣacarita*.¹¹¹

The Tipperah copperplate of Loknātha contains rhetorical subtleties. The use of long compound words with alliterations was overflowing here. For example, the first king of this dynasty Nātha, was praised for his sanctity and devotion.¹¹² He was a prominent king who destroyed his earthly existence and destroyed all his sins. He has used lofty titles like adhi-mahārāja ('muni Bharadvāja-sad- vaṅśa- jātaḥ- śrīmān- prakhyāta-kīrttiḥ prabhavad-adhi-mahārāja-śavd-ādhikāraḥ saṁsāra-ochchhitti-hetuḥ praśamita-durito-ṇātho').¹¹³ His courageous son sāmanta Śrīṇātha was lauded for his good deeds ('prakhyāta- vīrryo- mahān- sāmanto- yudhi lavdha- paurusha- dhano dharmya

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* p.223.

¹¹⁰ Basak, 'Inscriptions', p.404.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.* p.404.

¹¹² Basak, 'Tipperah Copper Plate', verse 2, p.306.

¹¹³ *Ibid.* line 5, p.306.

kṛiyaik āśrayaḥŚrīṇātho- Bhagavān-iva pratihata’).¹¹⁴ King Lokanātha was expertise in every facet. His army was victorious by the intellect of his counselors.¹¹⁵

In terms of the donative portion of the inscriptions are concerned, it has been noticed that in the Tipperah copperplate, forest land plot (‘āṭavibhūkhaṇḍa’) in Suvvuṅga visaya has been granted to the maṭha of the deity Anantanārāyaṇa and 192 brāhmaṇas studying the four Vedas. It was petitioned by mahāsāmanta Pradoshaśarman.¹¹⁶ The Kalapur copperplate of Maruṇḍanātha also depicted the same picture. It is noteworthy that in Śrīhaṭṭa and in the periphery of Samataṭa forest tracts have been donated for agricultural expansion in those areas. Incorporating the forest dwellers within the sedentary agrarian society through Brahmanical affiliation, was the main purpose here. On the other, the Kailan Copper plate Inscription of Śrīdhāraṇarāta which belongs to Samataṭa in the second half of the seventh century records the donation of well-settled marshy land to a Buddhist samgha and 13 brāhmaṇas. These land plots were held by ‘150 sons of good families’ who were assumed to be large number of brāhmaṇas and ‘Malla blacksmiths beginning with Vendhana’ who were the service providers.¹¹⁷ After the reclamation of wild tracts, agrarian expansion and settlements developed here.

Among these two copperplates, the Tipperah copperplate was documented by sāndhivigrahika Praśāntadeva.¹¹⁸ These documents were conveyed by the prince or local ruler. Such as, Laksmīnātha, the son of Lokanātha was the dūtaka of the Tipperah copperplate.¹¹⁹ Kailan

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.* lines 6-7, p.306.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.* verse 7, p.307.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.* lines 21-26, p.307-08.

¹¹⁷ Law, ‘The Kailan Copper plate’, lines 37-38, p.240.

¹¹⁸ Basak, ‘Tipperah Copper Plate’, line 55, p.309.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.* line 17, p.307.

copperplate also referred to yuvarāja śrī Baladhāraṇarāta.¹²⁰ Reference to the subordinate rulers, appointed officials under them, local magnets, brāhmaṇas and other residents is evident here. The Kailan Copperplate Inscription of Śrīdhāraṇarāta referred to prāptapañcamahāsabda held by Śrīdhāraṇarāta which reflects his subordinate status.¹²¹ The Rāta and Nātha rulers had a subordinate status under the influence of an overlord, apparently Bhāskarvarman. Although they were subordinates, they acted as independent rulers as indicated by the title Samataṭeśvara by Jīvadhāraṇa and Śrīdhāraṇarāta. Subordinate rulers were appointed under them; such as, mahāsāmanta Pradoshaśarman under Lokanātha¹²² and mahāsāndhivigrahādhikṛta Jayanātha and sāmanta Vappa Siṃha under Śrīdhāraṇarāta.¹²³ Kumārāmātyas were also appointed under them and the documents were issued by kumārāmātyādhikaraṇa.¹²⁴ The subordinate rulers made the grant as local magnets from the local administrative unit viṣaya; such as mahāsāmanta Pradoshaśarman of the Tipperah copperplate made the grant from suvvaṅga visaya in the forest region. The Kailan Copper plate Inscription of Śrīdhāraṇarāta also referred to kumārāmātyas of Devaparvata, under whose jurisdiction fell two viṣayas called Guptīnāṭana and Paṭalāyikā. The grant has been made by mahāsāndhivigrahādhikṛta Jayanātha.

The copperplates of Khaḍgas and Devas:

In the middle of the seventh century, the Khaḍgas established their power in eastern Vaṅga and Samataṭa. The political history of the Khaḍgas is conceivable from the discovery of two copperplates found in the Ashrafpur village of Dacca district¹²⁵ and the copperplate inscriptions found at Salban

¹²⁰ Law, 'The Kailan Copper plate', line 17, p.238.

¹²¹ *Ibid.* line 14, p.238.

¹²² Basak, 'Tipperah Copper Plate', line 21, p.307.

¹²³ Law, 'The Kailan Copper plate', line 18, p.238; Islam, 'Uḍiśvara Copper-plate', pp.61-72.

¹²⁴ Basak, 'Tipperah Copper Plate', line 1, p.306; Law, 'The Kailan Copper plate', line 4, p.237.

¹²⁵ Laskar, 'Ashrafpur Copper Plate', pp.85-91.

Vihāra in Mainamati.¹²⁶ Following the Khaḍgas, the Devas rose to power during the eighth and ninth century CE in Samatāta. The copperplates of the early Devas were the Devaparvata copperplate inscription of Bhavadeva¹²⁷ and Salban Vihara Copper Plate Inscription of Ānandadeva, year 39 and Bhavadeva.¹²⁸

Around the eighth century CE, the Ashrafpur copper plate of Devakhaḍga portrayed the eulogistic account of the Khaḍga dynasty in an oratorical tone. Inscriptions of early Deva dynasties of 8th-9th centuries CE have also followed a similar literary intonation. The characters of the Ashrafpur copperplate inscription of Devakhaḍga belong to the ‘early Kuṭila variety’ of the northern alphabets. Kuṭila variety means the Magadhan alphabet of the 7th century. Overemphasized words are noteworthy in these copperplate inscriptions. Examples can be drawn from the Ashrafpur copperplate of Devakhaḍga. Here the great devotee of Lord Sugata, Khaḍgodyama has been glorified and admired in the three worlds. To him, religion was a peaceful spirit reachable through the meditation of the ascetics and a repository of all good qualities.¹²⁹ Khaḍgodyama was a conqueror of this world. His son Śrī Jātakhaḍga exterminated his multiple enemies with his prowess, as a piece of straw flew away by the wind and as a number of horses were destructed by an elephant.¹³⁰

In these inscriptions, it is usually seen that the land donations were made to the Buddhist vihāras in scattered land plots around several settlements. The Ashrafpur grant record the donation of scattered

¹²⁶ Rashid, 'The Mainamati Inscriptions', p.201; Rashid, 'Mainamati Copper-plate', p.202.

¹²⁷ Sircar, ‘Copper-plate Inscription of Bhavadeva Abhinavamṛgāṅka’, pp. 744-50; Sircar, ‘Copper-plate Inscription of king Bhavadeva’, pp.83-95.

¹²⁸ Gupta, ‘Mainamati copper-plate’, pp.145-48; Rashid, 'The Mainamati Inscriptions,' pp.212-13.

¹²⁹ Laskar, ‘Ashrafpur Copper Plate’, lines 2-5, p.90.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.* lines 5-6, p.90.

cultivated lands to the Buddhist vihāras.¹³¹ These land plots were mentioned with the tenure of particular holders. Such as, the Ashrafpur copperplate of Devakhaḍga records different givers and enjoyers in different land plots; such as in Markaṭāsipāṭaka, 27 droṇavāpas of land was enjoyed by Sulabdha and others and 13 droṇavāpas was cultivated by Rājadāsa and Durggaṭa, in Vatsanāgapāṭaka the whole settlement was given by Bṛhatparameśvara- an older king, in Navaropya 1 pāṭaka of land was given by a royal member Udīrṇakhaḍga and enjoyed by some Śakraka and finally all the settlements had been given by the king to the vihāras of ācārya Saṃghamitra.¹³² Another Ashrafpur copperplate also recorded different tenure holders. Such as at Talyodyānikataralā, two pāṭakas were enjoyed by queen consort Sri Prabhāvati, one pāṭaka enjoyed by Śarvāntara and cultivated by mahattara Śikhara etc.¹³³ The Devaparvata grant of Bhavadeva records the donation of 7 and 1/2 pāṭakas of land located in the four settlements of Peranāṭanaviṣaya in favor of the Ratna-Traya to the Buddhist establishment in Veṇḍamativihārikā.¹³⁴

Reference to the draft writer or scribe comes from the Ashrafpur copperplate inscriptions of Devakhaḍga. Both the inscriptions were written by Pūradāsa, a pious Buddhist.¹³⁵ The Devaparvata CPI of Bhavadeva was written by Brahmādāsa.¹³⁶ The land grants had conveyed by the subordinates. Like the Devaparvata copperplate inscription referred to the dūtaka, the chief mahāsāmantādhipati Nandadhara.¹³⁷ The copperplates of Khaḍgas and Devas have been issued by the sovereign rulers. Viṣayapati, the governor of viṣaya and the employees of viṣayādhikaraṇas

¹³¹ Furui, *Land and Society*, p.108.

¹³² Laskar, 'Ashrafpur Copper Plate: plate B', lines 7-17, p.89.

¹³³ Laskar, 'Ashrafpur Copper Plate: plate A', lines 3-10, pp.87-88.

¹³⁴ Sircar, 'Copper-plate Inscription of Bhavadeva', lines 56-59, p.749.

¹³⁵ Laskar, 'Ashrafpur Copper Plate: plate B', pp.88-89.

¹³⁶ Sircar, 'Copper-plate Inscription of Bhavadeva', p.744.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 744.

worked under them. These indicate the established authority of the sovereign rulers over their subordinates. Under the control of the king, the tenure of scattered land plots was given to the royal people, cultivators and mahattaras. This paved the way for the enriched royal power and integration of the whole of eastern Bengal, including Vaṅga and Samatāṭa under the Candras in the tenth-eleventh centuries.

Inscription of Devātideva:

Around the eighth century CE, Harikela witnessed the formation of a sub-regional kingdom under the reign of king Devātideva as evidenced by a bronze vase inscription datable to 715 CE.¹³⁸ This inscription records five occasions of land sale grants and donations to a Buddhist vihāra called Haritakadharmasabhāvihāra or Dharmasabhāvihāra. The first phase of donation has been issued by local administrative unit called khaṣamaka and its adhikaraṇa, accompanied by kumārāmātya, four mahābalādhikṛtas, one mahāmahattara bhaṭṭa, a dharmapāṭha, three bhaṭṭas, a sāndhivigrahika, three elders (jyeṣṭha), mudrapāla, three kāyasthas and two mahāvārikas.¹³⁹ It records that in Khaṣamaka by the order of a mahāpradhāna Saubhāgyakīrti the members of adhikaraṇa, accompanied by the viṣayins and king's servants (rājakarmin), issued 25 pāṭakas of land to a vihāra of which 22 pāṭakas were purchased by mahāpradhāna mantrimukhya Nayaparākramagomin from the people of the villages and other 3 pāṭakas of land were given by the people of those villages itself.¹⁴⁰ The land was also given to the brāhmaṇas. In other cases, the lands were purchased by the residents of Dharmasabhāvihāra including bhikṣusaṃghācāryas and karanins from the particular villages of goldsmiths, paṇḍita Dharmadatta and mahāvārikas.¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ Bhattacharya, 'A preliminary report', pp.237-47; Furui, 'Bangladesh national museum', pp.46-47.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.* pp.44-45.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.* pp.46-47.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.* pp.46-47.

The scribe or the author of this inscription has not been mentioned. However, we find reference to officials engaged in administrative matters related to land transactions. This comprised the kumārāmātya, mahābalādhikṛta, dharmapāṭha, sāndhivigrahika, mudrāpāla and mahāpradhāna under the administrative units called khaṇḍa and viṣaya. The reference to mahāpradhāna, mahāmahattarabhaṭṭa indicated the existence of landed magnets. They collaborated with the other important groups like the bhaṭṭas, jyeṣṭhas and kāyasthas. Mahāvārikas were appointed as arbitrators by these local notables. Artisanal group like the goldsmiths and the brāhmaṇas were also referred to as landholders. Titles like paṇḍita and bhaṭṭa were attached to the brāhmaṇas. The presence of brāhmaṇa landholders and brāhmaṇa donee attest to the settlement of brāhmaṇas here which was evident from the reference to a village named Chandrabhaṭṭārikāgrāma in Khaṣamaka. The reference to Khaṣamaka denoted an area inhabited by a group of tribal people called khasas. According to Furui, they were organized at the level of chiefdom and were already incorporated into the sedentary agrarian society.¹⁴² The mention of the adhikaraṇa members of Khaṣamaka and karaṇa also attest to their status of authority over land transactions. Most importantly, many of the named communities, whether officials, local occupation groups, caste and ethnic communities could be assumed to have formed a part of the literate circle, especially the royal officials of higher status, the brāhmaṇas, the kāyasthas and even the community leaders from the mercantile and artisanal groups. The village of Chandrabhaṭṭārikāgrāma in Khaṣamaka area does not only indicate creation of Brahmanical settlements among zones occupied by ethnic communities but also that pockets of villages of literate settlers would have penetrated deep into these parts of Bengal in the early part of the early medieval times.

The literary style that grew throughout this period, portrays an evolution in the format, language as well as contents of the epigraphic messages. The inscriptions of this phase mainly continued to reflect the writing style of the Guptas. This was an obvious phenomenon as the Guptas had

¹⁴² Furui, *Land and society*, p. 115.

penetrated not only Puṇḍravardhana but also Vaṅga, Rāḍha and Samatāṭa.¹⁴³ The impact of the Gupta presence was not only felt in administrative frame and socio-economic life but also in cultural aspects, which is evident from the epigraphic records. This is reflected in the copperplates of Pradyumnabandhu in Puṇḍra, those of Dharmāditya, Dvādaśāditya, Gopacandra and Samācāradeva in Vaṅga, and the records of Gopacandra in Rāḍha and Vainyagupta in Samatāṭa. It is noteworthy, that they reveal a pragmatic employment of the device of the copperplate inscriptions as administrative records. Therefore, rather than poetic embellishments, they neatly documented the land sale figures, land measurement units and land evaluation methods, furnishing information of the developing stage of practical knowledge related to state matters. This reveals a different compositional aspect of the inscribed records.

It is actually with the seventh century copperplates of Śaśāṅka in Rāḍha that we get the first reflection of the sense of sovereign domination. The literary expression used here projects royal glory. The apotheosis of this trend was reached in the Nidhanpur Copperplate. We can cite the Nidhanpur copperplate as an example reflecting the most ornate and rich literary composition of this period. In terms of literary developments, the inscription allows us to draw the historical significance by pointing to Bhāskaravarman's association with Harṣavardhana and thus allowing us to link this beautiful flowering of literary style to that event. Based on that connection, it can be said that the writing style of Harṣa's poet Bāṇabhaṭṭa got reflected in this inscription. When we look at the inscriptions of Rāta and Nātha in South East Bengal, it is seen that these depict a subtler and more subdued version of this literary tone. Amongst them, the Tipperah copperplate of Loknātha and the Kailan copperplate of Śrīdhāraṇa Rāta were especially important. Radhagovinda Basak observed that the literary expressions used here were a reflection of Bāṇabhaṭṭa's *Harṣacarita*.¹⁴⁴ In this context, it may be said that possibly the association of Loknātha and Śrīdhāraṇa Rāta with Bhāskaravarman, acted as a conduit for the influence of Harṣavardhana's courtly literary air to reach

¹⁴³ Devdutta Kakati, 'The Socio-Cultural and Political Situation in the Easternmost part of the Gupta Realm: Emergent Samatāṭa', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol. 79, 2018-19, pp. 75-77.

¹⁴⁴ Basak, 'Inscriptions', p.404.

the literary circuit in their sub-regional court. Although not as rich in poetic ornamentation as the Nidhanpur copperplate, there is indeed a poetic subtlety that exhibits much beauty of language and style. These inscriptions also carried the aspirant tone of self-proclamation and political legitimacy harboured by these emergent sovereign rulers. Even though they were subordinate to Bhāskaravarman, their autonomous status at the local level gets across in their inscriptions. A somewhat enhanced form of this is seen in the copperplates of the Khadgas and Devas. These records bear a subtle precise literary tone.

As we have seen and noted in the introduction, the scope of tracking the origin and development of the literary culture of early medieval Bengal is best possible through a study of the inscriptions issued by royal houses since the 6th century CE. In fact, a survey of this source allows us to observe and draw hypotheses about the roots of development, nature and scope of the literary forms evolving through phases and gauge at the processes that could be seen to have laid the foundations of a regional literary culture of early medieval Bengal. However, a fuller development can only be witnessed from the Pāla Candra phase.

The literary form that we observe evolving through this phase, especially in the inscriptions was mainly transmitted through the scribes. In most cases, the scribes were members of the royal family or royal officials or members of clerical groups, incorporated within the administrative sphere. The Kāyasthas emerged as a group of literates among administrative personnel. Clearly, they were appointed through the royal court and transcribed the courtly agenda in connection with the courtly circuit on the one hand and in collaboration with the rural society on the other hand. The courtly supervision worked behind their activities which increased over time, as we shall observe during the later phases. Yet, they would remain a ubiquitous presence in the literate world operating as a bridge between the royal court and the rural communities. The inscriptions they wrote down involved the royal officials, local administrative officials, rural influential people, and prominent Brahmins who formed a circuit of literates and were all aware of the style and content of the concerned texts.

Lastly, we need to address the question of the economic base functioning behind the epigraphic literacy. The answer to this is available in the very prose portions recording the details of the land

grants. The nature of this patronization varied according to the settings of the different sub-regions. During the 6th-8th century CE, this difference was mainly determined on the basis of agricultural expansion in these sub-regions. While sedentary agriculture had already emerged in the sub-regions of Puṇḍravardhana-Vaṅga-Rāḍha in the earlier times under the Gupta rule, further agrarian expansion and development were observed in the period between the 6th -8th century CE. From the 6th century CE onward the riverine tracts, low lands and forest tracts have been incorporated into the agricultural circle under brāhmaṇa donees which necessitated the mobilization of labor power and enabled the control of landed magnets like mahattaras, viṣayamahattaras, pradhāna, vyavahārins, brāhmaṇas, etc. These influential rural residents collaborated with the adhikaraṇa members, for example, kāyasthas and karaṇikas to execute the land transaction procedure. The neat documentation of land measurements and land sale units in these copperplates reflect the administrative skills of these clerical groups and their role as scribes. The furnishing of these pieces of information also reflects the standard of land management, and agrarian fiscal systems already in vogue. The inscriptions, therefore, bear witness to emerging knowledge systems related to everyday life at the rural levels. A prolific body of personnel was involved in local administration. The adhikaraṇas of particular viṣayas were administered by mahāpratīhāra, viṣayapati, vyāpārakāraṇḍaya, viniyuktaka, rājānaka etc. The Mallasarul copperplate of Gopacandra referred to various functionaries of the provincial administration division of Vakkattakavīthī under Vardhamānabhukti of Rāḍha. A somewhat extended form of this appears in the 7th century CE in the Rāḍha sub-region. Here under the reign of Śaśānka, the governor of Daṇḍabhukti mahārāja Somadatta issued the land grant independently. Urban centres like Karṇasuvarṇa emerged as a symbol of political power. This is reflected in the rich literary style of inscriptions of Śaśānka which provides glimpses of royal glorification. The best example of this was of course seen in the Nidhanpur copperplate inscription of Bhāskarvarman. It is not only the poetic part of this inscription that bears rich evidence for us as to the development of a literary style, but the details of the grant in prose also furnish significant evidence for the conditions of the literate society under evolution. The varied inscriptions record the process of state's expansion and expansion of agriculture along with settlements of large numbers of brāhmaṇas in Rāḍha, Samataṭa-Śrīhaṭṭa-Harikela. In the latter sub regions large forest tracts and unreclaimed lands had been donated to a large number of brāhmaṇas and religious institutions to bring the forest dwellers under the religious system and

sedentary agrarian society. In this process of integration, observed most clearly in the Samatāṭa-Śrīhaṭṭa-Harikela sub-regions, the brāhamaṇas were gradually making their way in facilitating the emergence of sedentary agrarian society. Political centres like Devaparvata emerged under the Khaḍgas and Devas. The process would subsequently pave the way for an extended royal dominance in the Pāla-Candra period.

CHAPTER III

The flourishing phase of literary culture (8th – 12th century CE)

Bengal witnessed the establishment of strong dynasties like the Pālas and Candras from the second half of the eighth century to the end of the eleventh century. The rulers of the first of these dynasties especially wielded authority over far - flung territories as sovereigns and came to rule briefly in parts of the erstwhile Magadha state in their heydays. The Pālas had originated from Varendra, extended their dominion to Rāḍha and then to eastern Bihar. Historians have variously mulled over the narration in the earliest record of the dynasty, the Khalimpur copper plate inscription which provides a brief allusion to their ascendance to power. It states that a political anarchy was brought to end when with the consent of the people or a group of supporters, styled as ‘prakṛti’, the goddess of fortune led Gopāla to power as the founder of the Pāla rule in Bengal. According to D.C. Sircar, it was around the end of the eighth century, especially during the reign of Dharmapāla (c.789-821 CE),¹ that the dynasty got involved in the north Indian political struggle against the Gurajara-Pratīhāras and the Rāṣṭrakūṭas for the hegemony over Kānyakubja.² A period of stagnation followed with the death of the next ruler Devapāla (c. 821-860 CE)³ which gradually led to decline and disintegration until Mahīpāla I (c.997-1045 CE)⁴ rejuvenated the rule of the dynasty in northern Bengal and the northern portion of western Bengal along with the prepossessed Magadha. However, they had a continuous conflict with the Gāhaḍavālas and the Kalacuris on the western front in the following period from around 10th century CE. Eventually the last known ruler of the Pālas, Madanapāla retained his power in south-eastern Bihar (Munger and parts of Nalanda-Bhagalpur district) and parts of Puṇḍravardhanabhukti. Looking toward in eastern Bengal, another dynasty, that of the Candras emerged as a supreme power after the Khaḍgas and Devas in the Vaṅga-Samataṭa region. The duration of their rule lasted from the first half of the 10th century to

¹ Chowdhury, ‘Pāla Realm’, p.706.

² D.C.Sircar, *The Kānyakubja-Gauḍa Struggle from the sixth to the twelfth century A.D.*, (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1985), p.11.

³ Chowdhury, ‘Pāla Realm’, p.720.

⁴ *Ibid.* p.759.

the second half of the 11th century CE. The most significant reign among the Candra rulers was that of Śrīcandra (c.925-975 CE).⁵

In the same period, the Kāmboja Gaudapatis carved out for themselves an independent position in parts of western and northern Bengal, especially the peripheral areas of southern Rāḍha in the middle of the 10th century CE. Harikela also witnessed the rise of independent political power on a smaller scale. An independent ruler named Kāntideva formed a small independent kingdom around the last half of the 9th century located in the Chittagong-Tipperā hilly areas, adjacent to Samatāṭa. Furthermore, a metal vase inscription datable to the early tenth century referred to rājādhirāja Attākaradeva ruling in Chittagong and Tipperā-Arakan region.⁶

With the crystallization and concentration of the monarchical rule especially under the larger states like those of the Pālas and Candras, the presence of stronger hegemonic rule was felt. This led to enhanced control over the rural society. Monopolization of control over the resources and society was not only manifest in political and economic terms but also exhibited in the contents of the royal charters related to land transactions, an important element of the state authority. The impact was clearly felt in the compositional aspect of these charters which begin to project a more elongated and enriched literary style from the late eighth- early ninth centuries onward. The richly ornate language, full of comparative analogies, similes and metaphors structured in melodious words in the eulogies evolved with distinctive regional character which is evident from the Khalimpur inscription of Dharmapāla, Badal Rock Pillar Inscription of Guravamiśra, Bhatūria inscription of Yaśodāsa, Paschimbhag copper plate Inscription of Śrīcandra and so on. Alongside, a number of works in the form of literature were visible during this particular phase. As indicated by Nupur Dasgupta a textual world of compositions was already on the rise in the region which comprised various genres of Buddhist Sanskrit literature such as a number of works on Tantra and Sādhanās, works on Brahmanical śāstras or Vedic rites, treatises on the science of Jurisprudence, astrology, medical texts, astronomy and creative Sanskrit literature.⁷ Among the ascertainable creative compositions, Gauḍa Abhinanda's *Kādambari-Kathā-Sāra* (9th century CE), Abhinanda's *Rāmacarita* (9th century), Kṣemiśvara's drama *Caṇḍakauśika* and *Naiṣadhānanda*, Nītivarman's

⁵ Sircar, 'Paschimbhag Copper-plate Inscription', p. 92.

⁶ Bhattacharya, 'An Inscribed Metal Vase', pp.323-38.

⁷ Dasgupta, 'Sanskrit Literature', pp.546-557.

drama *Kīcaka-vadha* (11th century CE) and Sandhyākaranandi's *Rāmacarita* (c. 11th-12th century C.E.) were directly and indirectly associated with Bengal.⁸ Poetic anthologies had also emerged as a significant genre during this phase. *Subhāṣitaratnaḥa* compiled by Vidyākara (c.11th-12th century) falls into this category. *Kṛṣiparāśara* (mid11th century) is another Sanskrit text of this period, considered as an important agricultural manual for the early medieval rural society. Amongst them, Sandhyākaranandi's *Rāmacarita* best exemplifies the flourishing literary creativity in the region. However, the composition of the inscriptions reveals perhaps equally varied and distinguished literary creativity including a few excellent examples.

This efflorescence was perhaps not an isolated phenomenon and may have drawn inspiration from other sources. Looking into the contemporary pan-Indian scene of literary activity during the 8th-9th centuries, we come across eminent poets like Udbhāṭa (8th century CE), Vāmana (end of the 8th century) and Rudraṭa (first quarter of the 9th century CE) and their exquisite works on alaṅkāra.⁹ Among them, rhetorician and poet Udbhāṭa had followed in the line of Bhāmaha. He was acclaimed for his well-known treatise on poetry called *Kāvyaālaṅkāra-saṅgraha* or *Sāra-saṅgraha*.¹⁰ Vāmana brought forward a distinct school of poetics by asserting *rīti* as the soul of poetry in his *Kāvyaālaṅkāra-sūtra*.¹¹ Rudraṭa adopted the alaṅkāra school of poetics in his comprehensive work called *Kāvyaālaṅkāra*.¹² Hence, the literary tone of the time incorporated the style of alaṅkāraśāstra which was manifested in literary embellishments, adornments of speech etc. This general literary tone appears to have been largely imbibed and internalized by the contemporary litterateurs of Bengal, who, however, developed their distinctive style too. For example, the literary style of Sandhyākaranandi's *Rāmacarita*, and the *Subhāṣitaratnaḥa* stand out in their repertoire of expressive innovations. The former especially represents a new dimension of the carita genre with its dual entendre style and its innovative use of similes with epic narrative. Haraprasad Sastri's edition of Sandhyākaranandi's *Rāmacarita* has been revised with English translation and notes by Radhagovinda Basak.¹³ This has been considered a meticulous narration and translation of the text. Romila Thapar observed the literary traits of *Rāmacarita* and

⁸ *Ibid.* pp.558-63.

⁹ Sastri, 'Sanskrit Poetics', p.297.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* p.297.

¹¹ *Ibid.* p.297.

¹² *Ibid.* p.298.

¹³ Sastri, 'Rāmacarita'.

accordingly Sandhyākaranandi's literary concepts as an author. She has made a subtle narration of the text and critical observation of the kavipraśasti section.¹⁴ H.H. Daniel Ingalls's critical introduction and translation of the text *Subhāṣitaratnakoṣa* illustrates the merits of its poetic appeal and evaluates the anthology as a representation of classical Sanskrit literature as a whole.¹⁵ Nupur Dasgupta who has observed the process of the literary style of this phase in all genres of literature, places the Pāla Candra phase trend of literary style taking on both the epigraphic compositions and the literary texts.¹⁶ Inscriptions of the times thus must be observed as aligned with this overall creative efflorescence.

To understand the society of composers and audience, in which the literary culture of this phase was practiced, some previous works are taken into account. Ryosuke Furui, who looked deeply into the sub-regional structure of the society, pointed to the process of change in social stratification in different sub-regions of Bengal during this period and the changing status of the different sections of the rural society.¹⁷ He has investigated the social groups from the addresses in the Pāla inscriptions and copperplates¹⁸ and observed the enhanced position of subordinate rulers under the Pālas, as issuers of the inscriptions.¹⁹ Furui also traced the evolution of brāhmaṇas in this process. Land donation to high qualified brāhmaṇas led to their emergence as the most influential residents of rural society all over Bengal, and to the establishment of Brahmanical centres in Rāḍha and Varendra through their network-building processes.²⁰ Their ritual services in ordinary households have been highlighted by Suchandra Ghosh and Sayantani Pal in their article on 'Everyday Life in Early Bengal'.²¹ The above analytic works afford us clues to the social environs which nurtured the literary culture of this phase in early medieval Bengal.

¹⁴ Thapar, *The Past Before Us*, pp. 496-98.

¹⁵ Ingalls, *An Anthology of Sanskrit Court Poetry*, pp. 1-53.

¹⁶ Dasgupta, 'Sanskrit Literature', pp. 545-67.

¹⁷ Furui, *Land and Society*, pp. 130-187.

¹⁸ Ryosuke Furui, 'Agrarian Society and Social Groups in Early Medieval Bengal from a study of Inscriptions', in *Inscriptions and Agrarian Issues in Indian History*, eds. B.D.Chattopadhyaya, Suchandra Ghosh and Bishnupriya Basak, (Kolkata: The Asiatic Society, 2017), pp. 168-74.

¹⁹ Furui, 'Subordinate rulers', pp. 339-59.

²⁰ Furui, 'Brāhmaṇas', pp. 184-86; Furui, 'Brāhmaṇas in early medieval Bengal', pp. 229-36.

²¹ Ghosh and Pal, 'Everyday Life', p. 12.

Inscriptions or records of land transaction constitute the major historical source for the entire period under discussion. The choice of inscriptions as a source for discerning the rising trend of literary culture in this context was deliberate. This choice was guided not only by the availability of such volumes of available records but also because these records, emanating from state agency, would afford us clarity about the role of the polity, the political agents and the attendant society of creators and consumers of the literary products. Not only do they furnish us with details of administrative processes especially connected to revenue administration and illuminate the social sphere of such activities but also throw interesting light on literary practices. No literary text bears more illuminating information on these aspects of the production of literary creativity. The inscriptions are also extremely important as they provide us with visible clues to the transformation of the scripts from early Nāgarī to Proto Nāgarī and finally to the Nāgarī type of characters. This forms an integral and important aspect of the process of literary evolution pointing to the pattern of literary accomplishment.

Locating the inscriptions in the context of dynastic rule, it appears clearly that from the Pāla-Candra period onwards the literary tone of the contents of inscribed messages became richer with pompous diction and exaggeration. The present chapter discusses some select Pāla-Candra inscriptions to arrive at a general idea about the overall modish pattern of the time. The choice of inscriptions was determined on the basis of the most voluble and rich contents as the most representative among the extensive number of epigraphic materials associated with this historical phase. These include, for example, the Khalimpur copperplate inscription of Dharmapāla, the Nalanda copperplate of Devapāla, Badal Rock Pillar Inscription of Guravamiśra which have been considered as landmarks in the rising literary trend in the phase. The Paschimbhag copper plate inscription of Śrīcandra bears a slightly distinct testimony to a long and meticulous recording of land-grant evoking a different scenario of knowledge and literary engagements in the sub-regional context.

Inscriptions of the Pālas

The voluminous inscriptions of the Pāla phase (8th-12th century CE) were comprised of land charters, eulogies, dedicative and donative inscriptions engraved on copper plates, images, rocks, temples, and other objects. Among them, we get around twenty-five copperplate charters, thirty-three image inscriptions, fourteen rock inscriptions, four temple inscriptions, one terracotta plaque inscription and many more. The royal praśastis provide the most illuminating clues to

literary history. Some praśastis were dedicated to various personalities such as feudal lords, subordinate rulers, Brahmin advisors, or other religious personages who were politically associated with the Pāla administration. These afford us some idea about the horizon of literary engagements.

The Khalimpur copper plate of Dharmapāla

The Khalimpur copper plate of Dharmapāla was the first testimony to an elongated and ornate composition of the Pālas.²² This copperplate bears testimony to the involvement of the Pālas in the north Indian struggle for hegemony over Kanauj against the Gurajara-Pratīhāras and the Rāṣṭrakūṭas. It is also significant for its eulogistic poetry, with fine expertise in literary style, handling of language and use of similes - upamā in poetic beauty, alamkāra and rūpaka (metaphor), atīśayokti (hyperbole) and play of words or śleṣa. Hence, this inscription can be considered the landmark of this phase's literary genre.

F. Kielhorn has provided a detailed provenance of this text. He stated that this copperplate has been discovered by Umes Chandra Batavyal in November 1893 at the village of Khālimpur near Gauḍa in the Malda district of Bhagalapur division.²³ The alphabet of the inscription belongs to the Magadha variety of the Nāgarī, which can be considered a ninth-century inscription on paleographic grounds.²⁴ Apart from the beginning word 'om svasti' which continued with twelve other eulogical verses, the rest of the text was composed in prose.²⁵ The eulogy portion of the inscription contains the panegyric description of the Pāla family in a fine embellished tone, commencing with a poetic ornate verse in praise of Lord Sugata (Buddha), whose huge power was invoked for protection. The ancestral lineage is described in a high tone of praise, beginning with Dayitaviṣṇu to Gopāla. Dayitaviṣṇu has been praised as the source of the dynasty, comparable to the ocean and the moon, an august progenitor among all the kings

²² Kielhorn, 'Khalimpur Plate', pp.243-54; Umes Chandra Batavyal, 'On a new Copper plate Grant of Dharmapāla', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol.LXIII, Part-I, (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1895), pp.39-63; Dines Chandra Sircar, ed., 'Khalimpur Copper Plate Inscription of Dharmapāla (c.775-812 AD), Regnal year 32', *Select Inscriptions*, Vol. II, 1983, pp.63-70; Akshay KumarMaitreya, 'Dharmapāladeva's Copper-plate Inscription: Khalimpur Inscription', *Gaudalekhamala*, (Kolkata: Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar, 2004), pp.9-28.

²³ Kielhorn, 'Khalimpur Plate', p.243.

²⁴ *Ibid.* p.244.

²⁵ *Ibid.* p. 244.

(‘Dayitaviṣṇusarvvavidyāvadātaḥ/ āsīdā sāgarād urvvīm gurvībhiḥ kīrttibhiḥ kṛtī’).²⁶ His son Vapyata became famous as the destroyer of the enemy.²⁷ His brilliant son Gopāla was of infinite fame like the glorious mass of moonlight. Next comes the interesting line stating how Gopāla assumed power which was bestowed on him by the people and dispelled anarchism from his domain (‘Mātsya-nyāyam-apohitum prakṛtibhir- lakshmyāḥ karaṇ-grāhitaḥŚrī-Gopāla- iti kshitīsa-śirasām cūdāmaṇis-tat-sutaḥ’).²⁸ Dharmapāla, the son of Gopāla and Deddadevī was the main admirer of this eulogy.²⁹ Dharmapāla, the master of kings, who alone ruled the whole world, had been extolled for his achievements.³⁰ When his gravest troop moved forward with unmitigated joy, the earth rose like a mountain and marched on it (‘yasminn uddāma līlā calita valabhare dig-jayāya pravṛtte yāntyā isvambharāyām calita giri tiraścīnatām tad vaśena’).³¹ Drawing similarities to mythological characters like Pṛthu, Rāma, Raghu and Nala, who were considered to be the creators of the Kali age, Dharmapāla was raised as a supreme ruler with extensive power over the whole earth (‘ye-bhūvan Pṛthu-Rāma-Rāghava-Nala-Prāya dharitībhujas-tān-ekatra-didṛksuṇ-eva nicitān sarvān samam-vedhasā dhvast-āśesa-narendra-māna-mahimāśrī-Dharmapālaḥ-kalau lola-śrīkariṇi-niva- bandhana-mahāstambhaḥ- samuttambhitaḥ’).³² Further, the overemphasized similes illuminated the power of Dharmapāla in such a way that it is said that Indra and his army Māndhātṛi were thrilled to fight with his battalion.³³ Such poetic embellishments of the rulers as protagonists in the praśastis was already emerging in the main theatre of northern and central India as well as in the Deccan around the late 8th century. Bengal seems to have entered the arena of high Sanskrit poetics at the right moment. Yet, certain distinctness in orthography which reflects the possibility of local use of Māgadhā Prakṛt and details of local vernacular words for technical terms in the land grant portion lend a regional character to the whole composition.

The donative portion of the inscription records the grant of the village of Gopippali in Āmrasaṇḍikāmaṇḍala of Sthālīkkaṭa-ṣaṣya and the villages of Krauñcaśvabhra, Mādhāsāmmali

²⁶ *Ibid.* verse 2, p.248.

²⁷ *Ibid.* verse 3, p.248.

²⁸ *Ibid.* verse 3, p.248.

²⁹ *Ibid.* verse 6, p.248.

³⁰ *Ibid.* verse 6, p.248.

³¹ *Ibid.* verse 7, p.248.

³² *Ibid.* verse 10, p.252.

³³ *Ibid.* verse 11, p.248.

and Pālitaka in the Mahantāprakāśa viṣaya of the Vyāghrataṭi-maṇḍala within the Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti to the temple of God Nunna-nārāyaṇa by the king Dharmapāla himself.³⁴ It was made at the request of mahāsāmantādhipati Nārāyaṇavarman and conveyed by the dūtaka yuvarāja Tribhuvanapāla. Here mahāsāmantādhipati Nārāyaṇavarman petitioned Dharmapāla to give four villages in Śubhasthalī that possibly lie within his own territory. He dedicated the villages to the temple of Nannanārāyaṇabhaṭṭāraka and to the Lāṭa brāhmaṇa priests protecting the deity within his own territory.³⁵ This grant was addressed to four categories of people. The first was dependents of the royal favor (rājapādaprasādopajivin) or dependents of the king (rājapādopajivin) which includes 24 titles of royal officials or subordinate rulers like rājanas, rājanakas, rājaputras, rājāmātyas, senāpatis, viṣyapatis, bhogapatis, shasthādihikṛtas, daṇḍasaktis, chauroddharaṇikas, dauḥśādhasādhinakas, dūtas, kholas, gamāgamikas, abhitvaramāṇa, tarikas, śaulkikas, gaulmikas, tadāyuktakas, viniyuktakas and others.³⁶ The second category includes the cāṭas and bhaṭas. The third was viṣayavyavahārins with karaṇas which include the influential residents of rural society like jyeṣṭhakāyasthas, mahāmahattaras, mahattaras, dāsagrāmikas etc. The fourth category was ‘residing cultivators’ mentioned with homage to brāhmaṇas beforehand (‘brāhmaṇamānanāpūrvakam’).³⁷ Hence, the enhanced control of the state and subordinate rulers in Puṇḍravardhanabhukti under the Pālas is evident since the 8th-9th centuries. The declining power of rural society and growing stratification within it are mentioned in the charter. This copperplate was regarded as the first testimony to the changing power relation between the state and the rural society, which bears witness to the increased state power and monarchical rule in Bengal during this period. So not only from the point of view of a literary ornament but also as a testimony to the establishment of a monarchical structure, this inscription can be regarded as marking a landmark in the literary history of the region.

³⁴ *Ibid.* p.247.

³⁵ *Ibid.* lines 49-52, p.250.

³⁶ *Ibid.* line 43, p.253.

³⁷ *Ibid.* line 43, p.253.

The Nalanda copperplate of Devapāla:

The Nalanda Copper of Devapāla (c.821-860 CE)³⁸, characteristically identical to the Khalimpur Copperplate, was regarded as another ornate composition.³⁹ The author of this copperplate had not only praised the Pālas, but also elevated another dynasty through his writings. The significance of this copperplate lies in mentioning the connections between Bengal and south-east Asia during the reign of Devapāla. According to Abdul Momin Chowdhury, it has been claimed that the king of Suvarṇadvīpa surrendered to Devapāla for the purposes of constructing a temple at Nālandā, within the realm of Devapāla at the time. This king is named as Bālaputradeva, the son of Samarāgravīra and grandson of Vīravairimathana, of the Śailendra dynasty ruling over Indonesia and Malaysia with their capitals at Śrīvijaya (Palembang in Sumatra) and Kaṭāha (Kedah near Penang in Malaysia).⁴⁰

The copper plate was found in 1921 at Nālandā by Hirananda Sastri. The characters of this inscription belong to the type of northern class of alphabets of about the 9th century CE as similar to the Khalimpur copperplate of Dharmapāla, the Munger copperplate of Devapāla etc. With the exception of the introductory ‘om svasti’, this is a verse composition down to the commencement of the formal part of the grant. The donative part of the inscription is also in verse. The eulogium account of this charter has two portions- the first portion exhibits the panegyric verses of the Pāla dynasty and the other eulogizes the Śailendra dynasty.⁴¹ It commenced with the usual auspicious ‘om svasti’ and was followed by a verse in honor of Lord Buddha and 14 verses in tribute to the Pāla genealogy. Here the first ruler of the Pāla dynasty, Gopāla was compared to the great mythical kings like Pṛthu and Sagara.⁴² It has been said that he established his reign all over the Earth reaching up to the sea (‘vijitya yenājalaghervasundharāmbimocitā moghaporigrahā iti/

³⁸ D.C. Sircar, ed. ‘Nalanda Copperplate inscription of Devapāla’, *Select Inscriptions*, Vol. II, 1983, p. 71.

³⁹ N. G. Majumdar, ‘Nalanda Copper Plate of Devapāladeva’, *Monographs of the Varendra Research Society*, No.1, (Calcutta: The Cotton Press, 1926), pp.1-29; Sastri, ‘The Nalanda Copper-plate’, pp.310-27; Sastri, ‘Nalanda Copper plate’, *Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India*, No.66, p.92ff; Sircar, ‘Nalanda Copperplate’, pp.71-79.

⁴⁰ Chowdhury, ‘Pāla Realm’, p. 721.

⁴¹ Majumdar, ‘Nalanda Copper Plate’, p.4.

⁴² *Ibid.* verse 2, p.17.

sabaṣpamuddhāṣpaviloconāt punavarneṣu vandhundattaśurmmataṅgajāḥ’).⁴³ His son Dharmapāla followed the śāstras and brought people to the path of righteousness.⁴⁴ At the end of his world victory, although his ruling regime decimated all his enemies, they upheld his dignity and their hearts yearned for Dharmapāla out of affection as happens to those banished from heaven, remembering their past existence.⁴⁵ As a simile and exaggerated praise this ironical sentence illuminates the voluble and loaded tone that the praśastis of the Pāla rulers began to assume. In the same vein his son Devapāladeva was compared with the precious pearl extracted from the sea oyster (‘śnāghyāpratīvatāsau muktāratnam samudraśuktiriva śrīDeavapāladevam prasannabakta sutamasuta’).⁴⁶ He was compared to Bodhisattva for inheriting the kingdom with his pure mind, body and considerate speech.⁴⁷ The king, as the repository of enlightenment, was able to keep his kingdom away from every turmoil.⁴⁸ The royal camp at Mudgagiri, the place from where the document was issued has also been glorified here in high rhetorical verses.⁴⁹ It is indeed interesting to observe the juxtaposing of praise for military might with the traits of benign benevolence and supreme knowledge while lauding the monarchs, which on the one hand exhibits the literary potential of the composer and, at the other, projects a sense of the moral embedded in the heart of the literati of this time, expressing the pacifying sentiments of Buddhism.

The donative part of the inscription recorded the grant of five villages of Śrīnagara Bhukti in the Rājagrha Viṣaya and Pālāmaka in the Kumudasūtra-vīthī of the Gayā Viṣaya issued by paramēśvara paramabhaṭṭāraka mahārājādhirāja Devapāladeva.⁵⁰ Devapāla addressed a number of parties or stakeholders including those who were described as his dependents (‘svapādapadmopajivin’) comprising subordinate rulers and an increasing number of royal officials. Besides there were the lesser agents of the state, the cāṭa bhaṭa and the rural residents headed by mahattamas and kuṭumbins, among whom the brāhmaṇas were the foremost, headed by mahattamas and kuṭumbins and reaching to medas, andhras and caṇḍālas.⁵¹ The aforementioned

⁴³ *Ibid.* verse 3, p.17.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* verse 5, p.17.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* verse 8, p.18.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* verse 11, p.18.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* verse 12, p.18.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* verse 12-13, pp. 18-19.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* verse 15, p.19.

⁵⁰ Sastri, ‘The Nalanda Copper-plate’, p.311.

⁵¹ Majumdar, ‘Nalanda Copper Plate’, lines 24-33, pp. 19-21.

villages were given for the establishment of a Buddhist vihāra at Nālandā by the ruler of Suvarṇadvīpa (Sumatra), mahārāja Bālaputradeva and for endowing every kind of facility for the Buddhist community.⁵² The next verse glorifies the royal messenger of the inscription, Balavarman, who was regarded as the king's right hand and proficient in crushing the forces of the enemy.⁵³ This part also reveals a modicum of understanding about the Buddhist ritual practices associated with pious actions.

Part II of the inscription had the panegyric description of the Śailendra family. The praise of the Śailendra dynasty under the patronage of the Pālas was an indirect indication of Devapāla's glory. It has been penned down here in an enriched literary tone that Viravairimathana was such a graceful king of Yavabhumi that the lotus leaves of his pedestal were unfolded by the light of the sparkling jewels adorned by the kings who bowed at his feet.⁵⁴ The verse 'harmya sthaleṣu kumudeṣu mr̥ṇālīṇiṣu saṅkhendukundauhineṣu padandaghānā niḥśeṣadiṅmukhanirantara labdha gitīḥ murteiva yasya bhūvanani jagāṃ kirtīḥ' was a beautiful illustration of the king's glory.⁵⁵ His son Samāragravīra was endowed with a knowledge of the śāstras, courage and well-being, and was admired as that of Yudhiṣṭhira, Parāśara, Bhīmasena, Karṇa and Arjuna.⁵⁶ His repute helped to eradicate the darkness of this world forever.⁵⁷ Samāragravīra and his wife Tārā was regarded as myth pairs like Indra-Paulomī, Śiva-Pārvatī, Viṣṇu-lakṣmī etc.⁵⁸ Their son Bālaputradeva was born just as Buddha was born from Māyā and Suddhodana and the conqueror of the god of love or Kārttikeya was born from Śiva and Umā ('māyāyāmiva kāmdevavijayīSuddhodanasyātmajaḥ skando nanditadevabbando hridoyohśommorumāyāmivatasyānto narendrabandavinotpādāravindāsanahsarvarvapotigarvvakharvvannacanaḥśrīBālaputaputroyobh avat').⁵⁹ Thus the references to epic icons and legends was juxtaposed with the buddhist tradition which brings out the peculiar tone of the eulogy here. The Śailendra ruler's devotion to the Buddha

⁵² *Ibid.* lines 36-40, p.21; See Sircar, 'Nalanda Copperplate', pp. 72, 76 (for the text).

⁵³ Majumdar, 'Nalanda Copper Plate', verse 22, p.22.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* verse 24, p.23.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* verse 25, p.23.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* verse 27, p.23.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* verse 29, p.23.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* verse 30, pp.23-24.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* verse 31, p.24.

and the Nālandā *vihāra* were mentioned as the chief concern which encouraged him to request the grant of five villages from Devapāla.

Some more royal inscriptions of the Pāla Dynasty

As the Pāla empire got revived under Mahīpāla I during the 11th century CE, fine literary compositions flourished once more as noted in the Rangpur, Belwa, Bangarh, and Biyala copperplates. Among them, the Bangarh copperplate was a very important literary testimony during the reign of Mahīpāla.⁶⁰ According to R.D. Banerji, some characters of this inscription exhibit well developed Bengali forms of script, while the other were advancing towards the Bengali alphabet of the 12th century CE.⁶¹ The metres used here were vasantatilaka, śārdūlavikrīḍita, sragdharā, āryā, mandākrānta, mālinī and indravajrā.⁶² It is also an important land grant to a brāhmaṇa named Kṛṣṇādityaśarmman, who was an immigrant of Hastipadagrāma of Śrāvasti.⁶³ Thus, this copperplate was an indication towards the building up of Brahmanical network during the 10th-12th century CE in Varendra. It was incised by the artisan Mahīdhara, an inhabitant of Poṣālī.⁶⁴ This was regarded a centre of artisans with special skills and literacy during the Pāla period.

The two Rajibpur copperplate inscriptions of Gopāla IV and Madanapāla issued during the 12th century CE were discovered in the village Rajibpur of west Dinajpur district within Puṇḍravardhanabhukti.⁶⁵ The characters of these inscriptions are in gauḍī script of the 12th century CE. If we notice the eulogistic verses of the Pāla kings here, it is seen that there is a similarity with the verses composed in the earlier Pāla records. For example, if we look at the Bharatkala Bhavan Copperplate of Rajyapāla during the first half of the tenth century CE and these two Rajibpur copperplate Inscriptions of Gopāla IV and Madanapāla during the middle of the 12th century CE, we find that the laudatory verses used here were the same for the kings up to Nārāyaṇapāla. Thus, they followed a similar pattern of poetic style in laudatory verses. Not only as a praśasti, these

⁶⁰ Banerji, 'The Bangarh Grant', pp.324-330; Maitreya, *Gauḍalekhamālā*, p.91.

⁶¹ Banerji, 'The Bangarh Grant', p.325.

⁶² *Ibid.* p.325.

⁶³ *Ibid.* p.325.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* line 62, p.328.

⁶⁵ Furui, 'Rajibpur Copper-plate', pp.39-61.

inscriptions are also considered as two significant land documents. It is notable that the Rajibpur copperplate inscription of Madanapāla has been observed as bearing the indication of tightening of control over land and its revenue during the later part of the Pāla rule, especially under Madanapāla. The grant referred to the donation of land, excluding those that belonged to ('vṛti') to Buddhist establishments, kaivartas and carmakāras as well as the royal estates ('rājasambhoga').⁶⁶ Thus while we talk about continued flourish of literary creativity in the Pāla courtly circuit, the hegemony was on the verge of decline.

Besides the above records, the Jagajjibanpur Copper Plate of Mahendrapāla,⁶⁷ Bhagalapur Copper Plate of Nārāyaṇapāla⁶⁸ and other examples all carry a charming portrayal of rūpaka, atīsoyukti and śleṣa. Through these inscriptions a steady flow of literary style becomes clear.

Inscriptions related to non – royal personages

As noted, this phase witnessed interesting development in the issuance of a few beautiful panegyrics. But such compositions were also found to be devoted to diverse personages, especially of political or religious importance. The protagonists to whom these dedications are made, for example, comprised a brāhmaṇa adviser- officer – courtier and feudatory, a brāhmaṇa – turned Buddhist adherent of high repute, and a feudatory ruler in the eastern borders of the Pāla domain, etc. Such examples, alongside the highly poetic renditions of the royal eulogies and details of land – grants made by the Pāla rulers provide the wide array of literary creativity in the extended Pāla domain. The focus and possibly the source of this creativity were thus not confined to the royal circle of supreme rulers of the domain but spilled over to other foci of glory and power. A study of some of these examples would throw light on how a standard of literary excellence was getting organized, perhaps drawing inspiration from the courtly orbit.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* lines 41-49, p.55; Furui, *Land and Society*, p. 189.

⁶⁷ Ramesh and Iyer, 'The Jagjivanpur Copperplate', pp.6-29; Suresh Chandra Bhattacharya, 'The Jagjivanpur Plate of Mahendrapāla Comprehensively Re-edited', *Journal of Ancient Indian History*, Vol.XXII, 2005-06, p.61ff.

⁶⁸ Ramranjan Mukherji and Sachindra Kumar Maity, *Corpus of Bengal Inscriptions*, (Calcutta: Firma K.L.Mukhopadhyay, 1987), pp.163-84; Sircar, 'Bhagalpur Copper-plate', pp.80-86; Maitreya, *Gauḍalekhamālā*, p.55 ff.

The Ghoshrava rock inscription of Devapāla

This is a eulogy of a Buddhist named Vīradeva datable during the reign of Devapāla in the late 9th or end of 10th century CE.⁶⁹ Although this stone tablet, inscribed with 16 verses, was carved in the village of Ghosrava in Bihar, Akshay Kumar Maitreya has noticed the use of many Bengali characters here.⁷⁰ Various embellished similes and allegorical verses are composed here about Vīradeva. The way in which this text is written in ornate language reflects the grandeur of Devapāla's extended rule up to Bihar. A careful reading of the verses brings to the fore the tone of philosophical and moral aspects of Buddhism as a religion that had lent a distinct ethos and sentiment. This inscription can be assumed to bear evidence for the prevalence of a Buddhist circle of affiliated followers.

The Badal rock pillar inscription of Guravamiśra: of the time of Nārāyaṇapāla

The Badal pillar inscription of Guravamiśra (dated by D.C. Sircar to 855 – 910 CE)⁷¹ records the deeds of a brāhmaṇa family, of which five generations were associated with the six Pāla kings by serving them mostly as political advisors and occasionally as priests or generals.⁷² It is a praśasti or laudatory account of Guravamiśra and his ancestors. These Sāṅḍilya gotra born Brāhmaṇas were respectively Vīradeva, Pāñcāla, Garga, Darbhapāṇi, Someśvara, Kedāramiśra, and Guravamiśra.⁷³ Garga was a minister under the Pāla ruler Dharmapāla. Darbhapāṇi has worked under the Pāla king Devapāla. Kedāramiśra was the advisor of Śūrapāla. His son Guravamiśra was associated with Gopāla II and Nārāyaṇapāla. He was a royal messenger under the latter ruler. This inscription was also linked to the historical process of the time. It bears witness to the way in which the subordinate rulers or feudal lords were established in the political background of the Pālas at this

⁶⁹ Maitreya, *Gaudalekhamala*, pp. 45 – 54, especially p. 46; See Hirananda Sastri, *Nalanda and its Epigraphic Material*, Memoirs of archaeological Survey of India, No. 66, 1942, pp. 89 – 91; Dr. Ballantine and M. Kittoe, 'Sanskrit Inscription from Behar', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol.VII, Part I, 1835, pp.492-501; F. Kielhorn, 'A Buddhist Stone Inscription from Ghoshrawa', *The Indian Antiquary*, Vol.VII, 1984, pp.307-12.

⁷⁰ Maitreya, *Gaudalekhamala*, p. 46.

⁷¹ Sircar, *Select Inscriptions*, Vol. II, p. 87.

⁷² Kielhorn, 'Badal Pillar Inscription', pp.160-67; Dines Candra Sircar, ed., 'Badal Stone Pillar Inscription of the time of Nārāyaṇapāla (c.855-910 A.D)', *Select Inscriptions*, Vol.II, 1983, pp.87-91.

⁷³ Kielhorn, 'Badal Pillar Inscription', p.161.

time. Hence, it inscribed the praśasti of a feudal family. This inscription is a testament to how the literary style has evolved in the long history of the Pālas.

This stone pillar inscription was discovered in the vicinity of the town of Badāl, in the Dinajpur district of the province of Bengal. The inscription records the installation of a pillar by the brāhmaṇa Rāma Guravamiśra.⁷⁴ The palaeography of this inscription dates it between the end of the ninth and beginning of the tenth century CE.⁷⁵ The inscription is in verse except for the short 29 lines of writing. This portion of the inscription records the name of the engraver, Viṣṇubhadra. Orthography and grammar indicate peculiarities as discussed by Kielhorn. This panegyric description of Guravamiśra and his predecessor has been considered to be an elegant and rich composition.⁷⁶ The inscription commenced with the panegyrics of Garga who was considered the reason behind the emergence of Dharmapāla.⁷⁷ Garga's wife Icchā was comparable to the charm of the moon ('patnīcchā nāma tasyāsīdicchevāntarvivartinī nisargga nirmala snighdhā kāntīścandra maso yathā').⁷⁸ Regarding their son Darbhapāṇi, it has been said that by his policies the illustrious prince Devapāla gifted a natural beauty to the earth where the water of the two oceans flanked with piles of rocks and whitened mountain peaks with the rising and setting of the sun.⁷⁹ Darbhapāṇi's glorious son Someśvara was like the moon who had sprung from Atri.⁸⁰ The verse 'dhañajayatulāmārūjhyā vikrāmatā vittānyarthiṣu varṣatā stuti giro nodgavvamākarṇitāḥ naivoktā madhuramva hupraṇayinaḥ sambalgitāśca śriyā yenaivam svaguṇairjjagadvisaduśaiścakre satāmvismayah' was an illustration of his unlimited prowess.⁸¹ His relationship with his wife Rallādevī was comparable to Śiva-Śivā and Hari-Lakṣmī.⁸² Their illustrious son Kedāramiśra, shiny as gold, was the finest in every branch of knowledge.⁸³ His mind made no distinction between his enemy and ally.⁸⁴ He was remembered for his sacrifices

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* pp.160-61.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* pp.160-61.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* p.161.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* verse 2, p.161.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* verse 3, p.161.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* verse 5, p.162.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* verse 8, p.162.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* verse 9, p.162.

⁸² *Ibid.* verse 10, p.162.

⁸³ *Ibid.* verse 11, p.162.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* verse 14, pp.163.

(‘yasye jyāsu br̥haspati pratikṛteḥśrīSūrapāla nrpaḥ sāksādinra iva ksatāpriya valo gartaiva bhūyaḥ svayaṁ nānāmbhonidhi mekhalasya jagataḥ kalyāṇa saṁśī ciraṁśraddhāmbhaḥ pluto manosō nata sira jagraha putampayah’).⁸⁵ His wife Vavvā bore to him a son, who was famous, compassionate, and a lord of fortune just as Devakī gave birth to Puruṣottama.⁸⁶ He was Guravamiśra, born in Jamadagni’s race and abode of good fortune.⁸⁷ The Pāla king Nārāyaṇapāla, highly efficient in discerning qualities, held him in high regard.⁸⁸ Verses 18 to 28 were entirely devoted to unrestrained praise of Guravamiśra. The encomium portrayed his immeasurable fame and profound knowledge (‘vācāmvai bhavamāgameṣvadhigamaṁ niteḥ parāntiṣṭhatāṁ vedārthānugamādasī ma mahaso vaṁśa sya samvandhitāṁ trāsaktiṅguṇa kirtaneṣu mahatānniṣṇātātāṁ jyotiṣa yasyānalpamaterameya yaśaso dharmmāvātārovadat’).⁸⁹ He was considered a Vālmīki of the Kali age (‘pratilomaharṣaṇeṣu kaliyuga vālmīki janma piśuneṣu dharmetihāsa parvvasu puṇyātmā yaḥśrūtūrvvyavṛnot’).⁹⁰ Full of poetic beauty and elegance, this work proves to be an excellent testimony to the literary genre of tenth-century Bengal. Above all, this inscription bears the witness to the enhanced position of brāhmaṇas as subordinate rulers in the form of various services and appointments to administrative positions during the Pāla phase.

Bhaturia rock inscription of Rājyapāla

The Bhaturia Rock Inscription of Rājyapāla dated to the 10th century CE comprises an eulogy of Yaśodāsa who was a member of a non-brāhmaṇa literate family and was hereditarily in the service of the Pāla kings.⁹¹ It is a beautiful stone slab inscription consisting of 20 lines of well-preserved writing. This praśasti is composed of various metres, for example, sragdharā, anuṣṭubh, śārdūlavikrīḍita, mandākrāntā, hariṇī, vasantatilakā and upajāti.⁹² As Sircar observed, the characters of this inscription belonged to the Gauḍiya or eastern Indian alphabet of the 10th century CE.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* verse 15, p.163.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* verse 17, p.163.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* verse 18, p.163.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* verse 19, p.163.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* verse 20, p.163.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* verse 24, p.164.

⁹¹ Sircar, ‘Bhaturiya Inscription’, pp.150-54; Dr. J.Sundaram and Dr. K.M.Bhadri, eds. *Uṭṭānkita Sanskrit Vidyā Aranya Epigraphs*, Vol.VII, Mysore, 2011, pp.14-19.

⁹² *Ibid.* p.15.

This inscription was very important from a historical point of view. It bore the evidence of the emergence of local chieftains under the Pāla reign and their growing influence as *sāmanta*. Yasodāsa, who belonged to a non-brāhmaṇa literate family was appointed as a mantrin and then promoted to the position of Tantrādhikārin, an officer in charge of administration by king Rājyapāla. It records the donation of a village Madhusrava to the deity of the Śaiva temple built by Yaśodāsa on the condition that a certain amount of tax would continue to be paid to the king.⁹³ This inscription portrayed literary traits like *rūpaka* and *upamā* regarding Yasodāsa who had been compared to the lord of speech, Bṛhaspati.⁹⁴ This composition was engraved on the stone slab by the artisan Śrīnidhāna.⁹⁵

Gaya Kṛṣṇadvārikā Temple inscription of Viśvāditya:

Apart from the inscriptions mentioned above, there were some other Pāla inscriptions that portrayed a fine literary tone through their poetic charm. For example, Nupur Dasgupta observed the Gaya Kṛṣṇadvārikā temple inscription of Viśvāditya in the eleventh century CE as a testimony to a beautiful composition and exquisite handling of languages.⁹⁶ Most importantly, the excellence of this literary creativity emanated from a non – brāhmaṇa, Sahadeva, who belonged to the caste of veterinarians or horse doctors. Not only that this inscription was from a group of five inscriptions issued by the local Gaya rulers who seem to have been brāhmaṇa by caste. The location of the inscription is significant since Gayā subregion may be assumed to already emerging as a centre of Brahmanical practices. The place used to resonate with resounding voices of brāhmaṇas reciting the Vedic chants. Thus, there were many different sources and venues of literary efflorescence which converged under the extensive rule of the Pāla monarchs in their heydays (here during the rule of Nayapāladeva) and brought to fruition an evolutionary literary style.

In continuation with the inscriptions that we have sought to discuss in some details to track the evolution of the literary style and nature of intellectual culture, that is the inscriptions associated with non – royal protagonists, we now present another which when put alongside the Ghosrawa

⁹³ Sircar, ‘Bhaturiya Inscription’, lines 14-17, p.154.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* verse 5, p. 154.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.* verse 15, p.154.

⁹⁶ Dasgupta, ‘Sanskrit Literature’, p. 566; Maitreya, *Gauḍalekhamālā*, pp. 110 – 120; Sircar, ‘Inscriptions of Two Brāhmaṇa Rulers’, pp. 86 – 88.

and Kṛṣṇadvārikā inscriptions represent the world of the religious leaders. This is the rare inscription dedicated to a Śaivāchārya discovered from the site of Bangarh, the erstwhile capital of the Guptas in Bengal, located in Gangarampur block of Dakshin Dinajpur District. The inscription belonged to the time of Nayapāladeva (c. 1045-1060 CE).⁹⁷

Śaiva inscription from Bangarh: An interesting development

The inscription on a stone slab contains an eulogy of the Śaivāchārya named Murtiśiva, who belonged to the Durvāsā sect of Śaiva religion. The dating can be assigned with reference to Nayapāla who has been mentioned.⁹⁸ It begins with invocation of goddess Carcikā and was composed by the brāhmaṇa poet, Śrīkaṇṭha. The verses that follow were composed in different metres, showcasing the lyrical embellishments achieved at the time. After eulogies of the goddesses Carickā and Cāmuṇḍā, Nayapāla has been mentioned. This is followed by narration of a mythical legend of the sage Durvāsas, followed by an allusion to the great Śaiva centre, the Golaki Maṭha, originally established possibly in Central India under the domain of the Cedi-Kalacuri rulers, as discussed by D.C. Sircar. The next part of the inscription describes the Śaiva sages associated with the maṭha and indicates the expansion of the religion headed by the ascetics in Varanasi. The most important and relevant part informs us of the dedication of a Śiva temple by Mahīpāla to the ascetic Indraśiva, including the laudation of the following successive sages and the august description of this temple. Ritual activities, genealogies of sages and the special reference to the main protagonist among them performing all the rites make an interesting reading of the emergence of the religion and a centre manned by Śaiva ascetics in and around the subregion at the time. A number of articles by scholars throw further light on the religious and spatial aspects drawn from this inscription.⁹⁹ For us the inscription is significant as it brings to the fore another

⁹⁷ Chowdhury, 'Pāla Realm', p.772.

⁹⁸ D.C. Sircar, 'Bāṅgaḍh Stone Inscription of the time of Nayapāla', *Journal of Ancient Indian History*, Vol. VII, pp. 135 – 158.

⁹⁹ Gauriswar Bhattacharya, 'Inscribed Image of a Śaivācharya from Bengal', *Essays on Buddhist Hindu, Jain Iconography, Studies in Bengal Art Series*, no. 1, pp. 309- 13, (Dhaka: The International Centre for Study of Bengal Art, 2000); Ranjusri Ghosh, 'Image of a Śaiva Teacher and an Inscription on Pedestal: New Evidence for Bangarh Śaivism', *Pratna Samkisha: A Journal of Archaeology*, New Series, Vol., I, 2010, pp. 135 – 139; Krishnendu Ray, 'Mattamayuras in Bengal', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 1998, Vol. 59 (1998), pp. 150-155.

source of literary genesis in the present phase of history of the evolution of literary culture in the region of Bengal.

Kamauli copper Plate of Vaidyadeva

The Kamauli copperplate inscription¹⁰⁰ was found in the village of Kamauli, near the confluence of Varunā and the Ganges at Benaras. It comprises an eulogy in praise of Vaidyadeva, a feudatory ruler appointed by Kumārapāla in the eastern part of the Pāla kingdom, possibly in Kāmarūpa. The order of the grant is held to have been issued from Kāmarūpa by Vaidyadeva. It is to be noted, that although he was a minister of Kumarapāla, he had achieved autonomous status, which gets reflected in the inscription. He is hailed as the supreme ruler, ‘Parameśvara Pramabhaṭṭāraka Mahārājādhirāja’. He issued this grant in his 4th year of reign. Thus, it appears that by the time Vaidyadeva issued this land grant, he had gained autonomy in the Kāmarūpa area for at least four years.

The long inscription is an example of mid-12th century style of composition and its palaeography has been identified with that of the Deopara inscription.¹⁰¹ The praśasti part of this copperplate illustrates the poetic artistry of the composition enriched with alaṅkāra. This inscription commenced with the eulogy of Vāsudeva or Hari (‘om̐ namo bhagavate vāsudevāya svasti trambara mānastammaḥ kummaḥ saṅsāravīja hattāyāḥ haridantara mita mūrṭiḥ krīḍāpotrī harijjayati’).¹⁰² Next came the genealogical description and eulogy of the dynasty beginning with Vighrapāla, who was declared to be born in the solar race, perfect in every accomplishment.¹⁰³ His son Rāmapāla, as shining as the moon, wielded the glory of the empire.¹⁰⁴ The dynastic praise was followed by the laudation of Bodhideva, the minister of Rāmapāla, who was described as faultless and even an abode of truth.¹⁰⁵ From his wife, Pratāpadevī, was born the renowned Vaidyadeva (‘trabhūdamuṣyāntanayotsyaviṣrutāḥśrīVaidyadeva purayāśriyāyutaḥ yaducchalat kīrtti śaroborodo padmāṅkurābhaḥśiva mudharo bhavat’).¹⁰⁶ Use of similes exhibit fine literary

¹⁰⁰ Venis, ‘Copper-plate Grant of Vaidyadeva’, pp.347-58; Maitreya, *Gauḍalekhamālā*, pp. 127-46.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.* p. 127; Venis, ‘Copper-plate Grant of Vaidyadeva’, p. 348.

¹⁰² *Ibid.* verse 1, p.350.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.* verse 2, p. 350.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.* verse 4, pp. 350-51.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* verse 5, p. 351.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* verse 7, p.351.

expression regarding Vaidyadeva that – ‘soyam rāmanarendrajasya sacivaḥ sāmrajya lakṣmī juṣaḥ prakhyātasya kumārapālanṛpate śrīttānurūpobhavat yasyārāti kirīṭa hāṭhaka kṛta prāsāda kaṇoṭhirava grāsa trāsa vaśādappaiṣyati vidhorbhimbānkarūpi mṛgaḥ’.¹⁰⁷ He was an exemplary person as regards to his knowledge, efficiency, agility, coherence, and prosperity (‘jñānairgīṣpatirūrjitaihirnapatiḥ satpourūṣaiḥśrīpati dyaiyairrambupatidvanaidvanapatiidvanaiḥ sa campāpatiḥ’).¹⁰⁸ This inscription is further beautified by the presentation of laudatory verses for the donee Śrīdhara. This Śrīdhara was hailed as the great son of Yudhiṣṭhira, born in the lineage of Kauśika. Śrīdhara, learned in karman and brahman, was the source of all kinds of religious knowledge (‘karmma brahma vidān mukhaḥ sarvākāra taponidhiḥśrauta smārta rahasyeṣu vāgiṣa iva viṣrutah’).¹⁰⁹ This kind of mixture of epithets that invoke moral stature, wisdom and intellectual accomplishments of the protagonists was increasingly sought by the composers to project an enhanced sense of glory. The charter records the grant of two villages named Śāntipāṭaka and Mandarā in the viṣaya of Baḍā, of the Kāmarūpa maṇḍala within Prāgjyotiṣa bhukti to a brāhmaṇa named Śrīdhara of the Viśvāmitra gotra.¹¹⁰ Above all, this inscription is significant because it contains the name Manoratha as the composer and his identity as the son of a brāhmaṇa, Rajaguru Murāri and Padmā. Most of the Pāla and Candra records however, do not mention the name of the composers.¹¹¹ But this reference affords us with two possibilities, first that in the emerging orbit of the feudatorial ruler was one where the persona of the learned poets/composers was emerging and second that this class of intellectuals came from the brāhmaṇa caste. Thus, here we do have an inkling about a section of the literati of the times.

Not only that, we also get hints of many quarters of literate activity which were reflected in the epigraphic postings and compositions and many foci of such compositions which indicate the wide orbit of literary intent and themes. Moreover, connections drawn with the northern Indian Vaiṣṇavite tradition or from the emerging Śaiva tradition from Central and southern India, throw light on the convergence of religious-cultural trends and their impact on the growing regional tradition of culture and knowledge.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.* verse 9, p.351.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.* verse 19, p.352.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* verse 27, p.353.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.* verse 29, pp.353-54.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.* verse 33, p.358.

The Candras:

Although the inscriptions of the Candra rulers were not as elaborate as those of the Pālas, they carried an entrancing tone of beautiful literary creativity. A number of copperplate inscriptions of the Candras have been discovered so far. Their separate political entity in the south-eastern part of Bengal during the 9th-10th centuries possibly brought some unique flavour to their inscriptions. Based on the Candra records, Shariful Islam¹¹² suggested that the ancestors of Trailokyacandra were subordinate allies to the Ākara kings of Harikela, who originated from the Arakan region, located in Burma. This raises a point about potential Arakanese influence or vice versa which might have been reflected in many forms, including in the epigraphic records. Referring to Gouriswar Bhattacharya in this connection it can be said that king Attākaradeva of the Ākara dynasty was an Arakanese. Suchandra Ghosh highlighted this further in her article ‘Understanding the Economic Networks and Linkages of an Expanded Harikela’ where she mentioned Harikela's connection with Arakan.¹¹³ Somehow these connections may have been reflected in their inscriptions.

The Paschimbhag copperplate inscription of Śrīcandra:

Among the various copperplates issued by Śrīcandra, the most illustrious ruler of this dynasty, the Paschimbhag copperplate inscription¹¹⁴ (from Sylhet) bears a rich historical testimony to a flourishing Sanskrit literary culture in the sub-regions of Vaṅga-Samatāṭa and possibly Harikela. The copperplate was discovered at the village of Paschimbhag in the Sylhet district of east Pakistan.¹¹⁵ The inscription was issued by Śrīcandra in 935 CE. The charter is mainly a deed of donation in which Śrīcandra granted lands to many brāhmaṇas and to nine monasteries in the Sylhet region, which had perhaps emerged as a major educational centre in the subregion. It includes an extensive description of the Candra dynasty, their history, information about land assessment process, rural residents and other aspects of rural society. The 65 lines of beautiful composition is written in the eastern Indian script of the tenth century CE. D.C. Sircar had pointed

¹¹² Islam, ‘Emerging Political entities’, p. 667.

¹¹³ Ghosh, ‘Understanding the Economic Networks’, pp. 91-94.

¹¹⁴ Gupta, ‘Paschimbhag copper-plate’, p.74-94; Chowdhury, ‘Paschimbhag copper-plate’, p.183; Dani, ‘Sylhet Copper-plate Inscription’; Sircar, ‘Paschimbhag plate’, pp. 19-40, 63-69; Sircar, ‘Paschimbhag Copper-plate Inscription,’ pp. 92-100.

¹¹⁵ Sircar, ‘Paschimbhag plate’, p. 19.

out that the script reflected the genesis of the gauḍī from the siddhamātrkā, which was engraved with lot of care by the engraver, who has been named in the composition.¹¹⁶ This composition consisted of both prose and verse. The copperplate commenced with adoration of the Buddhist trinity- the Jina, Dharma and Saṅgha.¹¹⁷ It is followed by the eulogy of Pūrṇacandra, the progenitor of the dynasty. It says that

‘Pūrṇacandra iti śrīmānāsīnnāsīrajāṃ rajaḥ yasyāpurorayo pūrvomā tapatramapatrapāḥ’.¹¹⁸

His son Suvarṇacandra was like pure gold and as beautiful as the moon.¹¹⁹ His illustrious son Trailokyacandra has been compared in aureate language

‘tasmādvandī vilocanendu dṛṣadānni syanda candrodayoḥ koulīnātsabhaśabhākamalinī supṛāto sandhyātapāḥ tṛṣṇakātakamaṇḍalī navaghanassa prajñāyāmikaḥ trailokyapṛathitarūkīrttirajani Trailokyacandra nṛpaḥ’.¹²⁰

Verse 7 throws welcome light on Devaparvata, the capital of the Samatāṭa, located on the Kṣīrodā River.

‘kṣīrodām anu Devaparvata iti śrīmat tad etat puram yatrāgantū janasya vismaya rasaḥ kamboja vārttādbhutaiḥ’.¹²¹

These descriptions abound with lyrical references to nature and the actual landscape, something that distinguishes the tone of the inscription from the earlier panegyrics. It also alludes to many local practices and aspects of life. Loftier descriptions of the royal figures, however, are comparable to the Pāla tone. The verse 10 for example introduces Śrīcandra, the son of Trailokyacandra and his queen Kāñcīkā, as comparable to Indra, who was born on the auspicious configuration of planets called rājayoga and had brought the earth under his sole umbrella.¹²² Some literary terms used here are not found in any other inscriptions of the tenth and eleventh centuries. For example, Śrīcandra propitiated the god of war by his own deeds of valor and brushed off the patrāṅguli decoration on the breasts of the yavana women, made the cheeks and abdomen of the

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.* p. 20.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.* verse 1, pp. 63-64.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.* verse 2, p.64.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.* verses 3,4, p.64.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.* verse 5, p.64.

¹²¹ *Ibid.* verse 7, pp. 64-65.

¹²² *Ibid.* verse 10, 11, p.65.

hūṇa women covered with the wounds of scarification carried out in grief and put an end to the fickleness in the glances of the Utkala women intoxicated by toddy (‘santoṣaṃ raṇadevatāṅgamayatā vīyavidānainnijjai rūnmṛṣṭaṃ yamanī payodharataṭo patrāṅgulimaṇḍanamśokapracchanajarjaraṃ viracitaṃ hūṇī kopoladaraṃ yenonmūlitamutkalī nayanayostālīsūrā ghurṇitaṃ’).¹²³ These add local flavour to the composition.

The donative part of the copperplate records that mahārājādhirāja Śrīcandradeva passed the order from the victorious camp at Vikramapura, addressing a host of officials, village potentates and others about the grant of several plots of land in the viṣayas of Candrapura, Garalā and Pogāra belonging to the Śrīhaṭṭa-maṇḍala at Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti.¹²⁴ The list includes the rājñī, rāṇaka and rājaputras, the mahāsāndhivigrahika, mahāsainyapati, mahāmudrādhiḥkṛta, mahākṣapaṭalika, pādamūlaka, mahāpratīhāra, mahātantrādhiḥkṛta, mahāsarvādhiḥkṛta, mahābalāhikaraṇika and mahāvīyūhapati, the maṇḍalapati, koṭṭapāla, dausādhasadhanika, chauroddharaṇika, naubalahastyaśvagamahiṣājāvīkādivyāpṛitakas, gaulmika, śaulkika, dāṇḍika, dāṇḍapāsika, dāṇḍanāyakas, viṣayapatis and others. Among the addressees were some unnamed officials (‘adhyakṣapracāroktānihākīrtitān’), cāṭas and bhaṭas, and janapadas and cultivators as residents of rural society of whom brāhmaṇas were foremost (‘janapadān kṣetrakarāṃś ca brāhmaṇottarān’). The vast tract was donated to nine maṭhas and 6000 brāhmaṇas.¹²⁵ The first plot of land covering 120 pāṭakas was granted in favor of a maṭha of Brahmā. Among them 73 pāṭakas were assigned to 81 people related to the maṭha including a grammarian of Candra school, for the maintenance of ten students, five guest brāhmaṇas and service groups like garland makers, potters, musicians, servants and so on. The second plot of land covering 280 pāṭakas was granted to four Deśāntarīya temples and four Vaṅgāla temples, each group housing the gods Vaiśvānara (Agni), Yogeśvara, Jaimani and Mahākāla. The third plot allotted in equal shares to 6000 brāhmaṇas. The remaining lands were donated in equal divisions to those brāhmaṇas of whom 37 were unnamed. Finally, land belonging to a Buddhist establishment (‘ratnatrayabhūmi’) and lands measuring 52 pāṭakas were excluded from the donated lands. The presence of excluded lands and the existence of janapadas and cultivators as addressees hinted toward settlements in that area and at the same time accommodated large number of brāhmaṇas for further agrarian expansion. The service groups

¹²³ *Ibid.* verse 14, p.6.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.* lines 28-33, pp.66-67.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.* lines 35-51, pp.67-68.

referred to in the grant must have already existed in the hierarchically ordered society of these villages as both B.D. Chattopadhyaya and R. Furui have observed.¹²⁶ Śrīcandra may be understood to have introduced some reorganization of the erstwhile rural society of the locality through land grants to the *maṭhas* and by settling of the brāhmaṇas in the area. This attests the prevalence of royal monopoly over the land and indicates the sovereign status of the Candra ruler. The granted area bore the name of the dynasty, Candrapura – Brahmapura śāsana.¹²⁷

Apart from the Pascimbhag copperplate, a few other inscriptions of the Candras further enhanced the literati cultural scene of the time. Among them, the Dhulla copperplate,¹²⁸ Rampal copperplate,¹²⁹ Madanpur copperplate of Śrīcandra,¹³⁰ and the Mainamati copper Plate inscriptions of Laḍahacandra¹³¹ were illuminating manifestations of other creative creations of the Candra dynasty. Of these we shall briefly discuss two.

The Rampal copper plate inscription of Śrīcandra

The Rampal Copper Plate Inscription of Śrīcandra of the end of tenth and beginning of eleventh century CE, was a significant piece of composition. The character of the script is northern Nāgarī of the late 10th and early 11th century CE, a script that was found to be used by the later Pāla rulers and was prevalent in eastern India in the late 10th to early 11th century CE.¹³² The rājaprasasti part of this inscription was composed in verse and the donative part was composed in prose. Compositional element is noteworthy especially as a variety of metres have been used, for example, vasantatilaka, śārdūlavikrīḍita, upajāti indravajrā, puspitāgrā and anustubh.¹³³ This inscription was commenced with the praise of Buddha and the use of Buddha's simile is seen

¹²⁶ Chattopadhyaya, *Aspects of Rural Settlements*, p.57; Furui, *Land and Society*, p.161.

¹²⁷ Sircar, 'Paschimbhag Copper-plate Inscription,' p. 93.

¹²⁸ Sircar, 'Dhulla plate', pp.134-40.

¹²⁹ Basak, 'Rampal copper plate', pp.136-42; Majumdar, 'The Rampal copper-plate', pp.1-9; Sarkar, *Nityakaler Tui Puratan*, pp. 197-207.

¹³⁰ Basak, 'Madanpur plate', pp.51-58.

¹³¹ Sircar, 'Mainamati plates', pp.197-214; Sircar, 'Two Grants of Laḍahacandra', pp.45-49; Sarkar, 'Maynamatir Candrabamsiya Tamrashasanatray', pp.143-48; Sharma, 'Mainamati Candra plates', pp.25-37.

¹³² Majumdar, 'The Rampal copper-plate', p.1.

¹³³ *Ibid.* p.1.

throughout the praśasti section. This copperplate manifests a wonderful combination of ornate descriptions of Candra genealogy and the mundane details of the grant of a pāṭaka of land by Śrīcandra to the śāntivārika pītavāsaguptaśarmā at the village of Nehakāśṭhi in the nānyamaṇḍala of Puṇḍravardhanabhukti.¹³⁴ The combinations reflect the contribution of varied groups of literates and informants, a phenomenon that is found in every inscription that combines a praśasti and land grant or charter of endowments. We note the trend quite clearly in the inscriptions of our context.

The Mainamati copper plate inscription of Laḍahacandra

Two epigraphic records of Laḍahacandra have been discovered in Mainamati in the 10th century CE. The inscriptions are the illuminating manifestation of literary creativity of the Candra dynasty. The two plates portray nuanced literary expressions and play of words or śleṣa and a fine mixture of ornate praśasti and donative deeds. The analogical and symbolic verses embellishing the praśasti bear testimony to the continued impact of the trend of literary genre of praśasti that emerged in northern India. A curious point mentioned by Sircar in connection with the Mainamati inscriptions later may be of significance in indicating a local trend. That is the orthography which reveals a wrong use of the nasal 'ṛ' as 'ṝ', and use of 'ṝ' as 'na' in certain instances.¹³⁵ This shows a distinctive use of the nasal notes which could represent the local pronouciation. The Candra dynasty was hailed as representing the combined power of three deities flowing from the sage Atri's eyes, and as an impeccable lamp shining on the earth.¹³⁶ The divine similes were drawn here from puranic Brahmanism reflecting the eclectic tradition while using poetic metaphors, where the religious affiliations stood blurred. For example, Laḍahacandra's omnipotence was declared by projecting that the ruler had the goddesses Saraswatī and Lakṣmī under his control.¹³⁷ These examples indicate the emergence of literary potential in the subregion and the growing domain of culture under the Candra dynasty. While the Goddess of fortune was a necessary grace for the rulers, the invocation of the goddess of knowledge indeed strikes as a reference to this latter phenomenon.

¹³⁴ Sarkar, *Nityakaler Tui Puratan*, p.199.

¹³⁵ Sircar, 'Mainamati plates', p. 198.

¹³⁶ Sircar, 'Two Grants of Laḍahacandra', verse 1, p.45.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.* verse 12, p.46.

From the above analysis, it is observable that there was an evolution of literary style in Bengal during the 9th-12th century CE. with some element of distinction in the major subregions. The inscriptions often exhibited the mark of heightened literary creativity during the reign of some significant rulers. However, this was not necessarily restricted to the records issued by the supreme rulers but appeared in other records commissioned or ordered by feudatories, religious personages and officials. The efflorescent Sanskrit literary style was evident in the fine compositions of these engravings, which also bear witness to the gradual evolution of a regional script. The two phenomena perhaps represent a holistic picture of the cultural developments surrounding literary activities in the phase under discussion. We may now note some of the brilliant examples of creativity and knowledge from the variegated Sanskrit textual literature of this phase. In fact, a number of works composed by eminent litterateurs during this phase illuminate the complete scene of cultural efflorescence in this phase. A few examples from different genres of texts have been briefly discussed below to bring out the contemporary literary flavour.

The *Rāmacarita* by Sandhyākarnandi:

The finest exemplar of the flourishing literary design of this phase was the *Rāmacarita* of Sandhyākarnandi. It was a lone composition of c. 11th-12th century C.E., through which this rising culture was best expressed. Haraprasad Sastri's edition followed by that of Radhagovinda Basak along with a meticulous English translation and notes provides us with clarity about the composition.¹³⁸ The work has received attention from many eminent scholars like Sukumari Bhattacharji¹³⁹ and Romila Thapar. In fact, Thapar adds it to the list of the examples of the significant genre of the Carita alongside Bāṇabhaṭṭa's *Harṣacarita*, as a work closely defining the writing of history and points to the subtle narration, literary merits, and the style of kaviprasāsti.¹⁴⁰

Nupur Dasgupta mentioned that although carita kāvya had already been introduced and had crystallized with the brilliant penmanship of Bāṇabhaṭṭa, the *Rāmacarita* of Sandhyākarnandi was probably the best of its kind created in Bengal.¹⁴¹ The *Rāmacarita*, written in a rare style, narrates the story of the *Rāmāyana* on the one hand and the dynastic history of the Pāla rulers,

¹³⁸ Sastri, 'Rāmacarita'.

¹³⁹ Sukumari Bhattacharji, *History of Classical Sanskrit Literature*, (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, Limited, 1993), pp. 242 – 3.

¹⁴⁰ Thapar, *The Past Before Us*, pp. 496-98.

¹⁴¹ Dasgupta, 'Sanskrit Literature', p. 563.

from the days of Mahīpāla II to the time of Madanapāla, on the other. The rise of the kaivartas and their ousting by Rāmapāla was the main theme of this carita - kāvya. Sandhyākaranandi composed this text in double entendre (with dual meaning/ reference) which was a beautiful amalgamation of epic story and dynastic narrative. The work consisted of 220 verses arranged in four cantos or paricchadas.¹⁴² Despite the literary criticism, the skillful use of śleṣa and alaṅkāra, the polished application of the epic narrative genre and the combination of two different narrative contents/allusions transforms this text into an extraordinary piece of literary composition – cum - history. The author Sandhyākaranandi's karaṇa-kāyastha background, his special skill in vakroktimārga following the trend of Subandhu and Bāṇabhaṭṭa and the way he portrayed popular works like epics in the dynastic history of Bengal, reveals his proficiency in the classical tradition and writing with reference to the mainstream Sanskrit culture.¹⁴³ Simply put, the *Rāmacarita* presents the glorification of the Pāla ruler and his prowess written in the āryā metre. The centrality of this literature was the description of the valor and generosity of the Rāmpāla, in the guise of the epic narrative of *Rāmāyana*, using ostentatious language and literary devices current in the contemporary praśasti genre. The main protagonist, Rāmpāla, has been acclaimed in such a rhetorical way that he was endowed with high glory, elegance and good fortune. Here the king's military might and prowess have been manifested in exaggerated literary expressions. He was a conqueror and only competent person to offer protection to the world

‘atha tasya Mahipālaḥ Surapālo pi puruṣottoma Rāmaḥ sfura dr̥ṣyaśṛṅga sambhāvita rūpaścārū bhāgya sampannaḥ jaga dava naikadhurīṇaḥ sāmāyik maho mahānalo bhārataḥ api laksmaṇo pi śatrughna laksmaṇo jajñire tanayāḥ’.¹⁴⁴

King Madanapāla has also been praised here in embellished verses. But what is of more significance is how even though the kaivartas were enemies of the protagonist and were in general parlance of the lower social rung, they have been admired with poetic subtlety. It has been said that the kaivarta chief Divya shared royal fortune and rose to a high position.¹⁴⁵ Kaivarta king

¹⁴² *Ibid.* p.563.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.* p. 564.

¹⁴⁴ Sastri, ‘Rāmacarita’, cantos I, verses 10-11, p.7.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.* cantos I, verse 38, p.26.

Bhīma brought peace and prosperity to the whole world and was remembered for his voluntary charities:

‘ajjīvan jagadakhilam dadhataḥ pārārthya marthino ghanāḥ acyuta pada madhirūhma yasya ca kalpadruma prakṛteḥ’.¹⁴⁶

This nature of the narrative indicates the poet-composer’s perspective as well as the contemporary political and social frame in Bengal within which the author was putting the details of royal exploits. The nuanced references evoke the deeper complexities of the situation and did not constitute a straightforward eulogistic biography.

Sandhyakarnandi has also kept to the tradition of Bāṇabhaṭṭa, in projecting a grand portrayal of the Varendra city and the grandiose garden of the city. The poet has included a kavipraśasti section where he declares the intent of the composition, that it was his desire to place this composition on the king’s neck like a garland of pearl. The beauty of the declaration is enhanced by ornaments of speech, like rūpaka and jāti or svabhāvokti,

‘gau rohitā stu muktāvali radhiguṇa rūpa jātya laṅkāra sau priya dṛṣṭi rasā dhāna kalā bhaṅgi rīśa kaṅṭhaika gatiḥ’.¹⁴⁷

Most interestingly, the text delineates the characteristics of the Kaivarta rebellion and the social changes which occurred around it in Bengal. Ryosuke Furui had tried to tease out the gradual changes in the land grant practices made by the Pāla ruler and alludes to this as the prime factor behind this outrage.¹⁴⁸ The increasing demands made by the Brāhmaṇa donees and pressure of royal dues as well as evident pressure created by the growing hegemony of the rulers indicated by the large body of officials encountered in the landgrant charters, would have been oppressive for the rural society which ignited into a revolt of the sāmantas led by the kaivartas. On the other hand, both Furui and Sayantani Pal¹⁴⁹ have also alluded to the phenomenon of social mobility which was witnessed in the event of the rise of the kaivartyas into landholding community, something which has also been recorded in inscriptions, which portrays the growth of kaivartas as an important

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.* Cantos II, verse 25, p.48.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.* Kavipraśasti, verse 10, p.100.

¹⁴⁸ Furui, ‘Characteristics of Kaivarta’, pp. 95 – 97.

¹⁴⁹ Pal, ‘Revisiting the Kaivarta Revolt’, pp. 502 – 17.

caste-group. The resultant possibility of conflict, political as well ritual complexities pertaining to the conditions of the early medieval polity in Bengal have also been discussed by Pal.

According to Romila Thapar, this text was apparently a play on language. In the kavipraśasti section, the author has composed the verses through lakṣmaṇā vyāñjanā. This means the application of some expression whose literal meaning differs from its verbal meaning. Since Sandhyākaranandi's father was in the position of sāndhivigrahika, the minister of peace and war of Puṇḍravardhana, some of the internal affairs of the state have been disclosed by the poet in his kāvya through śleṣa. Romila Thapar and Sukumari Bhattacharji both alluded to the possibilities that might have plagued the author, i.e., the possibilities of incurring political criticism or wrath for projecting the recent political activities which were evidently controversial.¹⁵⁰ Thapar also talks about how the Kavipraśasti section hints at the political topicality and value of the text. Only one copy of this kāvya has been found in Nepal and annotation of the book made by a Buddhist scholar named Śīlbhadra was found there. The annotation itself could point to a Buddhist association stemming from the religious affiliation of the Pāla rulers, as Thapar indicates.¹⁵¹ Evidence that this work was quite popular at that time can be found in the presentation of its contents in the Kamauli copperplate of Vaidyadeva.¹⁵²

Subhāṣitaratnaśoṣa of Vidyākara:

It is quite significant that we note the genesis of a distinct category of texts in this period, especially from Bengal, these comprise the anthological literature (koṣa-kāvya) as defined by Viśvanātha in his *Sāhitya-darpaṇa* as 'a collection of detached verses arranged under different sections'.¹⁵³ We are told that anthological literature was composed in order to satisfy the 'moods' and 'literary taste' of the common people. thus, we come to the collection of detached verses in anthologies in which we find the reflection high culture as well as projections of the joys and sorrows of the common people, their everyday life experiences relating to nature, replenished with the hills, rivers, trees and the landscape. We also find some verses which reveal deep thoughts of human beings. Compiling verses regarding moral dicta had become an axiomatic trend from the 10th-11th

¹⁵⁰ Thapar, *The Past Before Us*, p. 498.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.* pp. 497 – 8.

¹⁵² Dasgupta, 'Sanskrit Literature', p. 563.

¹⁵³ Quoted in Banerji, *Sadukti-Karṇāmṛta*, Introduction.

centuries in the backdrop of the Sanskrit literary scene. We are also told that there were many poets who composed important verses, but remained in the shadows, behind the ‘dazzling glow’ of eminent poets like Kālidāsa, Bhāravi etc. The compiler compiled the creations of those poets and produced anthological literature. To this genre belong the *Subhāṣitaratnaḷoṣa* of Vidyākara (c.11th-12th century).¹⁵⁴ The first edition of this book was compiled about 1100 CE and the expanded edition was about 1130 CE. The compiler Vidyākara hailed from the Jagaddala Vihāra, situated in the present Malda district of East Bengal.¹⁵⁵ He was probably a Paṇḍita of that vihāra, identified closely with Bhīmārjunasoma.¹⁵⁶

H.H. Daniel Ingalls’ critical study of the *Subhāṣitaratnaḷoṣa* illuminates Vidyakara as an exemplary compiler and someone with heightened appreciation and knowledge of literature created in Sanskrit over a long period.¹⁵⁷ He has pointed to how many distinct traits of Sanskrit poetry have been brought before us through the verses of the *Subhāṣita*. This text was divided into fifty sections or vrajyās. Among them first six were devoted to divine characters.¹⁵⁸ The seventh section is dedicated to the sun, who was considered a minor deity.¹⁵⁹ The following sections or vrajyās contain seasonal matters. From vrajyā 14 onwards this text is dedicated to erotic love and experiences as the main theme of this text.¹⁶⁰ The residual sections are of miscellaneous nature which deals with courtly flattery, unusual subjects like a dog chasing a cat (1163), quail picking up seed at the edge of a muddy field (1181), sparrows scratching in plowed furrows (1162), etc. and rural life and poverty. In the sections of rural life experiences preparation of mustard oil (318), peasant women’s singing (1178, 1182, 314) are all delineated. The sections on poverty represented the real-life scenario. They portray this through such utterances as how a single ox may be the only source of income for a helpless family (1317), or if the children were fed somehow on any day the mother wishes that night would never pass to bring on fresh worry about food on the following day (1311), etc.¹⁶¹ The first section, Sugatavrajyā comprised of verses of Buddhist scholars like

¹⁵⁴ Kosambi and Gokhale, *The Subhāṣitaratnaḷoṣa*.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.* preface.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.* p.xxxix.

¹⁵⁷ Ingalls, *An Anthology of Sanskrit Court Poetry*, pp. 1-53.

¹⁵⁸ Kosambi and Gokhale, *The Subhāṣitaratnaḷoṣa*, p.xl.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.* p. xl.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.* p. xli.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.* p. xliv.

Aśvaghōṣa, Vasuka, Aparājjitarakṣita, Vasukalpa, etc.¹⁶² The next section Lokeśvaravrajyā attributed to compositions of Buddhākaragupta and Ratnakīrti.¹⁶³ The other sections of the text contain verses of eminent scholars like Kalidāsa, Bāṇabhaṭṭa, Bhavabhūti, Vākpatirāja, Rājaśekhara, Amarasimha, Puruṣottamadeva etc.¹⁶⁴ Among the varied list of poets, there were also monastic scholars who wrote such erotic poetry without the least sense of transgression or deviation from the puritanical doctrine and ascetic life.¹⁶⁵ Some poets were ascribed to the status of Pāla court poets, such as Yogeśvara, Mahodadhi, Śatānanda etc. Yogeśvara was a Pāla court poet, perhaps belonging to not later than the ninth century CE. He was proficient in composing the country scenes.¹⁶⁶ Mahodadhi was a Pāla Court poet who probably had a royal patron named Rājyapāla,¹⁶⁷ although it cannot be ascertained whether this patron was the same noted Pāla ruler. Śatānanda was the father of Abhinanda and a Pāla court poet.¹⁶⁸ Inspired by Vidyākara's anthological literature, Śrīdharadāsa and Nandana later compiled works of similar genres in their own anthologies.¹⁶⁹ Govardhanācārya's, the author of the *Āryāsaptaśatī* was also stimulated by this to some extent. Vidyākara's compilation is considered the oldest general anthology of Sanskrit verses and its compilation throws light on the literary scene of early medieval Bengal, indicating the prevalence of a culture of reading and appreciation. According to Ingalls, the exceptional quality of the *Subhāṣitaratnakoṣa* among the works of classical Sanskrit literature should be attributed to the inclusion of the poetry of the common composers illuminating the life of commoners.¹⁷⁰

Kṛṣiparāśara:

Kṛṣiparāśara (c.11th century CE) is a Sanskrit technical treatise of this time exclusively devoted to explaining the processes of cultivation of rice. In this regard, Ryosuke Furui's analysis throws much light as he uses the text to understand the rural scene of early medieval Bengal.¹⁷¹ This text

¹⁶² Dasgupta, 'Sanskrit Literature', p.564.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.* p. 565.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.* p.565.

¹⁶⁵ Kosambi and Gokhale, *The Subhāṣitaratnakoṣa*, p. xlvii.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.* p.xcii.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.* p.xc.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.* p.ci.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.* p. xxx.

¹⁷⁰ Ingalls, *An Anthology of Sanskrit Court Poetry*, p.51

¹⁷¹ Furui, 'The Rural World of an Agricultural Text', p.149ff.

is quite significant as it presents the textual take on the primary rural activity.¹⁷² The mid-eleventh-century text may be situated in the lowlands of eastern India, from the eastern part of present Bihar to the Bengal delta.¹⁷³ The text consists of 243 Sanskrit śloka interspersed with verse and prose.¹⁷⁴ It is divided into four parts, comprising of an introduction, followed by sections on the knowledge of rainfall, general remarks on agriculture, and instructions on each agricultural operation. The first part contains reference to Parāśara as the narrator and states the importance of agriculture as an activity and knowledge in several verses.¹⁷⁵ The second part contains the relevance of rainfall in agriculture and various theories such as the cloud types seasonal formation, explanation of annual rainfall, the amount of rainfall etc.¹⁷⁶ The third part contains description of rules and regulations regarding agriculture and auspicious rituals such as the cattle festival to be held on the first day of the month Kārttika, the procession and leading of cattle into the cowshed etc.¹⁷⁷ The fourth part referred to various technical aspects connected to agricultural operations such as plough assemblage, collection and preservation of seeds, sowing of seeds etc.¹⁷⁸ *Kṛṣiparāśara* might have been employed or regarded as an agricultural manual especially may be within the circles of the local brāhmaṇas or similar local literate groups with a rural social background who were involved in land-related matters.

The structure of these elaborate grand writings had become well-established in this phase, especially within the practices of court poets and among the higher echelons. The question arises about the identity of the composers who were in the business of advancing such a literary style. As administrative documents too, they portray valuable details related to land administration and the people associated with it. Scribes and the engravers were involved into the creation of the records. The identity of some scribes and authors are known from the inscriptions and literature of the time.

¹⁷² *Ibid.* p.150.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.* p.151.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.* p.151.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.* p.152.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.* p.152.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.* p.152.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.* p.152.

Composers

Although the inscriptions of this phase were mostly silent about the original composers except in a few cases, we do get some information from the 9th century, especially in the inscriptions of Pālas. Brāhmaṇas have been portrayed as eminent composers as evidenced through the Bangarh Rock Inscription of Nayapāla. This eulogy has been composed by the brāhmaṇa poet Śrīkaṇṭha who represents himself as ‘ṣaṭ-tarkkārtha vivecan-oru-sarasī-hamso-ti-niḥsīma, rasa-rasin, vādi-dīkṣā-guruḥ, śuci-vāg’ etc.¹⁷⁹ Śrīkaṇṭha was the younger brother of the great scholar Śrīvallabha. In this regard, the Kamauli copperplate inscription of Vaidyadeva is significant because it contains the name Manoratha as the composer and his identity as the son of a brāhmaṇa, Rajaguru Murāri and Padmā.¹⁸⁰

The scribes have been mentioned, who in most cases, were administrative officials or came from a royal background. As an example, we may refer to the Nalanda Copper Plate of Dharmapāla which mentions Kuladatta as the writer of the copper plate who was the son of Dharmadatta.¹⁸¹ Later, some names of the composers had been revealed. The eulogy of Gaya Rock Inscription of Govindapāla was composed by Muktendra and written (scribe) by Kā (Kāyastha) Jaśīyi and Jayakumāra.¹⁸² The Gaya Krsnadvarika Temple Inscription of Nayapāla was composed by Vāji-vaidya Sahadeva.¹⁸³ The Gaya Gadadhar Temple Rock Inscription of Nayapāla was composed by *Vaidya* Vajrapāṇi.¹⁸⁴ The Gaya Fragmentary Inscription of Viśvarūpa or Viśvāditya was composed by *Vaidya* Dharmapāṇi.¹⁸⁵ It is clear from these evidences that vaidyas were getting engaged as literate scribes and even excellent composers and should be considered as part of the literate society in these contexts.

¹⁷⁹ Sircar, ‘Bāṅgaḍh Stone Inscription’, verse 33, p.49.

¹⁸⁰ Venis, ‘Copper-plate Grant of Vaidyadeva’, verse 33, p.358.

¹⁸¹ P.N. Bhattacharya, ‘Nalanda Plate of Dharmapāladeva’, *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol XXIII, 1940, line 7, p.292.

¹⁸² D.C.Sircar, ‘Gaya Inscription mentioning Govindapāla, Vikrama 1232’, *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol.XXXV, 1963, line 14, p.238.

¹⁸³ D.C. Sircar, ‘Inscription of Viśvāditya, year 15 of Nayapala’, *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol.XXXVI, 1965, line 17, p.86.

¹⁸⁴ D.C. Sircar, ‘Inscription of Viśvarūpa, year 15 of Nayapala’, *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol.XXXVI, 1965, line 13, p.88.

¹⁸⁵ D.C. Sircar, ‘Fragmentary Inscription of Viśvarūpa or Viśvāditya, year 5 of Vighrahapala’, *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol.XXXVI, 1965, line 26, p.92.

The fact that a class of literati existed in the society, especially in Varendra, was evident from the *Rāmacarita*. Madanapāla's kingdom was considered the birthplace of the poet-laureates as referred to in the *Rāmacarita*.¹⁸⁶ Here Sandhyākaranandi referred to the existence of learned men in the state and society who were pleased by unsolicited gifts by the king.¹⁸⁷ Society was adorned by the excellence of these esteemed personalities.¹⁸⁸ The city Rāmāvātī in Varendrī was full of learned persons as evidenced in the *Rāmacarita*.¹⁸⁹

Sandhyākaranandin himself was foremost of the eminent scholars in Bengal at that time. He belonged to the karaṇika-kāyastha lineage. He was proficient in many languages, had a good grasp of literature, and possessed a brilliant art of poetic compositions. He portrayed a wonderful history of the Pāla dynasty with the comparative discussion of epic narrative in his *Rāmacarita*. Gauḍa Abhinanda, who originally came from a family of scholars from Gauḍa, played a very crucial role who flourished in Kashmir in the 2nd half of the 9th century CE.¹⁹⁰ He was the author of *Kādambari-Kathā-Sāra*, an exquisite, rhythmic summary of Bāṇabhaṭṭa's prose kāvya.¹⁹¹ There was another Abhinanda of 9th century CE, the author of *Rāmacarita*. He was under the patronage of Devapāla.¹⁹² His verses have also been included in the *Saduktikarṇāmṛta* of Śrīdharadāsa, *Kavīndravacana Samuccaya* and *Śuktimuktāvalī* of Bhagadatta Jalhaṇa (1257 CE).¹⁹³ His literary prowess was recognized at the pan-Indian level due to the indomitable play of words in his compositions. He was admired by Soḍḍhala for his efficiency in 'vāgīśvaram'.¹⁹⁴ He was also referred as Āryavilāsa as evident from the verses of *Saduktikarṇāmṛta*.¹⁹⁵ He was the son of Satānanda who was also a composer of verses included in the *Saduktikarṇāmṛta* and *Kavīndravacana Samuccaya*.¹⁹⁶ Thus, it is evident that from this period onwards the kāyasthas and vaidyas became prominent as a class of literati.

¹⁸⁶ Sastri, 'Rāmacarita', cantos IV, verse 33, p. 91.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.* cantos I, verse 25, p. 17.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.* cantos IV, verse 40, p. 94.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.* cantos III, verse 29, p. 71.

¹⁹⁰ Dasgupta, 'Sanskrit Literature', p.558.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.* p.558.

¹⁹² *Ibid.* p.559.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.* p.558.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.* p.558.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.* p.560.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.* p.560.

Engravers

Some renowned and officially acknowledged artisans were involved in engraving the inscriptions as revealed through the text. Such as the eulogistic account of Guravamiśra of the Badal Rock Pillar Inscription was inscribed by sūtradhāra Viṣṇubhadra. the Bhaturia Rock Inscription of Rājyapāla was engraved by the artisan Śrīnidhāna.¹⁹⁷ In the Pāla period many artisans who worked as engravers, hailed from Poṣalīgrāma situated within Bardhaman district during the reign of Mahīpāla I and Vīgrahapāla III. The Bangarh Copper Plate of Mahīpāla I was incised by the artisan Mahīdhara, an inhabitant of Poṣalī.¹⁹⁸ The engraver of the Biyala Copper plate Inscription of Mahīpāla I, artisan Dāmāditya, had emerged from Poṣalīgrāma.¹⁹⁹ Again the engraver of the Amgachi Copper Plate of Vīgrahapāla III was Śāśideva, an inhabitant of Poṣalī.²⁰⁰ This Śāśideva of Poṣalīgrāma has also been mentioned as an engraver in the Bangaon Copper Plate of Vīgrahapāla III.²⁰¹ Furui identified this Poṣalīgrāma with modern Poshela near about Mangalkot in Bardhaman district.²⁰² According to him, this was a centre of artisans with special skills and literacy.²⁰³ There are some examples of engravers from Samataṭa who have worked on the Pāla inscriptions in a hereditary manner and formed their lineal identity. Such as, Furui evidenced the Bhagalpur and Jajilpara copperplates where the engravers, respectively Maṅghadāsa and Vimaladāsa were father and son.²⁰⁴ Examples of engravers like Dakkadāsa from Samataṭa had worked in various inscriptions like Mirzapur plate of Śūrapāla and Nimdighi stone inscription of Pāhila.²⁰⁵ They share the name ending dāsa. Furui observed that these engravers from Samataṭa worked in a wide geographical region in Varendra stretched from the present Rajshahi district of Bangladesh to eastern Bihar.²⁰⁶

¹⁹⁷ Sircar, 'Bhaturiya Inscription', line 20, p.154.

¹⁹⁸ Banerji, 'The Bangarh Grant', line 62, p.328.

¹⁹⁹ Ryosuke Furui, 'Biyala Copper plate Inscription of Mahīpāla I', *Pratna Samiksha*, Vol. I, 2010, lines 55-56, p.105.

²⁰⁰ R.D.Banerji, 'The Amgachi Grant of Vīgrahapāla III: The 12th year', *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XV, 1920, line 49, p.298.

²⁰¹ D.C. Sircar, 'Bangaon Plate of Vīgrahapāla III; Regnal year 17', *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XXIX, 1951, p.51.

²⁰² Furui, 'Social Life', p.59.

²⁰³ Furui, *Land and Society*, p.167.

²⁰⁴ Furui, 'Social Life', p.59.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.* p.59.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.* p.59.

Messenger:

There was an intermediate officer acting as a go-between for the scribe or recorder of the royal messages and compositional part and the actual engraver of these on copper plate or stone. Usually, in the case of land deeds, the royal officials or high-ranking councilors can be seen as an envoy of the text as is seen in Khalimpur copperplate where the dūtaka was Yuvaraja Tribhuvanapāla.²⁰⁷ Once again, the Nalanda Copperplate of Devapāla referred to the ruler of Vyāghrataṭi-maṇḍala, Balavarmā as the messenger of the charter.²⁰⁸ The royal messenger of Jagajjibanpur Copper Plate of Mahendrapāla was Śūrapāla.²⁰⁹ The Bangaon Copper Plate of Vighrahapāla III referred to the dūtaka mantrin Prahasitarāja, described as the son of the king.²¹⁰ Likewise, sāndhivighrahika Bhīmadeva was the messenger of the Rajibpur copperplate inscription of Gopāla IV and Madanapāla.²¹¹ Thus this was a role of grave significance and generally played by royal members or high officials of the court. The role was important as the royal order could not be corrupted, interfered with in any way and were entrusted to high authority of the especially important and responsible members of the court. For the compositional element of the royal eulogies, the author would convey to the intended reader his writings in a precise and pure format and hence the carrier of the message needed to be well-endowed with literacy and knowledge.

Kāyasthas, the clerical and literate Group

The kāyasthas were referred to as the scribes. They also held important administrative positions. During the Pāla period among the rural residents, jyeṣṭhakāyastha was mentioned along with the mahattaras and kuṭumbins as a constituent of viṣayavyavahārins. By the 10th century they had acquired a distinct hereditary identity or status. Not only as clerical figures, but they have also grown as a literati group in society. Sandhyākaranandin, the author of *Rāmacarita* was the son of sāndhivighrahika karaṇa Prajāpati. He was an eminent writer and scholar.

²⁰⁷ Kielhorn, 'Khalimpur Plate', line 49, p.250.

²⁰⁸ Majumdar, 'Nalanda Copper Plate', line 51, p.22.

²⁰⁹ Ramesh and Iyer, 'The Jagjivanpur Copper plate', line 54, p.22.

²¹⁰ Sircar, 'Bangaon Plate', lines 47-49, p.57.

²¹¹ Furui, 'Rajibpur Copper-plate', lines 62-63, p.45.

List of addressees: Administrative cadres

The address of copperplate inscriptions indicated a large number of officers and royal subordinates associated with ' ('samupagata') land plots or villages to be donated.²¹² The enhanced presence of the state is detectable here. Furui observed that an elaborate list of royal functionaries was obtainable in the Pāla inscriptions as dependents of the king ('rājapādopajīvin') or the dependents of the royal favor ('rājapādaprasādoopajīvin').²¹³ They were enlisted as the first category of the addressee in these copperplates. Such list ranged from rājā, rājanaka, rājāmātya to kumārāmātya, senāpatis, chauroddharaṇika, sāndhivigrahika etc. In Varendra, these subordinates and royal functionaries are traceable as evidenced by the Khalimpur copperplate of Dharmapāla. Here we get the name of various officials related to the grant. Such as rājans, rājanakas, rājaputras, rājāmātyas, senāpatis, viṣyapatis, bhogapatis, saṣṭhādihikṛtas, daṇḍaśaktis, dāṇḍapāśikas, chauroddharaṇikas, dauḥasādhasādhanikas, dūtas, kholas, gamāgamikas, abhitvaramāṇas, hastyaśvagomahiṣyajāvīkādhyakṣa, naukādhyakṣa, balādhyakṣa, tarikas, śaulkikas, gaulmikas, tadāyuktakas, viniyuktakas and others.²¹⁴ A more or less similar list of officials is noticeable in the Indian museum copperplate of Dharmapāla and in the Jagajjibanpur copperplate of Mahendrapāla. A somewhat modified and extended forms of royal functionaries are evidenced in the Mohipur copperplate of Gopāla II, which enlist rāja, rājanaka, rājaputra, rājāmātya, mahāsāmanta, mahāsenāpati, mahāsāndhivigrahika, mahākṣapāṭalika, mahāpratīhāra, mahādaṇḍanāyaka, mahārājasthānīya, uparika, mahākārttākṛtika, mahādaussādhyasādhanika, dāṇḍika, dāṇḍapāśika, śaulkika, gaulmika, kṣetrapa, prāntapāla, koṭṭapāla, khaṇḍarakṣa, tadāyuktaka, viniyuktaka, hastyaśvoṣṭranaubalavyāpṛtaka, kiśoravaḍavāgomahiṣyajāvīkādhyakṣa, dūta, preṣaṇika, gamāgamika, abhitvaramāṇa, viṣayapati, tarapati, tarika and others.²¹⁵ It is evident here that some designations have been expanded to a higher level such as from kumārāmātya to mahākumārāmātya, dauḥsādhasādhanika to mahādauḥsādhasādhanika etc. as mahā denotes a larger denomination. From the reign of Gopāla II in the second half of the 9th century to the reign

²¹² Furui, *Land and society*, p.133.

²¹³ *Ibid.* p.133.

²¹⁴ Kielhorn, 'Khalimpur Plate', lines 44-46, pp.249-50.

²¹⁵ Furui, 'A new copperplate', lines 41-46, p.73.

of Gopāla IV and Madanapāla in the second half of the 12th century, more or less a consistent list of royal functionaries is traceable with the inclusion of śaunakika and aṅgarakṣa in it.²¹⁶

More or less a standardized form of administrative posts is traceable in Magadha as is evidenced in Dharmapāla's Nalanda copperplate. Here administrative designations appear as rāja, rājanaka, rājaputra, rājāmātya, mahākarttākṛtikā, mahādaṇḍanāyaka, mahāpratīhāra, mahāsāmanta, mahārāja, dauḥśādhasādhanika, pramātri, sarabhaṅga, kumārāmātya, rājasthāniyoparika, viṣayapati, dāsāparādhika, chauroddharaṅika, dāṇḍika, dāṇḍapāśika, kṣatrapa, prāntapāla etc.²¹⁷ The Munger and Nalanda copperplate of Devapāla also has a similar form of standardized listing with an increasing number of officials.

The second category of the copperplate grants is the others belonging to cāṭas and bhaṭas ('akīrtita').²¹⁸ The Mohipur copperplate of Gopāla II referred to cāṭa bhaṭa servants, mentioned with ethnic levels like gauḍas, mālavas, khaśas, hūṅas, kulikas, karṇātas and lāṭas. The Senas were referred as karṇātas among them.²¹⁹ Furui mentioned that these cāṭa bhaṭas were irregular troops or mercenaries including people from Bengal and the other regions, who were employed for war or police duty in the rural area and tended to disturb residents.²²⁰

The sub-region of Vaṅga, Śrīhaṭṭa, Samataṭa and Harikela were incorporated into the largest administrative division of Puṇḍravardhanabhukti during this phase. Hence the royal officials and subordinate rulers in the address of the Candra grants related to Vaṅga, Samataṭa and Śrīhaṭṭa do not show much change throughout the period between the tenth and mid11th centuries only with some irregularities in its numbers. For instance, the Paschimbhag Copper plate of Śrīcandra records the administrative officials as rājñī, rāṇaka, rājaputra, mahāsāndhivigrahika, mahāsainyapati, mahāmudrādhikṛta, mahākṣapaṭalika, pādāmūlaka, mahāpratīhāra, mahātantrādhikṛta, mahāsarvādhikṛta, mahābalādhikaraṅika, mahāvvyūhapati, maṇḍalapati, koṭṭapālas, dauḥśādhasādhanika, cauroddharaṅika, naubalahastyaśvagomahiṣājāvīkādīvyāpṛtaka, gaulmika, śaulkika, dāṇḍika, daṇḍapāśika, daṇḍanāyaka, viṣayapatis and others.²²¹ A similar list

²¹⁶ Furui, 'Rajibpur Copper-plate', lines 38-41, p.43.

²¹⁷ Bhattacharya, 'Nalanda Plate', p.291.

²¹⁸ Kielhorn, 'Khalimpur Plate', lines 46-47, p.250.

²¹⁹ Chowdhury and Misra, 'The Sena Rule', p.835.

²²⁰ Furui, *Land and society*, p.135.

²²¹ Sircar, 'Paschimbhag Copper-plate', pp. 92-100.

of royal officials is traceable during the time of Laḍahacandra as evidenced in his Mainamati copperplate. Alongside the Madanpur copperplate of Śrīcandra refers to some different list of officials such as, rājñī, rāṇaka, rājaputra, rājapurohita, mahāsāndhivigrahika, mahāsenāpati, mahāsāmanta, mahādharmmādhyaḡa, mahāsarvādhikṛta, mahātantrādhyaḡa, mahāpīlupati, gocchakapati, ardhanauvāṭaka, nauvāṭaka, dauḡssādhyasādhanika, gomahiṡyājādyadhyaḡa and others undeclared (anyāṡ cānuktan). Cāṭas and bhaṭas (cāṭabhaṭajātīyān) were mentioned as another category of the addressee.

In Daṇḍabhukti of Rāḍha, the Irda copperplate of Kāmboja king Nayapāla datable to the second half of the tenth century addressed his subordinates and future kings of his own lineage (‘āgāmino pi nṛpatīn nijatīrthayuktān’).²²² The subordinates were sub-divided into seven groups. They are queen, crown prince and councilor (‘mahiṡyuvārājamantriṇaḡ’), purohita accompanied by ṛtvijis (‘saha ṛtvigbhir atho purohitam’), niyogins and the ones knowing dharma accompanied by magistrates (‘dharmmajñāṡ ca samaṡ pradeṡṛbhiḡ’), all officials accompanied by karaṇas (‘ahyaḡavargam akhilaṡ karaṇais sametām’), general accompanied by leaders of the corporation of soldiers (‘senāpatiṇ ca saha sainikasaṅghamukhyaiḡ’), messengers with secret officials accompanied by keepers of mantra (‘dūtān sagūdhapuruṡān saha mantrapālair’) and other subordinates of the king (‘anyān api kṡitipater anujīvinaś ca’).²²³

In the early 10th century Harikela the metal vase inscription of Attākaradeva referred to the addressee of the inscription. They are present and future kings, rājaputras, rāṇakas and ṡhakkuras and all the royal officials like akṡapaṭalika in Harikelāmaṇḍala with homage to brāhmaṇas beforehand.²²⁴

The assigning duties of the officers was portrayed by Niharranjan Ray.²²⁵ From the previous sources it can be said that if kumārāmātya was the omnipotent ruler of the viṡaya, mahākumārāmātya was the omniscient or supreme head of the kumārāmātyas. In that way mahāsāndhivigrahika was the highest official in foreign affairs related to war and peace, mahāsenāpati was the highest officer related to warfare, mahāpratīhāra was probably a senior royal official guarding the outskirts of the state, mahādaṇḍanāyaka was the omnipotent ruler of the

²²² Majumdar, ‘Irda copperplate’, line 36, p. 156.

²²³ *Ibid.* lines 32-36, p.156.

²²⁴ Bhattacharya, ‘An Inscribed Metal Vase’, lines 3-4, p.333.

²²⁵ Ray, *Bangalir Itihas*, pp.332-38.

judiciary, mahākṣapaṭalika was the head of the income-expenditure accounting department, rājasthāniyo was a high-ranking official and representative appointed by the emperor, kṣatrapa was the highest accountant and observer of arable and cultivable land, pramātri was the departmental officer of land survey, mahābhogapati was the highest official of the consumer tax collection department, tarapāṭaka was an observer at the crossing ghāt, śaulkika was the head of the customs department involved in business and trade, dāsāparādhika was the head of the department of judgment and collection of ten types of crimes, gaulmika was the head of the revenue department from the forest, dāṇḍika, daṇḍapāśika, daṇḍasaktis were related to peacekeeping department, saṣṭhādhikṛta were in charge of collecting one-sixth of the tenant's grain, koṭṭapālas were the fort keeper, prāntapāla was the state border guard, mahāvyūhapati was the master of strategies during the war, abhitvaramāṇa and gamāgamika both may have been involved in peacekeeping, foreign affairs, or the military, or in general public service. Semantically speaking, abhitvaramāṇa was the one who traveled fast and gamāgamika was also an officer involved in traveling. dūtapreṣaṇika was the correspondent of the ambassador attached to the central state or foreign department, sarabhaṅga was the commander of the archery army or the king's hunting companion, khaṇḍarakṣa was either a customs examiner or an employee of the military department or the public works department, hastyaśvoṣṭranaubalavyāprtaka and kiśoravaḍavāgomahiṣyajāvīkādhyakṣa were princes in charge of navy, army, elephant, horse, cow, buffalo, goat, sheep etc. The necessity of these ministers in stately affairs was evidenced in the *Rāmacarita*. Here the author mentioned that Rāmapāla carefully discussed all pros and cons with his ministers and sons before implying and authorizing vinaya or discipline to the state.²²⁶ These officers possessed a secure position in their realm which was evidenced by the *Rāmacarita*.²²⁷

Sundry residents of rural settlements

In Varendra, Rāḍha and eastern Vihara, under the reign of the Pālas the influential rural residents became less powerful. They were mentioned only as addresses in various copperplate charters. In Varendra, the Khalimpur copperplate of Dharmapāla refers to jyeṣṭhakāyastha, mahāmahattara, mahattara, dāśagrāmikas, karaṇas etc.²²⁸ Among the rural residents landed magnets such as mahāmahattara and mahattaras were mentioned as a constituent of viṣayavyavahārins as evidenced

²²⁶ Sastri, 'Rāmacarita', cantos I, verse 42, p.26.

²²⁷ *Ibid.* cantos II, verse 25, p.45.

²²⁸ Kielhorn, 'Khalimpur Plate', line 43, pp.253-54.

from the Khalimpur copperplate of Dharmapāla.²²⁹ It has also referred to residing cultivators with homage to brāhmaṇas beforehand.²³⁰ The Mohipur plate of Gopāla II referred to rural residents of whom brāhmaṇas were foremost, headed by mahattamas and kuṭumbins reaching to some lowest strata of the society like medas, andhrakas and caṇḍālas.²³¹ Here mahattaras were replaced by the mahattamas. The Belwa copperplate of Vighrahapāla III also referred to the same.²³² Alongside, in Magadha, during the reign of the Pālas, the existence of mahattamas and kuṭumbins can be traced back a long time. The Nalanda plate of Dharmapāla refers to rural residents of whom brāhmaṇas were foremost, headed by mahattamas and kuṭumbins reaching to medas, andhras and caṇḍālas.²³³

During the Pāla period, among the rural residents in Varendra and Magadha, medas, andhras and caṇḍālas denote social groups placed at the bottom of the society. They were considered mixed jāti who were kept out of the village.²³⁴ They were a completely distinct caste as their belongings were considered separate.

In the Candra grants related to the sub-regions of Vaṅga, Samataṭa and Śrīhaṭṭa, the rural residents were referred as janapadas and general cultivators (kṣetrakara) of whom brāhmaṇas were foremost.²³⁵ The janapadas constituted of scribes, artisans and musicians, may have some landholdings as reflected in the Paschimbhag copperplate of Śrīcandra.²³⁶ Landholdings by the rural residents like supakāra (cook), vardhaki (carpenter) and kaṃsāra (brazier) was also witnessed in Samataṭa during the 11th century which was evidenced from the Mainamati copperplate of Laḍahacandra.²³⁷

In 10th century during the rule of the Kāambojas in Daṇḍabhukti, Rāḍha the rural residents such as the vyavahārins accompanied by karaṇas and cultivators accompanied by residents were referred to in the Irda copperplate of Nayapāla.²³⁸ They have been informed about the donation, which

²²⁹ *Ibid.* line 47, p. 250.

²³⁰ *Ibid.* line 48, p.250.

²³¹ Furui, 'A new copperplate', line 46, p.73.

²³² Sircar, 'Two Pāla Plates from Belwa', line 40, p.8.

²³³ Bhattacharya, 'Nalanda Plate', lines 7-17, p.291.

²³⁴ Furui, *Land and Society*, p.136.

²³⁵ *Ibid.* p. 137.

²³⁶ Sircar, 'Paschimbhag plate', lines 38-47, pp.67-68.

²³⁷ Sircar, 'Two Grants of Ladahacandra', pp.73, 75.

²³⁸ Majumdar, 'Irda copperplate', lines 20-22, p. 155.

indicates their strong position in society.²³⁹ Another fact to be noted here is that the Irda copperplate of Nayapāla referred to a village named Bṛihachattivannā contained 36 caste groups.²⁴⁰ This indicates the presence of diverse rural residents in a village.

In Harikela, with the exception of brāhmaṇas the absence of local residents is evident in the address section of the inscriptions. However, there are some references to the individual residents, mentioned as landholders. Landholdings of kārada Indranātha and bhārada Amhela was attested in the metal vase inscription of rājādhirāja Attākaradeva.²⁴¹ Kārada and bhārada were two categories of landholders. Apart from this here an individual resident called Nāgadatta possessed a small garden with areca nut trees.²⁴²

Kaivartas: From farmers and fishermen to landholders

Kaivartas were referred to as one of the lowest categories of rural residents along with medas, andhras and caṇḍālas in a copperplate inscription of Gopāla II.²⁴³ They held the profession of fishing. Gradually they emerged as an influential group of people in Bengal during the Pāla realm. Lands have been given to them for their subsistence or some service.²⁴⁴ They upgraded themselves to the landholding class. Reference to kaivartas in Belwa and Rangpur plates of Mahīpāla I, indicate their growth as landholders from fishermen or boatmen. Both the inscriptions pertaining to the same administrative unit Phāṇitavīthī mention kaivartavṛtti ('Osinnakaivarttavṛtti, Uddhannakaivarttavṛttivahikala') as a place name.²⁴⁵ These place names attest to the settling of kaivartas as landholders in that particular area. Lands have been given to them for livelihood or some service. They had a service relation with the Pāla kings instead of which they received land. They possibly received land instead of serving the Pāla kings as military servers.²⁴⁶ The kaivartas were worthy enough to be upgraded to high administrative positions. It is assumed that Yaśodāsa of the Bhaturiya stone inscription was belonged to cāṣī kaivarta class and was raised to the position

²³⁹ Furui, *Land and Society*, p.139.

²⁴⁰ Majumdar, 'Irda copperplate', lines 21-22, p.155.

²⁴¹ Bhattacharya, 'An Inscribed Metal Vase', line 14, p.335.

²⁴² *Ibid.* text II. line 2, p.336.

²⁴³ Ryosuke Furui, 'Re-Reading two copper-plate Inscriptions', line 36, p.325.

²⁴⁴ Furui, *Land and Society*, p.154.

²⁴⁵ Sircar, 'Two Pāla Plates from Belwa', line 29, p.7; Ryosuke Furui, 'Rangpur Copper Plate Inscription of Mahīpāla I, year 5', *Journal of Ancient Indian History*, Vol. XXVII, 2011, line 27, p.240.

²⁴⁶ Furui, 'Social Life', p.60.

of a subordinate ruler.²⁴⁷ Finally, the kaivartas led a joint revolt of the sāmantas against the pālas and removed them from power for a certain period. Even after the rebellion, their presence as a social group and landholder was maintained. The Rajibpur copperplate of Gopāla IV and Madanapāla referred to the enclosed land of kaivartas included in rājasambhoga (royal estate).²⁴⁸

Artisanal class

Reference to various artisanal groups like tailika (oil presser), kumbhakāra (potter), carmakāra (leather worker), suvarnakāra (goldsmith) and śauṇḍika (distiller and vendor of liquid) during the Pāla reign attest to their presence in rural society. The Nalanda Inscription of Dharmapāla records a goldsmith (suvarṇnakāra) named Vajjaka who possibly be conjectured as the constructor of the miniature votive stupa on which the inscription is engraved.²⁴⁹

Alongside in Śrīhaṭṭa during the reign of the Candras various artisans with distinct identities as well as several skilled and semi-skilled occupation groups were referred to as service providers for maṭha as evidenced by the Paschimbhag copperplate of Śrīcandra. They included the gaṇaka, mālākāras (garland makers), tailikas, kumbhakāras, kāhalikas (kahala drum player), śaṅkhavādakas (conch blowers), naṭa (dancer), sūtradhāras (architects/carpenters), sthapatīs (architect), ceṭṭikas (female servants) etc.²⁵⁰ A few among these groups would be literate to a certain extent like the sthapati and sūtradhāra.

The phase of maturity at a glance

As observed in this chapter, with the rise of the hegemonic rule of the pre-eminent Pāla and Candra rulers, the inscriptions began to portray the rich cultural flavour that was on the rise too. If we look at the literary style of this period, we perceive a flow of creativity which was often reaching great heights and at other times found lacking in quality, perhaps some of these trends reflect the historical processes of the times and often these actually pertained to the skill of the composer. However, generally speaking, the conditions of patronage to literary culture would naturally leave a great impact on the trend. This trend is evident in the numerous inscriptions of the Pālas. For example, the Khalimpur copper plate of Dharmapāla of the ninth century was the first testimony

²⁴⁷ Chowdhury, 'Pāla realm', p.740.

²⁴⁸ Furui, 'Rajibpur Copper-plate', lines 43-44, p.53.

²⁴⁹ S. Subramonia Iyer, 'Nalanda Inscription of Dharmapāladeva, year 4', *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XLII, 1992, line 2, p.105.

²⁵⁰ Sircar, 'Paschimbhag plate', lines 36-51, pp. 67-68.

to an elongated and ornate composition of the Pālas, with fine expertise in literary style. This copperplate is especially significant because it bears testimony to the fact that the Pālas got involved in the north Indian struggle for hegemony over Kanauj against the Gurjara-Pratīhāras and the Rāṣṭrakūṭas. D.C. Sircar held it as an important historical record in this context.²⁵¹ But it is also extremely significant in providing a background to the rise of the Pāla dynastic rule. The wording of this ascendance may have been a deliberate ploy to mitigate criticism and adverse sentiments. Taken as a whole the compositional aspect and content of the record makes for a brilliant example of royal eulogy, historical record as well as literary merit, leaving a train of brilliance to be followed.

The inscriptions of Devapāla were almost similar to the style of Dharmapāla's inscriptions. They were also of great historical significance. Amongst them, the Nalanda Copper plate was particularly notable. It's connection to the world of Buddhism in its greatest centre of the times, Nalanda, and with the ruler of the Śailendra dynasty of south-east Asia not only indicate the outlying connections between Bengal and south-east Asia during the reign of Devapāla., but also hint at the cultural reach of the Pāla court at the time. Equally important are other inscriptions of Devapāla, for example, the Munger Copperplate. In addition to these, Jagajjibanpur Copper Plate of Mahendrapāla, Bhagalapur Copper Plate of Nārāyaṇapāla have also portrayed a rich literary composition. Some of these have been discussed above. On the other hand, we have noted the most interesting development in the form of eulogies composed and posted in inscriptions which were devoted to subordinate officials, feudatories, religious personages, etc. which exemplify the expanding horizon of literary creativity.

The records of the Candras from Vaṅga-Samatāṭa-Śrīhaṭṭa area bear testimony to not only reorganization of rural groups, and hierarchies but also indicated how the circle of rural residents came to include learned priestly and monastic communities. Apart from the Pascimbhag copperplate few other inscriptions of the Candras further portray the enhanced cultural scene of the time. Among them, the Dhulla copperplate, Rampal copperplate, Madanpur copperplate of Śrīcandra, and the Mainamati copper Plate inscriptions of Laḍahacandra were illuminating manifestations of other creative creations of the Candra dynasty. Especially the Mainamati Copper Plate inscription of Laḍahacandra, which is loaded with poetic hyperbolic exaggerations; whereas,

²⁵¹ Sircar, *The Kānyakubja-Gauḍa Struggle*, p.11.

the Mainamati Copper Plate inscription of Govindacandra was less ornamented in comparison to the copperplates of Laḍahacandra. This may have been due to the loss of patronage as it appears that Govindacandra may have been the last known ruler of the Candra dynasty, subsequently overthrown by the Varmans.

From the above analysis, it is observable that there was an evolution of literary style in Bengal during the 9th-12th century CE. At different phases, it reached heightened literary creativity during the reign of any significant ruler. Along with this, taking examples from the variegated Sanskrit literature of this period, we may arrive at the point when the surge of literary accomplishments appears to have been in its historical moment. The most important aspect to note is that apart from the main composers and their patrons, the scribes, engravers and messengers were also crucial in the task of depicting the inscriptions. They held important administrative positions. Several references indicated the presence of kāyasthas and vaidyas as the scribe of the inscriptions. From this period onwards their identity as a class of literati became prominent. The literary expressions they engraved were meant to address diverse social classes for example the administrative officials, influential residents of the rural society like the brāhmaṇas, mahattamas, kuṭumbins, jyeṣṭhakāyastha, and other rural inhabitants like the kṣetrakaras, medas, andhrakas and caṇḍālas and various artisanal classes. Thus, the process of literary culture as illuminated in the inscriptions and literature of this period hints toward a varied social order. Behind the whole process, there is certainly a hint of royal control, which is reflected in the innumerable land charters of this period. These indicated an enhanced state control all over the sub-regions. The prosperity of urban centres like Mahasthan and Bangarh in Puṇḍravardhana and Vikramapura and Devaparvata in Vaṅga-Samatata sub-region indicate a convergence of resources and concentration of political and economic power. An elaborate list of royal functionaries ('rājapādapajīvin' or 'rājapādaprasādoopajīvin') in the Pāla-Candra inscriptions indicated the royal dominance, manifest in institutions of the court, the socio-religious orders as well as in the processes of economic production.

Chapter IV

The full efflorescence of regional literary culture (11th- early 13th century CE)

The last decades of the 11th century CE saw the gradual rise of Brahmanical culture along with a reshuffling of political power in early medieval Bengal. Among the political houses which began to emerge were the rulers hailing from the Sena dynasty who went on to establish their position in Gauḍa and Rāḍha. They claimed origin from a Karṇāṭa brahmakṣatriya clan and first established their position as feudatory subordinates under the Pālas in Rāḍha. They supplanted the Varmans from Vaṅga and Samataṭa in south-eastern Bengal and pushed out the Pālas from Puṅdra and Gauḍa in northern and western Bengal. Almost all the sub-regions of Bengal were united under their rule for a short period before they lost their western and northern territories to the Turkish army led by Muhammad Bakhtiyār Khaljī at the beginning of the 13th century. But their territorial expanse was gradually narrowed down from the middle of the same century and they were found confined in the region of south-eastern Bengal. The Varmans had established their supremacy in the south-eastern and eastern Bengal after the Candras and before the Senas, around the 2nd half of the 11th century CE. The Varmans who may have originated from Kaliṅga, established their stronghold in Vaṅga and some parts of Samataṭa for a short period from c.1080 to 1150 CE.

Again, the later Devas emerged as a sovereign power in eastern and south-eastern Bengal at a time when the Sena power was weakening in the last quarter of the 12th century and first half of the 13th century CE. There were two lines of rulers whose names ended with 'Deva'. One line of rulers occupied Harikela, Samataṭa and Paṭṭikerā sub-regions and seized Vaṅga after ousting the Senas. Dāmodaradeva, the most prominent king of the lineage, ruled Samataṭa in the second quarter of the 13th century. Daśarathadeva, his son extended their power to Vaṅga after the decline of the Senas. Another line of Deva ruler who ruled in the Śrīhaṭṭa region, emerged around the middle of the 13th century. Progenies of this dynasty, Keśavadeva and his son Īsānadeva appear to have enjoyed autonomy.

In fact, a shift took place in the political climate from the late 10th- 11th century onward and this bore impact for the cultural scene of Bengal. The political domination of the Senas in northern Bengal and the Varmans in south-eastern Bengal coincided or perhaps directly led to a

predominance of the Brahmanical culture throughout Bengal. The brāhmaṇas, who had been notably and repeatedly visible as donees in the land-grant inscriptions in the earlier phase of history, were on the way to a heightened status, enjoying important position both in royal courts and rural society. This was more prolific as a result of the expansive networks of patronage and the familial opportunities that were in the process of getting expanded both with royal benevolence as well as other jajamānas, especially under the Senas. Such a context increases the tendency towards a more formal, Brahmanical and Sanskritic tone in the elite literate culture and practices. This is further reflected in an extensive number of ornate literary works that flourished during this period, especially from the mid-12th century. Sometimes the tonal quality reached a pompous, over-ornate note which truly characterizes the gauḍī style with its ‘akṣara ḍambara’ or volubility of sounds. The true literary quality of some of the creations, however, takes the literary culture of this phase to a great height of achievement as we shall note in the extensive number of inscriptions issued under the Senas and Varmans. However, it was actually the textual creative compositions which truly portray the enhanced quality of the culture of this phase. As noted by Nupur Dasgupta, Sanskrit as an elite language bloomed amongst the Brahmanical elites and pedagogic circle in this phase of early medieval Bengal, but this had its links with the pan-Indian trend of literary developments of the times.¹

Literary legacy and lineages

Taking the view of a pan-Indian context S.N. Dasgupta stated that the continued trend of creative Sanskrit literature decayed from the tenth century, became prone to imitation, and relied on monotonous and elaborate writing.² The truly creative epoch of Sanskrit literature had become exhausted and turned into a repetitive form. He said, ‘The poets of this period were undoubtedly gifted with literary skill, but they were capable masters as well as unfortunate victims of a rigid convention’.³ Among them, one of the eminent poets of the time was Rājaśekhara who emerged in the first half of the tenth century CE. His *Kāvya-mīmāṃsā* was a unique composition of literary discipline and tradition. He defined kāvya as a literary expression containing guṇas and alaṅkāras.⁴ Kuntaka or Kuntala, who flourished in the middle of the tenth century, had been influenced by

¹ Dasgupta, ‘Sanskrit Literature’, p.568.

² Dasgupta, *A History of Sanskrit Literature*, pp.304.

³ *Ibid.* p.307.

⁴ Sastri, ‘Sanskrit Poetics’, p.299.

Bhāmaha, Daṇḍin and Udbhaṭa. He pursued a style with overuse of vakrokti as is evident in his poetic composition *vakrokti jīvita*.⁵ This reflects another form of overdone literary writing style. Dhananjaya of the tenth century composed a work called *Daśarūpaka*, which dealt with various aspects of dramaturgy with the inclusion of rasa theory.⁶ In this line of poets, Śrīharṣa was a unique genius who flourished in the twelfth century. He was a ‘monistic dialectician’.⁷ His most celebrated poetic composition was the *Naiṣadhiya-carita*. According to S.N. Dasgupta, the poetry of this period was ‘a production of high cultivation’, possibly meant for a ‘highly cultivated audience’⁸ but he also noted that this was due to the ‘universal trend of scholastic activities’. Although, from a historical point of view this statement seems to defy reality, what was meant was that a scholastic trend had been set to be followed by the more and more increasing number of aspirants to a career in literary field. Royal patronage and the courtly culture had led to this phenomenon as has been pointed out by both Sheldon Pollock and Daud Ali from their different perspectives. While Pollock observed the ascendance of Sanskrit as the language of the intellectual and the refined and the powerful, Ali found an expansive courtly circuit to flourish in the cultural domain in the early medieval times. But the loss of simple classicism in the midst of over-concern for embellishments and conformity to established rules of poetics was clearly evident in the later examples and this pertained to the same heightened literary circuit of the regional royal and feudatorial courts. The kind of kāvya produced by the esteemed poets of the time was thus marked with critical elaboration, formality, and repetitive uses of various literary devices, like similes, metaphors and syllabic resounding. In inscriptions and literature, this genre was reflected in all these forms and in the use of more compound sentences and exaggerated literary expressions.⁹ Yet, in spite of this overdoing of the literary medium, there were a few gems that the composers from Bengal of this phase created which stand the test of time as classical creations.

The period from the 12th century to the 13th century saw a huge number of charters and panegyrics in inscriptions of the Senas, the Varmans and the Later Deva rulers. Side by side the literary works of this stage include numerous works on Sanskrit grammar, lexicons, texts on Brahmanical rites

⁵ *Ibid.* p.300.

⁶ *Ibid.* p.300.

⁷ Raghavan, ‘Sanskrit Kavya Literature’, p.217.

⁸ Dasgupta, *A History of Sanskrit Literature*, p.310.

⁹ Bhattacharya, ‘The Gauḍī Rīti’, p.388.

and rituals and substantial creative literature, devotional and poetic. Among the creative literature, the finest use of an exquisite, prolific and ornate literary tone was seen in the verses included in the anthology of the *Sadukti-karṇāmṛta* compiled by Śrīdharadāsa (1205 CE), the *Āryāsaptaśatī* of Govardhanācārya (c. 12th century CE), *Pavanadūta* by Dhoyī (c.12th century CE) and lastly, the most celebrated, the *Gītagovinda* by Jayadeva (12th century CE).

Historiographical perspectives

To understand the literary style of this period we have to rely on the study and analysis of the literature of this period by previous researchers. For example, N.G. Majumdar meticulously analyzed the literary traits of the Bhuvaneswar Praśasti of Bhaṭṭabhavadēva and the Deopara Rock Inscription of Vijayasena.¹⁰ Debarchana Sarkar has offered an analytic discussion of the Bhuvaneswar Praśasti and the Deopara Rock Inscription.¹¹ Sures Chandra Banerji's edition of the text of *Sadukti-karṇāmṛta* is the only one available on this important anthology.¹² James Mallinson's meticulous translation of the text of *Pavanadūta* helps to understand the literary features of this text.¹³ A Ph.D. dissertation on Dhoyī's *Pavanadūta* by Tandrima Sarkar throws light on the literary traits of the text.¹⁴ Sri Janhabi Kumar Chakraborty's translation of the *Āryāsaptaśatī* in Bengali with Bengali notes helps to analyze the literary formation of the text.¹⁵ Barbara Stoler Miller's excellent analysis and edition helps in understanding the classic literary structure of *Gītagovinda*.¹⁶ Dr. M.V. Krishna Rao meticulously delineated the theme of the *Gītagovinda*.¹⁷ Vicitri dasi narrated the substance and actual significance of the text *Gītagovinda*.¹⁸ An interpretation of the literary principles and method of the text has been portrayed here.

Apart from the specific texts some general studies on the literary works of the times were presented in the articles and chapters by S.K. De, Nihar Ranjan Ray and more recently by Nupur Dasgupta

¹⁰ Majumdar, *Inscriptions of Bengal*, pp. 25-41, 42-56.

¹¹ Sarkar, *Nityakaler tui Puratan*, pp. 220-36, 237-52.

¹² Banerji, *Sadukti-karṇāmṛta*.

¹³ Mallinson, 'Messenger Poems'.

¹⁴ Sarkar, *A study of Dhoyī's Pavanadūta*.

¹⁵ Chakraborty, *Āryāsaptaśatī*.

¹⁶ Miller, *Jayadeva's Gītagovinda*.

¹⁷ Rao, *Gīta Govinda of Jayadeva*.

¹⁸ Dasi, *Śrī Gīta Govinda-Śrī Jayadeva Gosvāmī*.

who had traced the evolution of the literary genre of this period by drawing on important literary analyses and translations of earlier scholars on valuable Sanskrit creative pieces of literature of this period.¹⁹ Jesse Knutson has studied the high degree of the literary style of the kinds of literature created in the court of Lakṣmaṇasena between 12th-13th centuries.²⁰ A reflection of the social communities in which the advanced literary style of this period was practiced is depicted through some more researches. For example, Ryosuke Furui has dwelt on the characteristics of the society, social categories and processes of social formation, with regard to production network, socio-economic and political interrelations between social and political communities. He has traced the rise of the brāhmaṇas both in royal courts and in the rural society, and looked into the nature of social stratification, status of different occupational groups and their incorporation into the order of state and varṇa-jāti society in different sub-regions.²¹ Suchandra Ghosh and Sayantani pal's article on 'Everyday Life in Early Bengal' is an excellent study of the social climate in early medieval Bengal. They portray the contrasting picture of urban and daily life in the light of the literary and epigraphic evidence of the Sena period.²²

This rich and ornate literary trend is clearly visible in the inscriptions of the Varmans and we note the culmination during the Sena times. Among the royal inscriptions of the Varmans, the Belava copperplate of Bhojavarman bore the best expression of the literary approach,²³ while it is the Bhuvaneswar Praśasti of Bhaṭṭabhavadēva which exhibits the height of creative beauty.²⁴ The Varman inscriptions perhaps signify more especially because we can draw their Kalacuri connection to have been impactful. Historians agree that the Kalacuri ruler Karṇa had invaded Kalinga and the Varmans became their active vassals.²⁵ The Varmans came to Bengal during

¹⁹ Dasgupta, 'Sanskrit Literature', pp. 568-81; De, 'Sanskrit Literature', pp.304-63; Ray, *Bāṅgālīr Itihas*.

²⁰ Knutson, *Into the twilight*.

²¹ Furui, 'Brāhmaṇas', pp. 184-86; Furui, 'Brāhmaṇas in early medieval Bengal', pp. 229-36; Furui, *Land and Society*, pp.188- 236; Furui, 'Social Life', pp.61-64.

²² Ghosh and Pal, 'Everyday Life', pp.36-37.

²³ Basak, 'Belava copper plate', pp.37-43; Banerji, 'Belabo Grant', pp.121-29; Majumdar, 'Belava Copper-plate', pp.14-24.

²⁴ Marshall, 'Bhuvanesvara Inscription', pp.88-97; Kielhorn, 'Bhuvanesvara Inscription', pp.203-07; Majumdar, 'Bhuvanesvara Inscription', pp.25-41; Sarkar, *Nityakaler tui Puratan*, pp. 220-36.

²⁵ Islam, 'Emerging Political Entities', p.644.

Kalacuri invasion as their subordinates. Jātavarman, as the first king of this dynasty, had entered into a marriage alliance by marrying Vīraśrī, the daughter of Kalacuri king Lakṣmi Karṇa.²⁶ It is in this connection, that Shariful Islam had observed the similarities between the Cedī and Varman inscriptions, especially, of the Belava copperplate inscription, in respect of citing Purāṇic legends and characters.²⁷

Inscriptions of the Varmans

The Belava copperplate of Bhojavarman:

The Belava Copper-plate of 12th century CE was discovered at the village Belava in the Naraingunj sub-division of the Dacca district within the sub-region Vaṅga.²⁸ It is engraved in the traditional Northern Nāgarī script of eastern India, which is regarded as somewhat better in quality than the script of the Rampal copperplate of Śrīcandra.²⁹ This inscription was composed in a variety of metres, for example, anuṣṭubh, śārdūlavikrīḍita, indravajrā, mālinī and vasantatilaka.³⁰ With the exception of the introductory ‘om siddhiḥ’, up to the end of line 24, this engraving was composed in verse.³¹ The verse portion of this inscription contained a beautiful praśasti. An exhaustive genealogical list of the Varman family of rulers is presented in an ornate literary tone. The praśasti highlights their prowess, dignity and wisdom in the standard format of the times. Royal virtue was not limited to the exhibition of military prowess alone but also in moral and intellectual accomplishments. The author of the Belava copperplate, brāhmaṇa Purūṣottama for example, praises the moral quality of Sāmalvarma, stating that his lord possessed all the eminent virtues, and not even the slightest evil has taken refuge in him.

‘Vīraśrīyām ajani Sāmalavarmadevaḥ śrīmāñ jagat prathama maṅgala nāmadheyah kimvarṇṇayāmy akhila bhupa guṇopapanno doshairmanāg api padam na kṛtaḥ prabhurme’.³²

²⁶ *Ibid.* p.646.

²⁷ *Ibid.* p.645.

²⁸ Majumdar, ‘Belava Copper-plate’, p.14.

²⁹ *Ibid.* p.14.

³⁰ *Ibid.* p.15.

³¹ *Ibid.* p.14.

³² *Ibid.* verse 9, 20.

The verses of its praśasti section also reflect the growing status of the Paṇḍit brāhmaṇas in the royal court and the prevalence of an intellectual environment.

The rest of the document was in prose which contained a fine documentation of the entire procedure of land sale transaction. A special significance of this copperplate is that it contains certain clues to the inflow of brāhmaṇas from the zones of Brahmanical culture and also the clusters of Brahmanical settlements that would grow. The family of the donee in this charter, a brāhmaṇa named Rāmadevaśarmman, is stated to hail from Madhyadeśa and settled in Siddhalagrāma.³³ This Siddhalagrāma was considered to have grown into an important Brahmanical centre during the reign of Varmans. Thus, along with the literary tone of the contents and dynastic lineage, we also come to know about the growing orbit of literate society.

The Bhubaneswar praśasti of Bhaṭṭabhavadeva:

The magnificent overelaborate wordings of the Varmans appear prominently in the Bhubaneswar praśasti of Bhaṭṭabhavadeva.³⁴ The record is datable around the late 11th to early 12th century CE. It includes a glorious panegyric of the family of Bhaṭṭabhavadeva, who was employed as a minister of war and peace under the ruler Harivarman. One of the attractions and significance of this inscription is that it eulogizes the deeds of an eminent scholar, not of a king or a prince. We have already noted this trend to be on the rise in the earlier phase. This inscription gives a detailed account of Bhaṭṭabhavadeva and a eulogy of seven generations of his family. The record also gives a long description of his profound learning in various branches of knowledge.

This praśasti is incised on the western wall of the Ananta Vāsudeva temple courtyard at Bhubanesvar in Puri district, Orissa. But the original location of this record does not seem to have been there. Professor Debarchana Sarkar has given a very nice explanation for this.³⁵ In 1810, General Stuart opened two inscriptions from the Ananta Vāsudeva temple and brought them to the museum of the Asiatic Society of Bengal. This was looked upon as a great sacrilege by the priests of Bhubanesvar. When Major Kittoe visited the place in 1837, they complained to him. He then

³³ *Ibid.* lines 43-45, p.21.

³⁴ Marshall, 'Bhubanesvara Inscription', pp.88-97; Kielhorn, 'Bhubanesvara Inscription', pp.203-07; Majumdar, 'Bhubanesvara Inscription', pp.25-41; Sarkar, *Nityakaler tui Puratan*, pp. 220-36.

³⁵ Sarkar, *Nityakaler tui Puratan*, p.223.

promised to restore the inscriptions and, in agreement with the Asiatic Society, sent the stone plaques to the Ananta Vāsudeva temple in the same year. Those two inscriptions were placed on the west wall of the temple courtyard, one of which was the Bhubanesvar Praśasti. But an analysis of this praśasti reveals that the temple built by Bhavadeva as mentioned in the inscription was located somewhere in Rāḍha.

This inscription was written in a similar northern Nāgarī script. Debarchana Sarkar observed that the style of the praśasti was simple.³⁶ Most of the verses, however, have a clever application of śleṣa.³⁷ It was composed by Bhaṭṭabhavadeva's dear friend Vācaspati. N.G. Majumdar observed that the poet often shows a predilection for certain words and ideas repeated in different forms.³⁸ For example, the synonyms of the words denoting 'earth' occur no less than 18 times. A phrase 'adbhuta śraṣṭā' meaning creator of wonder has been referred to in verse 20 and the same with a little modification as 'adbhuta prasavitā' in verse 21. The inscription which carries 33 verses was composed in different metres like the vasnatatilaka, śārdūlavikrīḍita, āryā, śloka, upajāti, śikhariṇī, vomśosthobil, sragdharā, mandākrāntā, mālinī and praharṣiṇī, and indicates the poetic proficiency of the composer, Vācaspati.³⁹ The eulogy begins with a homage to Vāsudeva and Hari. Each of the verses contains pompous diction and hyperbolic expressions, characteristic of the regional propensity for volubility. The central theme of this encomium was Bhavadeva himself, as the preeminent of the many descendants of the Sāvārṇa gotra.⁴⁰ The eulogy points to a purely brāhmanical-Vaiṣṇavite religious affiliation as the descriptions of the auspiciousness of the personage of the protagonist reveal.

The present Bhavadeva came from a family of brāhmaṇas from Rāḍha. The genealogical description begins with reference to his ancestor, another Bhavadeva. The family had settled in the growing Brahmanical centre, village Siddhalagrāma with landgrants received from royal patrons. The village of Siddhala in the Northern Rāḍha was praised as an adornment of the land of Āryāvarta. It is described hence:

³⁶ *Ibid.* p.224.

³⁷ *Ibid.* p.24.

³⁸ Majumdar, 'Belava Copper-plate', p.26.

³⁹ *Ibid.* p.26.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* verse 3, p.36.

‘sāvāṇasya munermahījasi kule je jojñire śrotrijā steṣām śāsanabhūmaja jonigrhogrāmāḥ śataṁ santu te/ āryāvartabhuvām bhūṣanamihā khyātastu sarvvāgrimo grāmaḥ siddhala eva kevalamalāṅkārosti rāḍhāsrijah’.⁴¹

Clearly this linking of Rāḍha with Āryāvarta signifies the network of heritage that was sought by the brāhmaṇa settlers in Rāḍha at the time. This was the ideological background to the emergence of the brāhmaṇa centres, which were also seats of Brahmanical learning and literary culture, a little outside the courtly orbit but connected to it. The lineage of the family has been described in some detail, which also points to the prevalence of polygamy. The members seem to have been entrusted with important administrative posts and as mentioned above, he himself enjoyed a high post under the Varmans. He had attained some scholastic prominence which is illustrated in the inscription and he is hailed as the crest jewel of the family, as the source of pure enlightenment, and as comparable to Śiva (‘tadvamśottomsamaṇiḥ phalasya dātāpi tāpanapratimaḥ bhava iva vidyātattvaprabhavaḥ pravabhūva bhavadevaḥ’).⁴²

Keeping to the Vaiṣṇavite tone, the auspiciousness of Bhavadeva’s birth is indicated by the presence of a lotus mark on his palms and a jewel in his heart, symbolizing his increasing glory (‘jatpāṇipraṇaji dvayaṁ jalajajorālokṣitoṁ lakṣmaṇā jocyāntornihitasti koustubho iti jñātaṁ prokāśodajāt’).⁴³ He is described being endowed with Lakṣmī on his right hand, Sarasvatī on the tip of his tongue, Garuḍa in the body of his enemies, and the discus on his feet in order to conceal his pristine, divine body (‘lakṣmīm dakṣinadoṣṇi mantravibhave viśvambharāmaṇḍalaṁ jihvāgre ca sarasvatīm riptanau nāgāntakaṁ patriṇaṁ cakraṁ pādātale niveśitavatā divyaṁ tadātman vapuninhotuṁ nijacinhametadamunā nūnaṁ viparjāsitaṁ’).⁴⁴ We also get the tone of moral excellence as a mark of his worth. Bhavadeva is described as possessing the qualities of self-dignity, chastity, humility, solemnity and tolerance that were above any kind of verbal expression.⁴⁵ On the other hand, the qualities invested with political authority and physical power were also projected in the allusions to Mahāgaḍḍī and Caṇḍī on the battlefield and Mahālakṣmī.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* verse 3, p.33.

⁴² *Ibid.* verse 5, p.33.

⁴³ *Ibid.* verse 14, pp.37-38.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* verse 15, p.34.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* verse 7, p.34.

the combined power of these three goddesses were said to have unleashed immense power, elevating him as the paramount lord of the world.⁴⁶

The fourth line of distinction and quality, comprised of intellectual and scholarly accomplishments, which is more important in our context. Bhavadeva was mentioned as the author and preacher of Horāśāstra, possessed the knowledge of an unlimited ocean of siddhānta, tantra and gaṇita, and was accredited as a composer in different branches of Dharmaśāstras, Mīmāṃsā, Arthaśāstra and many more.⁴⁷

The divine imageries were presented in elaborate and ornate poetic verses. The adorable deity of Nārāyaṇa, built by him, meets all the human desires in the earthly world, like the blue markings of the moon-like face of the eastern horizon, the lotus-ear ornament worn by the earth and the heavenly trees of the terrestrial world.⁴⁸ The temple of Viṣṇu, located in the middle of the water reservoir excavated by Bhavadeva himself, was vibrant and radiant as an emerald.⁴⁹ Its magnificent garden was built on the outskirts of the temple (‘vyadhita vivudhadhāmnaḥ sīmni soṃsārasāraṃ sa khalu nikhilānetrānandanisyaṇḍapātram tribhuvanajajakhinnāṅgaviśrāmadhāma prathitarativibhāvasthānamudyānaratnam’).⁵⁰ Superfluous metaphors (‘upamā’) and allegory (‘rūpaka’) add a distinct over-ornate flavor which resonates with the literary atmosphere of the time as observed earlier. This trend of composition attained its height under the Sena rulers.

The Sena and Varman domains were geographically contiguous and their inscriptions project a similar pattern. The grandiloquence of Sena inscriptions can be much attributed to the predominance of Brahmanical authority at the royal court and their closer association with the king. Strong Brahmanical networks got established centering around the royal courts at Varendra and Rāḍha, the core territories of the Sena rulership. This must have influenced the royal epigraphic compositions. Following Daud Ali, we can also argue for the prevalence of the closely knit and opulent atmosphere at the royal court at least as having been as important as Brahmanical influence. One cannot, however, negate the fact that the Sena context in Bengal saw a heightened

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* verse 18, p.34.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* verses 21,22,23, p.34.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* verse 27, p.35.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* verse 31, p.35.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* verse 32, p.35.

Brahmanical activity in textual compositions marking ritual efflorescence as well as the rise of Puranic culture during the time, attested by the rising numbers of regional Upapurāṇas. A combination of these political and social factors would have to be surmised as the background to this development.

Inscriptions of Sena Dynasty

The epigraphic records of the Senas consisted of 14 copperplate inscriptions, three rock inscriptions and two image inscriptions. As noted earlier, the literary style reached a kind of culmination under the Sena rule, when they may be considered to have reached a pinnacle of poetic grandeur and yet, lacked the classical simplicity, although some compositions indeed had combined the best of elements and present a truly beautiful state of literary creation. Among them the Deopara Rock Inscription of Vijayasena, the Naihati copperplate of Vallālasena, Lakṣmaṇasena's Tarpandighi copperplate, Anulia copperplate, Madhainagar copperplate etc. are significant. Amongst them, Deopara praśasti carried the deepest nuances of beautiful literary expression. The eulogistic verses of this inscription also throw important light on the history of the Sena dynasty, especially of Vijayasena.

Deopara rock inscription of Vijayasena:

In the long history of Bengal's regional literary style, the Deopara Rock Inscription of Vijayasena in the 12th century CE probably represents the finest example of writing style.⁵¹ The inscription, incised on a stone slab, was discovered by C.T. Metcalfe in 1865, near the village Deopara in police station Godagari in the Rajshahi district of Bengal.⁵² On the one hand, its historical significance is unquestionable, and on the other, it is unique in terms of its beautiful poetic nuances. The composer Umāpatidhara, was the court poet under Vijayasena, whom Jayadeva introduced in his *Gītagovinda* as 'Vācaḥ pallavajatyumāpatidharaḥ'.⁵³ Jesse Ross Knutson pointed out that he

⁵¹ F. Kielhorn, 'Deopara Stone Inscription of Vijayasena', *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. I, 1802, pp.305-15; Dines Chandra Sircar, ed., 'Deopada Stone Inscription of Vijayasena', *Select Inscriptions*, vol.II, 1983, pp. 115-22; Majumdar, 'Deopara Inscription', pp.42-56; Sarkar, *Nityakaler tui Puratan*, pp. 237-52.

⁵² Majumdar, 'Deopara Inscription', p.42.

⁵³ Sarkar, *Nityakaler tui Puratan*, p.241.

had the largest number of verses ascribed to him in the *Saduktikarṇāmṛta*, when compared with Jayadeva, Śaraṇa and Dhoyī, the other gems in the Sena court.⁵⁴ His penchant for portraying the rural communities is reflected in his verses. A fine picture of rural society is found here which throws light on the ideational background possibly. This rural scene is reflected against the splendor of the royal court.

This inscription, issued under the rule of king Vijayasena, records the building of an ostentatious temple of Pradyumneśvara. Debarchana Sarkar found the script of the engraving to be very fine.⁵⁵ The engraver has been named as Rāṇaka Śūlapāṇi, hailed as a supreme amongst the guild of artisans in Varendra, ‘vārendrakaśilpigoṣṭhīcūdāmoṇi’.⁵⁶ His lineage has been briefly cited. The alphabets of the inscription tend toward the modern Bengali alphabets.⁵⁷ This variety of northern alphabet was much-advanced compared to the other parts of northern India. Buhler explains this in his *Indian Palaeography* where he termed the characters as a proto-Bengali script,⁵⁸ which, by Al Biruni’s testament, may be called gauḍī.⁵⁹ Charming poetic composition puts this text among the finest of the contemporary literary creations. With the exception of ‘om̐ om̐ namaḥ śivāya’, in the beginning, the whole composition is in verse, written in different metres which were variously employed by the composers of praśastis at the time, viz. vasantatilaka, śārdūlavikrīḍita, sragdharā, pṛthvī, mandākrānta, mālinī, śikhariṇī, indravajrā and upajāti.⁶⁰

The text commenced with the overemphasized panegyric verses for different Brahmanical gods and goddesses. Apart from an almost melodious reference to the consorting divine couples, Śiva-Pārvati, (‘bakṣom̐śukāharaṇasāddhvaskṛṣṭamoulimālyacchoṭāhataratālajadīpabhāsaḥ devyāstrapāmukulitaṁ mukhamindubhābi vīkṣyānanāni hasitāni jajanti śambhoḥ’),⁶¹ there were equally grand descriptions offered on the Pradyumneśvara and Lakṣmī. This was known as the

⁵⁴ Jesse Ross Knutson, ‘The Political poetic of the Sena Court’, *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol.69, No.2, 2010, p. 386.

⁵⁵ Sarkar, *Nityakaler tui Puratan*, p.241.

⁵⁶ Majumdar, ‘Deopara Inscription’, verse 29, p.55.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* p.43.

⁵⁸ G. Buhler, *Indian Paleography*, (Calcutta: Indian Studies Past & Present, 1959), p.77.

⁵⁹ Edward Sachau, *Alberuni’s India*, Vol. I, 1914, p. 173. Cited in D.C.Sircar, *Studies in the Geography of Ancient and Medieval India*, 2nd Edition, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1971), p. 127.

⁶⁰ Majumdar, ‘Deopara Inscription’, p.43.

⁶¹ Majumdar, ‘Deopara Inscription’, verse 1, p.46.

‘ekaikena gūṇena jaiḥ pariṇataṁ teṣāṁ vivekāḍṛte kaściddhantyaaparaśca rakṣati srjatyanyaśca kṛtsnaṁ jagat devojom tu guṇaiḥ kṛto bohitithairdhīmān jaghān dviṣo brttosthānopuśaccakāra ca ripūcchedena divyāḥ prajāḥ’.⁷⁰

The temple that he built for the lord Pradyumneśvara became the next object of praise in grandiloquent terms. ‘diksākhāmūlakāṇḍaṁ gogonotolomohāmbodhi modhyāntorījom bhānoḥ prākprotyogodristhitimiladudajāstasya modhyānhośailam alāmbastambhamekoṁ tribhuvanabhavanasyaikaśeṣaṁ girīṇāṁ sa pradyumneśvarasya vyadhita vasumatīvāsavaḥ soudhamucchaiḥ.’⁷¹ If the Creator had made a pitcher, thinking of the earth as a mound of earth, it would have been compared to the auriferous jar placed on the pinnacle of the temple.⁷² Its overflowing lake dug out by him marked with the flowers of rays emanating from the crores of jewel bits on the coronets of serpent ladies – ‘vileśajavilāsinīmukuṭakoṭīratnaṅkrura sfuratkīraṇamanjarīcchuritaḥpurāṁ puraḥ.’⁷³ A metaphor has been used about the illustrious king Vijayasena who is said to have been destined to bring the whole world under one umbrella even though he was considered a beggar.⁷⁴

The brief details on Rāṇaka Śūlapāṇi’s identity make it evident that an artisanal centre existed in Varendra. He was regarded as the doyen of artisans in Varendrī. The word Rāṇaka suggests that Śūlapāṇi was probably an eminent person holding an important position in the state. This praśasti, regarded by many scholars as an outstanding composition could be regarded to represent the literary epitome created under the Sena dynasty. As Debarchana Sarkar commented, the creation of this inscription was as complete in all poetic characteristics as a beautiful woman possessing alaṅkāra, rasa and guṇa.⁷⁵

Naihati copperplate of Vallālasena:

Sequentially, the other inscriptions of the Senas exemplified the literary propensity towards voluble and rich compositions. Amongst them, Vallālasena’s Naihati copperplate of 12th century

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* verse 18, p.53.

⁷¹ *Ibid.* verse 26, pp.54-55.

⁷² *Ibid.* verse 28, p.55.

⁷³ *Ibid.* verse 29, p.55.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* verses 30,32, p.56.

⁷⁵ Sarkar, *Nityakaler tui Puratan*, p.241.

CE bears testimony to exquisite and embellished literary composition.⁷⁶ It was discovered in the village of Naihati in the district of Burdwan.⁷⁷ The characters of this inscription were also considered the forerunners of modern Bengali characters.⁷⁸ It displays a beautiful amalgamation of verse and prose, written in a variety of metres, for example, vasantatilaka, śārdūlavikrīḍita, sragdharā, mandākrānta, āryā and śikhariṇī.⁷⁹ It comprises both a beautiful praśasti of the Sena kings and a neat documentation of land-related matters. It records the receiving of a village by donee brāhmaṇa vāsudevaśarman as a reward for his service in Hemāśvamahādāna ceremony performed by the king's mother Vilāsadevī.⁸⁰ This village was first given ('utsṛṣṭa') by Vilāsadevī and then donated ('pradatta') by the king.⁸¹ It was indicative of assigning and reassigning of landed property by the Sena kings to their own dependents or subordinates in Rāḍha, Vaṅga and a part of Varendra. Moreover, we also get glimpses of the ritual sphere of activity and get the hints for the heightened significance of these matters under the Sena rule.

Copperplate inscriptions of Lakṣmaṇasena:

The reign of Lakṣmaṇasena was famous for its remarkable literary achievements. It is during his reign that the literary salon of Bengal reached its apex. The presence of eminent composers like Umāpatidhara, Dhoyī, Govardhanācārya, Jayadeva, etc. is significant at this time. It can be assumed that the praśasti section of all the inscriptions during this reign was written by one of these esteemed authors. The way in which the literary expressions have been portrayed regarding each of the kings of the Sena dynasty through the use of similes, hyperboles and metaphors is undoubtedly the work of skilled and eminent composers. A number of copperplate charters had been issued under Lakṣmaṇasena, viz. the Govindapur copperplate,⁸² Tarpandighi copperplate,⁸³

⁷⁶ Majumdar, 'Naihati Copper plate', pp. 68-80; R.D. Banerji, 'The Naihati Grant of Vallalasena', *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. XIV, 1917, pp.159-67.

⁷⁷ Majumdar, 'Naihati Copper plate', p.68.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* p.68.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* p.69.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* lines 44-46, 51-54, p.74.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* lines 52,54, p.74.

⁸² N.G. Majumdar, 'Govindapur Copper plate of Lakṣmaṇasena', *Inscriptions of Bengal*, Vol. III, 1929, pp. 92-98.

⁸³ Majumdar, 'Tarpandighi Copper plate', pp. 99-105; R.D. Banerji, 'The Tarpandighi Grant of Lakṣmaṇasena', *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. XVII, 1913, pp.8-13.

Sundarban copperplate,⁸⁴ Anulia copperplate,⁸⁵ Saktipur copperplate,⁸⁶ Rajvadi copperplate,⁸⁷ Madhainagar copperplate⁸⁸ etc. If we look at the geographical distribution of these copperplates, it is observed, that they were situated within Vaṅga, Rāḍha and Puṇḍravardhana. The variety of northern class of alphabets used in these inscriptions belonged to what may be called the precursor of the modern Bengali script. The engraved compositions appear to have followed a nearly similar pattern of style with a beautiful intermingling of verse and prose. Beginning with the invocational verses for the divine beings, the inscriptions narrated details of the origin and genealogy of the Sena dynasty in rich, flowery compositions. A few select inscriptions from Lakṣmaṇasena's time illuminate the trend. For example, the Anulia copperplate reflected an exquisite and embellished style of writing. This copperplate was discovered in the village Anulia, in the Nadia district of Bengal.⁸⁹ It was composed in different metres already popular with the composers, like vasantatilaka, śārdūlavikrīḍita, āryā, śikhariṇī, puspitāgrā and anustubh.⁹⁰ It illustrated the literary traits of rūpaka and śleṣa alamkāra. Taking an example from the verses, it is portrayed here that Hemantasena, who grew up in that family and in whom the virtues of the Sena family grew, has been compared to the ripening of paddy during Hemanta.⁹¹ Surrounded by the ripple of the four great seas, the conqueror Vijayasena was conceived as the husband of the goddess earth.⁹² The Tarpandighi copperplate also exhibits a similar pattern of literary style. This copperplate was discovered in the north of Tarpandighi, in the Dinajpur district. Composed in the usual variety of metres, like vasantatilaka, śārdūlavikrīḍita, āryā, śikhariṇī, puspitāgrā and anustubh,⁹³ the praśasti is similar in tone with the Anulia Copperplate. An interesting piece of evidence of this time was the Madhainagar copperplate. It was discovered in the village of Madhainagar, in the Sirajgunj

⁸⁴ Majumdar, 'Sundarban Copper Plate', pp. 169-72.

⁸⁵ N.G. Majumdar, 'Anulia Copper plate of Lakṣmaṇasena', *Inscriptions of Bengal*, Vol. III, 1929, pp. 81-91.

⁸⁶ Ganguly, 'Saktipur Copper Plate', pp. 211-19.

⁸⁷ Randle, 'India office plate', pp.1-13.

⁸⁸ Majumdar, 'Madhainagar Copper plate', pp. 106-115; Dines Chandra Sircar, ed., 'Madhainagar Copper plate Inscription of Lakṣmaṇasena', *Select Inscriptions*, Vol.II, 1983, pp. 124-30.

⁸⁹ Majumdar, 'Anulia Copper plate', p.81.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* pp.85-87.

⁹¹ *Ibid.* verse 4, pp.88-89.

⁹² *Ibid.* verse 5, p.89.

⁹³ Majumdar, 'Tarpandighi Copper plate', p.99.

sub-division of the Pabna district.⁹⁴ Engraved in the modern Bengali alphabet of the 12th century CE, the application of a variety of metres can be seen in this copperplate, like *vasantatilaka*, *śārdūlavikrīḍita*, *puspitāgrā*, *sragdharā*, *mālinī*, *upendravajrā* and *anustubh*.⁹⁵ Beginning with the adoration to Nārāyaṇa, it starts off with an erotic verse indicating a moment of confluence between Hari and Gaurī. Sāmantasena the founder, was described as usual as the crown jewel of the Brahmaṣatriyas. N.G. Majumdar observed that some verses of this inscription were similar to that of the Deopara inscription. Thus, it has been suggested that both the inscriptions were composed by the same poet, Umapātidhara.⁹⁶ Besides, the donative portion of these inscriptions also followed the same pattern in delineating the land sale transaction procedure. Highly qualified brāhmaṇas were given land for the ritual performance of mahādānas which was regarded as a symbol of validating the royal power of the ruler. The ornate language of these inscriptions had indeed become the general trend of literary style during Lakṣmaṇasena's reign. However, if we look at the later Sena inscriptions, for example, Viśvarūpasena's Madanpada Copper Plate,⁹⁷ Vangiya Sahitya-Parishat Copper Plate⁹⁸ etc., this high stylistic trend of writing does not seem to have sustained the declining status of the dynasty. Undoubtedly, the weak rule of the later rulers was the reason for this downward literary style. Similarly, the inscriptions of later Devas in the Samataṭa, Śrīhaṭṭa area during the 13th century CE also portray a languishing state of literary expression. For example, the Nasirabad copperplate Inscription of Dāmodaradeva projects an unostentatious tone of literary expression.⁹⁹ The culture of high literary creativity was on the decline with the loss of patronage and lack of political and economic bases of support.

⁹⁴ Majumdar, 'Madhainagar Copper plate', p.106.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.* p.107.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.* p.107.

⁹⁷ Dines Chandra Sircar, 'Madanapada plate of Viśvarūpasena', *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. XXXIII, 1963, pp.315-26; N.G. Majumdar, 'Madanpada Copper Plate of Viśvarūpasena', *Inscriptions of Bengal*, Vol. III, 1929, pp.132-39.

⁹⁸ Majumdar, 'Calcutta Sahitya-Parishat Copper Plate', pp.140-48.

⁹⁹ Majumdar, 'Chittagong copper plate', pp.158-63.

Sanskrit literature of varied genre

Ample evidence of grandiose creative literature which were composed in this phase point to the rich development of literary culture both around the courtly circuit of the Varman and Sena regime as well as in the orbit of the Brahmanical society which was flourishing at the time. The examples of literary creativity in epigraphs have to be observed in the context of this overall scene. Some of the finest compositions of literature considered as the epitome of Sanskritic tradition in early medieval Bengal were created with the patronage of the Sena rulers. Jesse Ross Knutson's study¹⁰⁰ throws much light on this trend of literary style that emerged especially during the turn of the 12th to the 13th century at the court of Lakṣmaṇasena. Poets and litterateurs like Umāpatidhara, Śaraṇa, Govardhanācārya, Śrutidhara, Jayadeva and Dhoyī are stated to have received patronage under the Sena realm. As Jayadeva mentions in his own kāvya, some of them adorned the court of Lakṣmaṇasena. Knutson had considered the Sena period as a time that marked the beginning of the emergence of a quintessential regional Bengali style of literature, hinting that the phase provided the basis for transition from Sanskrit to the regional vernacular literary ethos and compositions.¹⁰¹ However, this socio-cultural space for literary evolution, as he calls it, had been prevalent and functional from the beginning of the early medieval times. It is since the seventh century at least, that we note the first flowering of a regional Sanskrit poetic vocabulary, also deemed worthy of attention by eminent poetic critics of the times, such as Bāṇabhaṭṭa, Bhāmaha and others.

Saduktikarṇāmṛta

The *Saduktikarṇāmṛta*, an anthological compilation by Śrīdharadāsa has been considered amongst the finest literary compositions of the phase.¹⁰² The compilation is dated to the early 13th century CE. Like Vidyākara's anthology which appeared in the earlier phase, this text also included several beautiful verses composed by myriad well-known, eminent as well as popular and even hitherto unknown authors. The compiler Śrīdharadāsa hailed from the court of Lakṣmaṇasena. The collection is divided into five sections or pravāhas, each containing specific broad themes.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Knutson, *Into the twilight*.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.* p.2.

¹⁰² Sharma, *Saduktikarṇāmṛta*; Banerji, *Sadukti-karṇāmṛta*.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.* p. v.

These sections were further divided into subsections or *vīci*, each dedicated to precise subthemes. As discussed by Nupur Dasgupta each of these subsections consisted of five different verses composed by distinct poets. The first major section titled ‘Amarapravāha’ is devoted to panegyrics of Gods and Goddesses and religious themes such as Śaiva, Śākta and Vaiṣṇava and includes 95 *vīcis*.¹⁰⁴ The second section titled ‘Śrṅgāra Pravāha’ was dedicated to erotic love and love sequences. It manifested a transition from adolescence to adulthood in a woman through its subsections. The subthemes were titled as Vayaḥsandhi, Kiñcitupariyauvana, Yuvati and Nāyikādbhutam. Nāyikādbhutam consisted of compositions of eminent authors like Kālidāsa, Bilhaṇa, Pravarasena, Rudraṭa, Govardhana, Śrīharaṣa etc. An environmental scenario may be gleaned if we pay attention to the erotic love or sentiments stated in the concerned verses of the text. This section contains around 179 *vīcis*. The third section titled ‘Cāṭu Pravāha’ includes 54 subsections. This pravāha deals with eulogizing verses and glorious deeds of royal persona, warriors, events of war and general discourse. The fourth pravāha titled ‘Apadeśa Pravāha’ deals with the ethical aspects on variegated issues like nature, material life, worldly affairs and divine matters. This section dealt with deities such as Vāsudeva, Mahādeva, geographical features like samudra (ocean), nadnadī (rivers), jewels like marakata (emerald), animals like siṅha (lion), gaja (elephant), mṛga (deer), flowers like padma (lotus), ketakī (the screw pine flower), trees like Aśoka (flamboyant tree), birds like kokila (cuckoo), śuka (parrot), cātaka (swallo) etc. ‘Apadeśa Pravāha’ comprised of 72 *vīcis*. The last major theme contains a general interpretation of people, places and animals for example, on manuṣya (human beings), birds like vaka (heron), cakravakaka (curlew) and other themes like kavi (poet), kāvyam (poetry), mānasvī (greatmen), daridragṛhi (poor householder), jara (age) vṛddha (old man), kāla (time)etc. This section titled ‘Uccāvaca Pravāha’ comprised 74 subsections. According to S.C. Banerji, Śrīdharadāsa exhibits great devotional fervor in his anthology by including as many as 475 verses on different deities, reflecting a greater leaning toward Vaiṣṇavism.¹⁰⁵ The anthology contained verses with descriptions of the joys and sorrows of the common man, the charms of feminine beauty, the flattery of the rich, and the familiar sights of daily life, like rivers, hills, trees and flowers. It is worth noting that the anthology, includes both ends of the literary world, including the compositions of stalwarts from early historic to the contemporary authors in the 12th – 13th century. On the other hand, the collection also offers a

¹⁰⁴ Dasgupta, ‘Sanskrit Literature’, pp. 575 - 76.

¹⁰⁵ Banerji, *Sadukti-karṇāmṛta*, p. iv.

glimpse into the long tradition of literary creativity in Sanskrit including the composition of eminent legendary literary figures like Bhāsa, Kālidāsa, Bhāmaha, Bāṇabhaṭṭa, Bilhaṇa, Bhaṭṭhari, Rājaśekhara, Vākpatirāja and Viśākhadatta, the works of regional noted poets and unknown local writers had also appeared which Śrīdharadāsa compiled very carefully and meticulously in this book. Among the regional poets, eminent figures like Abhinanda and Gauḍa Abhinanda, Jayadeva, Dhoyī and Umāpatidhara emblazed the text through their writings. Besides, the literature is also enriched by the writings of some unknown grassroots writers like Tripurārīpāla, Tailavāṭīya Gāṅgoka, Kevaṭṭa Papīpa, Kamal Gupta, Ravi Gupta, Yajñaghoṣa, Candra Candra Tila Candra, Laḍaha Candra, Divākara Datta, Kālidāsa Nandī etc.¹⁰⁶ We also have references of verses compiled under the name of Lakṣmaṇasena and Keśavasena. This text is a collection of an extensive range of writers. Śrīdharadāsa's intent may have been to mainly to provide the literate reader with a taste of the literary works which would serve as a means of relaxation and would suit varying moods and literary tastes. What is interesting about Vidyākara's compilation of *Subhaṣitaratnakoṣa* and Śrīdharadāsa's *Saduktikarṇāmṛta* is that these anthologies indicate a necessity for showcasing the Sanskrit literary tradition ranging from the times of Kālidāsa- Bhāsa to the early medieval Bengal grass root level and ordinary writers. As Nupur Dasgupta mentioned, these anthologies reflect the growing tradition of literates as readers serving local needs.¹⁰⁷ Suchandra Ghosh and Sayanatani Pal have noted how rural Bengal is reflected through the *Saduktikarṇāmṛta*.¹⁰⁸

The *Pavanadūta* of Dhoyī

The *Pavanadūta* of Dhoyī Kavirāja was considered one of the earliest of the Dūtakāvya.¹⁰⁹ Date of the work is a little controversial. Chintaharan Chakravarti dated it to the 11th century CE, while Sternbach dated this to the 13th-14th century.¹¹⁰ In this context, mention may be made to Jayadeva who referred to Dhoyī as 'kavī-kṣmāpati' in his *Gītagovinda* which is dated around 12th century

¹⁰⁶ Dasgupta, 'Sanskrit Literature', p. 576.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.* p.576.

¹⁰⁸ Ghosh and Pal, 'Everyday Life', pp.35-36.

¹⁰⁹ Chakravartisharmana, *Pavanadūtām*; Mallinson, 'Messenger Poems'; Sarkar, *A study of Dhoyī's Pavanadūta*.

¹¹⁰ Dasgupta, 'Sanskrit Literature', p.577.

CE.¹¹¹ Although it is composed in an imitation of the dūtakāvya of Kālidāsa, the *Meghadūta*,¹¹² Dhoyī's work represents his own novelty and uniqueness.

Pavanadūta was a khaṇḍakāvya consisting of 104 verses, written in a very elegant and simple language with a wide range of beautiful quotes. The composition has a dual tone containing verses eulogizing Lakṣmaṇasena as well as a romantic tale. It is also considered an important document of the political-cultural history of the time and provides geographical details too. The romantic story is that of Kuvalayavatī, a Gandharva maiden from the south who fell in love with king Lakṣmaṇasena during his victory tour of the world.¹¹³ Shattered by the pain of love, she sent her love message to the king through the wind blowing over the Malaya mountain to Lakṣmaṇasena's capital Vijayapura.¹¹⁴ Here, the wind conveyed the message of Kuvlayavatī's torment to the king in poetic embellishment. If we take examples from the verses, it is stated

‘dhante saddaratvadupagamitapremalekhabhramam sā tāloptre
priyasahacarīkarnapāsacyuteyopi.’¹¹⁵

‘śāntaprāye rajanaisamaye kiñcidāmilitāgñō prāpya svapne kathamapi purakhyāmaniprouḍarāgā
śniṣyantā svā tanumanupadam priyabuddhātha vālā lajjālolaṁ valayati mukham sā sakhinām
mukheṣu.’¹¹⁶

This simple story had been penned down by the author in an exquisite and beautiful poetic composition. The verse where the branches of the lotus and the sandalwood powder were offered as symbols of peace and love resound with lyrical ethos. In this context, Chintaharan Chakravarti stated that the 31 verses devoted to the love pangs of the heroine could be considered one of the finest creations in Sanskrit literature.¹¹⁷ He also praised the elegance of the *kāvya* for its vivid expressions made in unadulterated language without the use of jargons.¹¹⁸ Tandrima Sarkar observed that in terms of alamkārasāstra, the easy-going language of *Pavanadūta* should be

¹¹¹ Miller, *Jayadeva's Gītagovinda*, verse 1.3, p.129.

¹¹² Chakravartisharmana, *Pavanadūtam*, p.1.

¹¹³ *Ibid.* p.15.

¹¹⁴ Sarkar, *A study of Dhoyī's Pavanadūta*, p.28.

¹¹⁵ Chakravartisharmana, *Pavanadūtam*, verse 68, p.23.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.* verse 76, pp.25-26.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.* p.12.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.* p.12.

considered to feature the classical sense of *prasādaguṇa*.¹¹⁹ According to her, ‘As regards the excellence of mādhrūya, the verses of the poem are replete with sweetness, especially in the messages of Kuvlayavatī’.¹²⁰ Verses of Kuvlayavatī’s love pangs were composed in mandākrānta metre. Various aspects and interpretations of this kāvya came up in the writings of different scholars, which reflect mixed assessments. This seems inevitable given that it was an otherwise beautifully styled kāvya that is ultimately an imitation in form. As an example, S.K. De observed it as a stylish but stereotypical kāvya.¹²¹ Niharranjan Ray praised the quality of the poetic fantasies and regarded it as a passionate composition, but criticized its tendency for imitation.¹²² According to Jesse Ross Knutson, *Pavanadūta* showcases a negative delineating of the love-lorn character of the heroine as against the splendor of the king’s magnificence. On the other hand, as Knutson pointed out, although Lakṣmaṇasena was the main protagonist of this *kāvya*, it is dedicated mostly to the women, their gestures, feelings, regional characteristics and so on, thus actually depending on female allure and beauty for beatifying the poetic tone.¹²³ Could we then consider the composition to represent a stilted and gendered perspective? In fact, among the entire gamut of literary creations of the phases under discussion, it is in this composition along with the *Āryāsaptaśatī* where we find a fulsome devotion to representing the female as something other than divinities, royal wives and queens, whatever the perspective may be.

The *Āryāsaptaśatī*

The *Āryāsaptaśatī* composed by Govardhanācārya is generally assumed to have belonged to the 12th century CE.¹²⁴ The provenance of this text has been debated to some extent and opinions differ on whether Govardhanācārya and his *Āryāsaptaśatī* belonged to early medieval Bengal or early medieval Orissa. Regarding this matter, we have a reference to the composer Govardhanācārya in the work of Jayadeva’s *Gītagovinda* which seems to situate the author in the court of Lakṣmaṇasena, the last sena ruler of early medieval Bengal in Gauḍa. Jayadeva further referred to

¹¹⁹ Sarkar, *A study of Dhoyī’s Pavanadūta*, p.60.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.* p.61.

¹²¹ De, ‘Sanskrit literature’, p.364.

¹²² Ray, *Bangalir Itihas*, p.624.

¹²³ Knutson, ‘The Political poetic’, p.389.

¹²⁴ Prasad, Parab and Pansikar, eds., *The Āryāsaptaśatī*; Chakraborty, *Āryāsaptaśatī o Gauḍabaṅga*.

Govardhanācārya as a master of the romantic genre or śṛṅgāra.¹²⁵ Jesse Knutson has studied the high degree of the literary style portrayed in the verses of the *Āryāsaptaśatī* of Govardhanācārya, where he noted the use of contrasting scenarios and sentiments, rural and urban tones, and sparks of realism in the projections of the mundane, and in contrast the use of myths, etc.¹²⁶ Knutson also observed how these grand literary vibes emanating from the old courtly circle of early medieval Bengal continued to resonate in the world of medieval Bengal.

The text actually has some significance in the history of creative literature as it represents a particular genre that has an early beginning in c.2nd century CE. Here we are referring to Hāla's *Gāthā Saptasatī* or *Gāhā Sattasatī* which is a later Sātavāhana text composed in Mahārāṣṭrī Prakrit. The composition of Govardhanācārya comes about a thousand years later. Both the texts are written in the āryā metre which was used traditionally both in Sanskrit and Prakrit verses. It may be assumed that Govardhanācārya had derived the genre and style from the old *Gāhā sattasatī*, but contextualized his narration in the region of Bengal or, broadly, the eastern India. The theme mainly deals with erotic love or sentiments displayed through portrayals of society in varied contexts and conditions. Govardhanācārya has projected his empirical observations on society through realistic thoughts and portrayals. The text falls under the genre of muktaka kāvya.¹²⁷ Of the three types of muktaka kāvya, it is composed in the śṛṅgāra muktaka style.¹²⁸

Janhavi Kumar Chakraborty has portrayed a neat sectional division of the text in his Bengali translation.¹²⁹ The text consists of 756 verses. It has been divided into 34 sections. The ślokaś can be classified by their subjects. The ślokaś 1-54 are devoted to narrating the glory and invocation of various gods and goddesses such as Śiva, Viṣṇu, Caṇḍikā, Gaṇapati etc, kings and poets of the times. About 250 ślokaś were concerned depictions of erotic love and sentiments of the people. Approximately 70 ślokaś have been devoted to dedicatory verses to various gods and goddesses. Approximately 152 ślokaś were devoted to describing natural objects like fruits, flowers, plants, birds and animals. Around 91 ślokaś describe seasonal variations experienced in the specific geographical location where the composition was set. Approximately 150 ślokaś were concerned

¹²⁵ Vidyasagara, *Gītagovindamkāvyam*, p.3.

¹²⁶ Knutson, *Into the twilight*.

¹²⁷ Dasgupta, 'Sanskrit Literature', p. 578.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.* p.578.

¹²⁹ Chakraborty, *Āryāsaptaśatī o Gauḍabaṅga*.

with the worldly affairs of the people of the society, their occupations, rituals, games and amusements, world of learning etc. This composition thus throws light on contemporary society of both the higher echelons and the commoner society, along with their interactions with the surroundings. Knutson's studies into the text has led him to present the author as a realistic poet who has interpreted both urban and rural environs and sentiments in his literature.¹³⁰

Gītagovinda

Jayadeva's *Gītagovinda* of c. 12th century CE was of course the finest creation of the entire history of the region in our period.¹³¹ It is a highly ornate lyrical devotional poem highlighting on the classical saga of love of Kṛṣṇa, Rādhā and the gopikās. Surprisingly enough Jayadeva has also been able to project a poetic yet vernacular ethos into the courtly register of Sanskrit kāvya through his creation. On the one hand, the *Gītagovinda* is considered one of the prime and foundational works of medieval Sanskrit literature. On the other, it is also associated with the regional Vaiṣṇavite tradition of Bengal which was on the rise. Barbara Stoller Miller studied the literary structure of the text very carefully and pointed to the features of classical ornamentation. Dr. M.V. Krishna Rao has offered a meticulous reading of the theme of the text. The Hindi edition of Śrī Śrīmad Bhaktivedānta Nārāyaṇa Gosvāmī Mahārāja is useful and brings out the significance of the text.

Barbara Stoller Miller's studies took her to track Jayadeva's intention in composing the grandest poem and she points out that the poet had actually attempted to address a diverse audience through a double mode of communication touching both the literary instinct and appreciation of a class of reader and the devotional sentiments of the other audiences.¹³² According to M.V. Krishna Rao, the text portrayed 'the conception of love, in a transcendental spiritual form'.¹³³ He said that *Gītagovinda* is a text where Jayadeva's 'mystic experiences or spiritual exaltations burst into a flamboyant expression of love and gestures.'¹³⁴ The text is into twelve distinct sections, projecting

¹³⁰ Knutson, *Into the twilight*, pp. 47-71.

¹³¹ Vidyasagara, *Gītagovindamkāvyam*; Miller, *Jayadeva's Gītagovinda*; Rao, *Gīta Govinda of Jayadeva*; Dasi, *Śrī Gīta Govinda-Śrī Jayadeva Gosvāmī*.

¹³² Miller, *Jayadeva's Gītagovinda*, p.8.

¹³³ Rao, *Gīta Govinda of Jayadeva*, p.2.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.* p.ix.

on the different qualities and aspects of love.¹³⁵ The provenance of this text has been widely debated and the matter still remains comes up amongst literary critics on whether this belongs to Orissa or Bengal. It is believed that the book was written in the second half of the 12th century under the patronage of Anantavarman Coḍagaṅga (1078-1147) or Anaṅgabhīmadeva II (1178-98) during the reign of the Coḍagaṅga rulers in Orissa. But it is surprising that Jayadeva's writings do not reflect his Orissa origins. On the other hand, his writings reveal the identities of his contemporaries in the royal court of 'Gauḍarāja' Lakṣmaṇasena. Tamal Dasgupta has linked Jayadeva's *Gītagovinda* to the Vaiṣṇava tradition of Bengal on the basis of philosophical and ideological trends.¹³⁶ On the other hand, some scholars have also placed this book and its author in the Mithila region on the basis of linguistic similarities with romantic poetry which began to emerge in medieval Bhāgavatism.¹³⁷ However, it remains a groundbreaking and innovative work. The use of lyrical language and the amalgamation of spirituality with romanticism took it to the pinnacle of excellence. On all counts the poet and his creation may be located on the borders of Bengal and Orissa in early medieval times, and as such it represents a distinct tradition of literary creation specific to the eastern region, bearing a glorious testimony of devotion and lyricism.

The above survey of the trend of literary creativity in the epigraphic and textual forms brings us to the full circle of culmination of the early medieval genre in Bengal. The trend is marked mostly by exorbitant ornamentation. The use of unnecessary analogies and imaginative allegorical textures led to an extremely pretentious and grandiose style of representation. Albeit this general tendency, a few examples of highest merit were also noted. It has been observed that much of the literary creativity emerged under royal patronage in this phase and some of the eminent composers were employed in the royal court. But the rise of eminent brāhmaṇa scholars has also been observed, which often indicated literary circuits outside the courtly order.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.* p.3.

¹³⁶ Tamal Dasgupta, 'The Radha Idea at the Crossroads of History, Culture and Politics: Gitagovinda and the Boishnob movement in Bengal', *Journal of Bengal Studies*, Vol.3, No.1, 2014, pp.14-42.

¹³⁷ De, 'Sanskrit literature', p.368.

The social orbit of literary culture

Composers:

Brāhmaṇa scholars and composers were evidently on the rise during the reign of the Varmans. The eulogy of Bhaṭṭabhavadēva Bālavālabhī-Bhujāṅga was the composition of his friend Vācaspati, a brāhmaṇa. The Belava copperplate Inscription of Bhojavarman was composed by brāhmaṇa Purūṣottama.

The Sena family patronised eminent scholars and poets. In *Rasikapriyā*, the commentary of the *Gītagovinda*, king Kumbha referred ‘iti ṣaṭ paṇḍitāsta sya rāñjo laṣmaṇasenasya prasiddhā iti ruḍiḥ’.¹³⁸ The six scholars referred here were Umāpatidhara, Jayadeva, Śaraṇa, Govardhana, Śrutidhara and Dhoyī, who adorned the Sena court during the reign of Lakṣmaṇasena.

A prominent figure was that of the great laureate of the Sena period, Umāpatidhara. According to N.G. Majumdar, Merutuṅga’s *Prabandhacintāmaṇi* dated in 14th century CE referred to Umāpatidhara as a wise and intelligent minister of Lakṣmaṇasena.¹³⁹ His family had probably served the Sena rulers for three generations. Although he had been criticized in the *Rasamañjarī*, the commentary of *Gītagovinda* on account of verbosity, his exquisite and well-crafted style perhaps made him a much-appreciated litterateur in his days.¹⁴⁰ Knutson pointed out that among the Sena court poets, including Jayadeva, Śaraṇa and Dhoyī, it was Umāpatidhara who has been named as the composer of the largest number of verses included in the *Saduktikarṇāmṛta*.¹⁴¹ He was also the composer of the Madhainagar copperplate inscription of Lakṣmaṇasena.¹⁴² According to Lienhard, he might have composed *Candracūḍacarita*, a poetry of the carita genre.¹⁴³

Dhoyī was another eminent poet who adorned the circuit of literati during the Sena regime. He was referred to as ‘Kavirāja’. Dhoyī himself refers to him as ‘Śrīdhoyīkavirājaviracitaṁ’ in the colophon to his Pavanadūta.¹⁴⁴ Jayadeva in his *Gītagovinda* mentioned him as ‘Dhoyī kavī-

¹³⁸ Chakravartisharmana, *Pavanadūtam*, p.2.

¹³⁹ Majumdar, *Inscriptions of Bengal*, p.107.

¹⁴⁰ Chakravartisharmana, *Pavanadūtam*, p.9.

¹⁴¹ Knutson, ‘The Political poetic’, p.386.

¹⁴² Majumdar, ‘Madhainagar Copper plate of Lakṣmaṇasena’, p. 107.

¹⁴³ Siegfried Lienhard, *A History of Classical Poetry: Sanskrit, Pali, Prakrit*, Otto Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden, 1984, p.204; Dasgupta, ‘Sanskrit Literature’, p.579.

¹⁴⁴ Chakravartisharmana, *Pavanadūtam*, p.3.

kṣmāpati'.¹⁴⁵ He was renowned for his self-conceit and exaggerated self-acclamation as referred to in the *Rasamañjarī*, the commentary of *Gītagovinda*.¹⁴⁶ Despite these critical remarks, the title of 'Kavirāja' was approved by the Sena authorities indicating his status in the royal circuit. The term 'Śrutidhara' referred to above in the commentary of *Rasikapriyā* has probably been used as an adjective of Dhoyī by Jayadeva.¹⁴⁷ This reference was supported by another commentary of *Gītagovinda*, *Rasamañjarī*.¹⁴⁸ Dhoyī's writings were also seen in the *Saduktikarṇāmṛta* as well as Jalhaṇa's *Suktimuktāvali* of the middle of the 13th century and later in the anthological work *Śārṅgadharapaddhati* of 11th or 14th century.¹⁴⁹

Govardhanācārya, seems to have enjoyed a high position in the royal court of the Senas. But strong claims have also been made by recent scholars about his affiliation to the court of Odisha. This cloud of doubt engulfs the question of provenance of both Jayadeva and Govardhanācārya. However, the epithet of 'Senakūlatilakabhūpati'¹⁵⁰ applied to Govardhanācārya indicates his close association with the Sena court¹⁵¹ and as such he might have enjoyed the patronage of the King Lakṣmaṇasena (c.1179-1206 AD).¹⁵² Govardhanācārya belonged to a culturally rich brāhmaṇa family. His father Nīlāmbara¹⁵³ was an expert in the Nātyasāstra. He was honored as a guru (scholar) next to Bṛhaspati ('yam gaṇayanti guroranu').¹⁵⁴ Govardhanācārya, nurtured in this environment, seems to have been an erudite scholar with vast knowledge in the epics, Purāṇas, Nātyasāstra, Astrology, Ayurveda, etc. Jayadeva referred to him as an expert in the field of śṛṅgāra genre and his work exhibits his command over erotic compositions. What remains significant though is the way in which he seems to have turned attention to the life of the common people, as reflected in the *Āryāsaptaśatī*.

¹⁴⁵ Miller, *Jayadeva's Gītagovinda*, verse 1.3, p.129.

¹⁴⁶ Chakravartisharmana, *Pavanadūtam*, p. 10.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.* pp.6-7.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.* pp.6-7.

¹⁴⁹ Dasgupta, 'Sanskrit Literature', p.577.

¹⁵⁰ Chakraborty, *Āryāsaptaśatī o Gauḍabaṅga*, p.2.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.* verse 39, p.143.

¹⁵² Dr. Dinesh Chandra Sarkar, *Pala-Sena Yuger Vamsanucarit*, Kolkata, 1982, p.125.

¹⁵³ Chakraborty, *Āryāsaptaśatī o Gauḍabaṅga*, verse 38, p.143.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.* p.2.

Śrīdharadāsa, the compiler of *Saduktikarṇāmṛta* was another gem in the court of Lakṣmaṇasena. As mentioned in the introduction or ‘prastāvaḥ’ of *Saduktikarnamṛta*, he was the son of Vaṭudāsa, who has been identified as Pratiṛāja and Mūlamahāsāmanta of king Lakṣmaṇasena. He was also a favorite (‘anumpama premapātra’) and friend (‘sakhā’) of the king.

Another noted figure during the reign of Lakṣmaṇasena was Śaraṇa. According to his contemporary, Jayadeva, he was well-known for attaining quick mastery over difficult verses (‘Śaraṇah ślāgho durūha drute’).¹⁵⁵ Twenty verses composed by him were included in the *Saduktikarṇāmṛta*. This anthology includes verses by several other poets bearing the same name; one was Śaraṇadeva, another Śaraṇadatta and a third figure named as Cirantana-Śaraṇa. S.K. De had referred to one Śaraṇadeva who was a grammarian and the composer of *Durghaṭavṛtti* dated in 1173 CE.¹⁵⁶ It is doubtful whether they were the same person. But what can be gleaned out of these medleys of literature and their composers is the proliferation of literary creativity in the phase discussed here.

The most magnificent and the most talked poet of the phase is of course Jayadeva. He was skilled in all the guṇas and figures of speech as evident in his work of the greatest merit. The commentary *Rasamañjarī* of *Gītagovinda* highlights on these features.¹⁵⁷ Jayadeva claimed to have knowledge of ‘Sandharvasuddhi’ which means the skill of sewing or weaving words in proper rhythm and sequence.¹⁵⁸ There has been a great deal of controversy over his provenance. Arguments have arisen between Bengal and Odisha regarding his origin. Those who claim the latter, identify the village of Kindubilva mentioned in *Gītagovinda* as Kenduli Sasan, located originally in Odisha. They also point out that the poet was patronized either by Anantavarman Coḍagaṅga (1078-1147 CE) or Anaṅgabhīmadeva II (1178-98 CE). on the other hand, those who claim a Bengal origin for Jayadeva have identified village of Kindubilva with the ancient village of Kenduli on the banks of the river Ajay in Birbhum.¹⁵⁹ The village area has long been associated with Jayadeva in popular memory and had emerged as a sacred centre for Vaiṣṇavites and Bauls quite early. An annual fair

¹⁵⁵ Miller, *Jayadeva’s Gītagovinda*, verse 1.3, p.129; Dasgupta, ‘Sanskrit Literature’, p. 577.

¹⁵⁶ De, ‘Sanskrit literature’, p.367.

¹⁵⁷ Chakravartisharmana, *Pavanadūtam*, p.10.

¹⁵⁸ Prafulla Chandra Tripathy, ‘Jayadeva, the poet and his times’, *Odisha Review*, May-2013, pp.13-14.

¹⁵⁹ Monmohan Chakravarti, ‘Sanskrit Literature in Bengal during the Sena Rule’, *Journal of Asiatic Society Bengal*, Vol.II, No.6, 1906, pp.157-76; Dasgupta, ‘Sanskrit Literature’, p.580.

is still celebrated at the spot which is named after him.¹⁶⁰ Irrespective of these disputes, Jayadeva's *Gītagovinda* projects the ultimate development of the regional literary lyricism as an art in the form of erotic Bhāgavatism.

Besides the stalwarts in the royal courts, there were references to brāhmaṇa composers of various Dharmanibandhas. For example, Bhaṭṭabhadra composed *Prāyścittaprakaraṇa* and *Sambandhaviveka*.¹⁶¹ Halāyudha was the author of *Brāhmaṇasarvasva*. The regional Upapurāṇas which begin to appear from the earlier phase and produced some of the richer versions in this phase cannot be ascribed to specific composers. But the voluminous narrations categorized into different sections provide very significant light on the contemporary socio-religious processes and illuminate the wider orbit of literary activity in these phases. Sections were specifically devoted to narrations of legends and myths on origin of cults and divinities, genealogies, astrological pronouncements, ritual prescriptions, and finally social regulations etc.¹⁶² These, together with the *nibandhas* and commentarial literature indicate the growing environs of brāhmaṇical tradition which were gradually getting embedded in the regional society. This wider literary orbit thus appears to have been a rather crowded domain of Brahmanical literary culture with varied offshoots which would leave trails to be followed in the later times.

Engravers:

The name of engravers is obscure in Varman and Sena inscriptions with the only exception of Deopara praśati of Vijayasena. Here engraver rāṇaka Śūlapāṇi has been mentioned as the crest jewel of the śilpigoṣṭhī of Varendra. This may indicate the build – up of communities of specialists in the art and technique and a possible development of network among the engravers centered on Varendra. Such groups of engravers can also be traced back to the Pāla period.

Messengers:

In most cases, the role of messengers was played by royal officials. Among them, sāndhivigrahika sometimes acted as a royal messenger of the grants as evident in the Govindapur copper plate of

¹⁶⁰ Miller, *Jayadeva's Gītagovinda*, p.7; De, 'Sanskrit literature', p.369.

¹⁶¹ Majumdar, 'Bhuvaneshvara Inscription', verse 16, p.38.

¹⁶² For the Purāṇas especially, see Chakrabarti, *Religious Process*.

Lakṣmaṇasena. Here the sāndhivigrahika Nārāyaṇadatta acted as a dūta.¹⁶³ In the Rajvadi copper plate of Lakṣmaṇasena, the dūta of the grant was Śaṅkaradhara, the Gauḍa-mahāsāndhivigrahika.¹⁶⁴ The dūta of the Madanpada copperplate of Viśvarupasena was Kopiviṣṇu, mahāsāndhivigrahika of Gauḍa.¹⁶⁵ The dūta of the Idilpur copperplate of Viśvarupasena is described as the prime minister of Gauda. But his name is not legible. The term Gauḍa here refers to the consolidated area of Bengal under the Senas at the time.

Addressees: Royal subordinates and rural residents

The same listing of categories was seen as addressees in the Varman and Sena grants which portray the existing reader class. The list of royal subordinates in Varman grants ranged from 19 to 27 officials designated in the Samantasara grant of Harivarman, datable to the end of the 11th century or the first half of the 12th century to that of in Belava copperplate of Bhojavarman belonging to the mid-12th century. Starting from the rājanas, rājanyakas, rāṇakas, rājaputras, the officers associated with the Belava grant were the pīṭhikāvīta, mahādharmādhyakṣa, mahāsāndhivigrahika, mahāsenāpati, mahāmudrādhikṛta, antaraṅga brhaduparika, mahākṣapaṭalika, mahāpratīhāra, mahābhogika, mahāvīyūhapati, mahāpīlupati, mahāgaṇastha, daussādhika, chauroddharaṇika, gaumikas, daṇḍapāsikas, daṇḍanāyakas, viśayapati and others.¹⁶⁶ Niharranjan Ray had offered his opinion regarding the identity and position of these officers. As an example, pīṭhikāvīta was probably responsible for the seating arrangement at the court of the royal assembly, mahādharmādhyakṣa was the Chief Justice, antaraṅga brhaduparika was probably a royal physician who was appointed as an honorable bhukti Governor, mahābhogika was the provincial governor, mahāpīlupati was the governor of the elephant troops, mahāgaṇastha was associated with the military department and mahāmudrādhikṛta was apparently responsible for the royal currency and sealing.¹⁶⁷ Some of these official denomination have been encountered in the earlier phase and were mentioned in the previous chapter.

¹⁶³ Majumdar, 'Govindapur Copper plate', lines 52-53, p.97.

¹⁶⁴ Randle, 'India office plate', p.3.

¹⁶⁵ Majumdar, 'Madanpada Copper Plate', verse 27, p.138.

¹⁶⁶ Majumdar, 'Belava Copper-plate', lines 24-37, p.23.

¹⁶⁷ Ray, *Bangalir Itihas*, pp.322-43.

Besides the royal subordinates, some unidentifiable designations ('adhyakṣapracāroktān ihākīrtitān'), and some usual ones like cāṭa bhaṭas and rural residents had also been included among the addressees.¹⁶⁸ The rural residents were mentioned by the terms janapadas, kṣetrkaras, brāhmaṇas and brāhmaṇottaras (highly qualified brāhmaṇas).

A similar list of addresses was found in the Sena grants. For example, the Saktipur copperplate of Lakṣmaṇasena refers to 25 royal subordinates as dependents of the king like rāja, rājanyaka, rājñī, rānakas, rājaputra, rājāmātya, mahāpurohita, mahādharmādhyakṣa, mahāsāndhivigrahika, mahāsenāpati, mahāmudrādhikṛta, antaraṅga, brhaduparika, mahākṣapaṭalika, mahāpratīhāra, mahābhogika, mahāpīlupati, mahāgaṇastha, daussādhika, cauroddharaṇika, naubalahastyaśvagamahiṣājāvīkādivyāpṛtaka, gaulmikas, daṇḍapāsīkas, daṇḍanāyakas, viṣayapati and other. Apart from them, the unidentifiable officials ('adhyakṣapracāroktān ihākīrtitān'), cāṭa bhaṭas and rural residents (janapadas, kṣetrkaras, brāhmaṇas and brāhmaṇottaras) have also been mentioned as addressees of the grant.¹⁶⁹ The rural scene in general and the prominent rural residents like janapadas and mahattaras were referred to as addressees in Samataṭa and Śrīhaṭṭa around the 13th century as is evident from the Mehar copperplate of Dāmodaradeva.¹⁷⁰

Sāmantas & subordinates:

The sāmantas were generally speaking less visible in the land documents of Varman and Sena rulers. The few indications found include the information in the Sujanagar stone inscription of Bhojavarman, which refers to the presence and activity of a subordinate ruler under the Varman rule. It records the land donation of mahāsāmanta Avūdeva, the son of pāñcakulika Hāsī.¹⁷¹ Hāsī was a member of an urban administrative organization named pañcakula situated within Vaṅga. This organization was constituted of influential urban members and they were in charge of documentary works and custom houses.¹⁷² Mahāsāmanta Avūdeva was controlled by an official adhikṛta Jīvasena appointed by the king, indicating stronger dominance of the state. The tendency towards enhanced local control by deployment of administrative apparatus may have occurred

¹⁶⁸ Majumdar, 'Belava Copper-plate', lines 35-36, p.21.

¹⁶⁹ Ganguly, 'Saktipur Copper Plate', lines 19-24, pp.217-18.

¹⁷⁰ Barua and Chakravarty, 'Meher Plate', line 16, p.188.

¹⁷¹ Islam, 'Unpublished Stone Inscription', lines 3-4, p.117.

¹⁷² Furui, *Land and Society*, p.192.

during the Sena rule. Hence, the appearance of the subordinates was limited to that of tenure holders in landed property and royal officials of varied kinds were found functioning in local levels. There was an absence of *sāmantas* in the lower part of Bengal under the Senas, the only exception being noted in the Rakshaskhali grant, where we encounter *Ḍommaṇapāla*. He was the son of a *mahāmāṇḍalika* and wielded the title *mahārājādhirājavipakṣasāmanta*.¹⁷³

In *Samataṭa* and *Śrīhaṭṭa* the subordinate rulers were active around the 13th century in terms of land-related issues. *Raṇavaṅkamalla* *Harikāladeva*'s subordinate ruler *mahāśvanibandhika* *Dadhieva* had issued a land grant.¹⁷⁴ At the same time royal court officers were invested with varied charges. In *Samataṭa* records thus, we find the *mudrādhikārin* and *saciva* (minister) *Gautamadatta* mentioned as the petitioner of the *Sobharampur* plate of *Dāmodaradeva*.¹⁷⁵ The chief of elephant troops *Gaṅgādhara* acted as a petitioner in the *Mehar* plate of *Dāmodaradeva*.¹⁷⁶ Here *mahāsāndhivigrahika* *Munidāsa* and *mahākṣapaṭalika* *Dalaeva* made the grant. The *Nasirabad* plate of *Dāmodaradeva* refers to *Gunadhara*, the sole chief of all the ministers ('*sarvāmātyaika mukhya*'), as the conveyer of the royal order.¹⁷⁷ Again in *Śrīhaṭṭa*, *Ākṣapaṭalika* *Vanamālikara*, a *rājaputra*, was the petitioner of the *Bhatera* plate of *Īsānadeva*. He belonged to the lineage of *Vaidyas*.¹⁷⁸ The *Bhatera* plate of *Keśavadeva* refers to one of the treasurers of the grant, *Syahuṇa* as *mahāsācūḍo* ('*mahāsāmantacūḍāmaṇi*').¹⁷⁹ Thus, the presence of royal officials, subordinate local potentates and those in charge of local administration indicates a substantial courtly community, which may have been oriented to a rural order of polity rather than operating in urban high enclaves. *Gauḍa*, however, remained the nodal administrative centre under the Senas.

The Sena kings were found to assign landed property to their subordinates in *Rāḍha*, *Vaṅga* and parts of *Varendra*, indicating reassignment of tenures from one holder to another. Superior land rights had been assigned to *brāhmaṇa* donees over scattered settlements. The *Naihati* copperplate of *Vallālasena* records the reception of a village in grant by donee *brāhmaṇa* *Ovāsudevaśarman* as

¹⁷³ Ghoshal, 'Rakshaskhali Island Plate', lines 1-3, p.122.

¹⁷⁴ Bhattacharya, 'The Mainamati Copper Plate', lines 12-20, p.287.

¹⁷⁵ Dani, 'Sobharampur Plate', lines 15-18, p.187.

¹⁷⁶ Barua and Chakravarty, 'Mehar Plate', lines 11-13, pp.187-88.

¹⁷⁷ Majumdar, 'Chittagong copper plate', lines 18-24, pp.160-61.

¹⁷⁸ Gupta, *Copper-plates of Sylhet*, lines 24-28, p.186.

¹⁷⁹ Gupta, 'The Bhatera Copper plate', *EI*, 19, lines 52-53, p.283.

a reward for his service in the Hemāśvamahādāna ceremony performed by the king's mother Vilāsadevī.¹⁸⁰ This village was first given ('utsrṣṭa') by Vilāsadevī and then donated ('pradatta') by the king.¹⁸¹ The Sahitya parishat copperplate of Viśvarūpasena records purchase of land plots by brāhmaṇa donee Halāyudha, given away by kumāra Sūryyasena, Puruṣottamasena and sāndhivigrahika Nāñisimha.¹⁸² Three layers of landholdings were attested in this record. The first was the king who had the highest power over land to convert plots of settlements to śāsana land. Next were the recipients of land tenures who belonged to royal households and were subordinates of the king. The third stratum comprised the local people, the actual peasants who had the collective landholdings. The grāmapati and nānāpati were involved in revenue administration and collection processes.¹⁸³ The local notables formed the lower middle layer in the hierarchical order of the rural society.

Brāhmaṇas:

This is the period when brāhmaṇas enhanced their presence in the political sphere and as a dominant group in rural society, as a result of their network building, especially under the patronage of the Senas. The brāhmaṇas were consolidating their position through ritual services both in the royal court and rural society from the 12th century CE onward. They were employed for the ritual performance of mahādānas which was regarded as a symbol of validating the royal power of the ruler. As noted in the contexts of Varendra and Rāḍha, the brāhmaṇas were rewarded with land plots for their services in ceremonies like 'kanakatulāpuruṣamahādāna', 'hemāśvamahādāna' etc.¹⁸⁴ Sometimes, the grants were treated as remuneration to a brāhmaṇa who is responsible for performing any royal ceremony. The Tarpandighi copperplate of Lakṣmaṇasena referred to fees paid to the donee ācārya Īśvaradevaśarmman on account of his service in 'hemāśvarathamahādāna' ceremony.¹⁸⁵ In the Govindapur copperplate of Lakṣmaṇasena, the grant was made to upādhyāya Vyāsadevaśarman on the occasion of the

¹⁸⁰ Majumdar, 'Naihati Copper plate', lines 44-46, 51-54, p.74.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.* lines 52,54, p.74.

¹⁸² Majumdar, 'Calcutta Sahitya-Parishat Copper Plate', p. 142.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.* lines 45,48, p.148.

¹⁸⁴ Majumdar, 'Barrackpur Copper plate', line 41, p.63; Majumdar, 'Naihati Copper plate', line 52, p.74.

¹⁸⁵ Majumdar, 'Tarpandighi Copper plate', lines 43-46, p.102.

coronation ceremony ('rājyābhiṣekasamaya') of the king Lakṣmanasena.¹⁸⁶ The Idilpur copperplate of Viśvarūpasena was made for the increase of the auspicious year ('subhavarsha') and for the long life of the king.¹⁸⁷ Śāntyāgārika Kṛṣṇadharadevaśarmman was also rewarded for his service as evident in the Sundarban copperplate of Lakṣmaṇasena.¹⁸⁸ Śāntyāgārikas were specialists of śānti rituals.¹⁸⁹ The Varman grants referred to titles like śāntivārika and śāntyāgārādhikṛta held by the brahamaṇas which indicate their ritual services.¹⁹⁰

Apart from performance of rituals, there were other aspects of the roles of brāhmaṇas which enhanced their prospects at the court and among the well – to – do and literate clientele. Many had been noted for composing Dharmanibandhas at the Sena and Varman court. For example, Bhaṭṭabhavadēva, the sāndhivigrahika of Harivarman, composed *Prāyścittaprakaraṇa* and *Sambandhaviveka*.¹⁹¹ Bhaṭṭabhavadēva's father Govardhana was a brāhmaṇa scholar and a well-known warrior. Govardhana's father was also employed as a mahāmantrī and a sāndhivigrahika under a king of Vaṅga. Bhaṭṭabhavadēva's family was hereditarily engaged in the service of the king. Their status in the Sena royal court is evident from the term 'vaṅgarājarājyaśrīviśrāmasaciba' used in the Bhuvanēsva prasasti of Bhaṭṭabhavadēva.¹⁹² Halāyudha was another eminent scholar of the times. He was the author of *Brāhmaṇasarvasva*, a commentary of vedic rituals. He was appointed to the court of Lakṣmaṇasena as dharmādhikāra, mahādharmaḍhyakṣa, mahādharmaḍhikṛta, dharmāḍhyakṣa or dharmādhikṛta.¹⁹³ It is obvious that knowledge on brāhmaṇical religio-juridical principles led to the appointment of the nibandhakāras in judicial and magisterial posts. The significance of this was reflected in the repeated reference of mahādharmaḍhyakṣa as addressees in the Sena and Varman grants. Thus, the brāhmaṇas had been gaining in status not only as priests with special skills in performing highly auspicious rituals in the courtly circuit or royal household, but also as advisors and ministers and in their judicial

¹⁸⁶ Majumdar, 'Govindapur Copper plate', lines 41-46, p.96.

¹⁸⁷ Majumdar, 'Edilpur copper-plate', lines 49-50, p.125.

¹⁸⁸ Majumdar, 'Sundarban Copper Plate' p.171.

¹⁸⁹ Furui, *Land and Society*, p. 203.

¹⁹⁰ Bhattasali, 'Samantasar Copper Plate of Harivarman', line 13, p.258; Majumdar, 'Belava Copper-plate', line 45, p.21.

¹⁹¹ Majumdar, 'Bhuvanēsva Inscription', verse 16, p.38; Furui, *Land and Society*, p. 203.

¹⁹² Sarkar, *Nityakaler tui Puratan*, p.226.

¹⁹³ Durgamohan Bhattacharya, ed. *Brāhmaṇa-Sarvasva: A pre Sāyana Vedic commentary by Halāyudha*, (Calcutta: Sanskrit Sahitya Parishad, 1960), pp.2, 17, 85, 145,198.

capacity. On the other hand, the brāhmaṇas had also been increasingly gaining ascendancy in rural society as recipients of landgrants and their presence was presumably impactful through spread of varied vedic and more evidently puranic norms, customs and symbols as pointed out by B.D. Chattopadhyaya, Hermann Kulke and Kunal Chakrabarti in the context of early medieval India in general and Bengal and Odisha in particular. Chattopadhyaya, however, had also drawn attention to the tensions within these growing socio-cultural structures and pointed to the other forces which were operative that led to the emergence of a complex fabric of society.¹⁹⁴ The Purāṇas in fact showcases their attempt to reorganize the social groups in a hierarchical order by implementing varnaśaṅkara. The social groups would be more and more consolidated into jāti under the authority of a Brahmanical institution in the following phases of history.

To go into the empirical details that can be noted through the epigraphic evidence, indications of strong networks of brāhmaṇa functions and agency were evident. Pūrvagrāma, Siddhalagrāma, Diṅḍisāya and Keśarakoṇa in Rāḍha and Cāmpahaṭṭī in Varendra developed as Brahmanical centres where the brāhmaṇas settled down.¹⁹⁵ The Manhali grant of Madanapāla referred to the settlement of the donee Vaṭeśvarasvāmiśarman in Campāhiṭṭī which was identical with Cāmpahaṭṭī in Varendra.¹⁹⁶ The Belava copperplate of Bhojavarman referred to a brāhmaṇa family originating from Madhyadeśa and settling down in Siddhalagrāma.¹⁹⁷ The ancestors of Bhaṭṭabhavadeva's also settled down in Siddhalagrāma. They further migrated to Vaṅga and received the patronage of the Varman king. The concentration of Brahmanical networks in Rāḍha and Varendra led to consolidations of Rāḍhiya and Vārendra categories of brāhmaṇas. This reflects the processes of agrarian expansion and formation of settlement clusters in these sub-regions. The reference to the term brāhmaṇottara other than the brāhmaṇas as addressees in the Sena and Varman grants indicates the settling and incorporation of qualified brāhmaṇas into the rural society. Their enhanced position was also indicated by added privileges and resources conferred on brāhmaṇa donees. They emerged as large-scale landholders with profitable plantation lands in their

¹⁹⁴ Kulke, 'The Early and the Imperial Kingdom' pp. 91 – 120; Chattopadhyaya, *The Making of Early Medieval India*, pp. 29 – 31; Chakrabarti, *Religious Process*, pp. 114 – 117. Also see Furui, 'Brāhmaṇas in Early Medieval Bengal'.

¹⁹⁵ Furui, *Land and Society*, p.205.

¹⁹⁶ Vasu, 'The Manhali Copper-plate', lines 43-44, p.72.

¹⁹⁷ Majumdar, 'Belava Copper-plate', lines 43-45, p.21.

possession, as evident in the Sahitya-parishad plate of Viśvarupasena.¹⁹⁸ Often, the donee brāhmaṇas were declared as belonging to high lineages. As an example, in the Barrackpur copper plate of Vijayasena, the donee was Udayakaradevaśarman, the great-grandson of Ratnākaradevaśarman who was an inhabitant of Kāntijoṅga and immigrant from Madhyadeśa, himself the grandson of Rahaskaradevaśarman and son of Bhāskaradevaśarman belonging to vatsa-gotra, affiliated to high pravaras and a student of the six aṅgas of the āśvalāyana śākhā of the Ṛgveda.¹⁹⁹ The evidence of such exemplary brāhmaṇa donees gets rarer with time, especially with the obscure and corroded documents of later Devas. However, reference to collective brāhmaṇa donees had been evident from the Mehar copperplate Inscription of Dāmodaradeva. It records the donation of certain plots of land in the village of Mehar along with the annual income with a perpetual right of enjoyment to 20 Brahmins of high distinction.²⁰⁰ One of the Brahmins among them was distinguished from the rest as gr̥hī-pañḍita. Apparently, these Gr̥hī-pañḍitas were engaged in household matters. This reference is indeed extremely significant and bears the clue to the rural brāhmaṇa who would be in constant touch with the rural residents and jajamāna and an ideal source for the propagation of the Purāṇic values and prescriptions. Thus, we come to the lowest strata of literates probably through whom the word of the text would percolate to the grassroots and the common society.

Other Occupational Groups:

As per other occupational groups are concerned, the Sujanagar stone inscription of Bhojavarman refer to a conch shell worker (śaṁkhakara).²⁰¹ The same inscription records a land donation by mahāsāmanta Avūdeva who could have belonged to a merchant family.²⁰² The Bhatara grant of Keśavadeva pertaining to the areas of Śrīhaṭṭa, refer to occupational groups like nāpita, rajaka, dantakāra or dantavāra, gopa, mālā, haddiya etc. these particular individuals were owners of houses ('gr̥ha') and units of ploughland.²⁰³ The record outlines the social identity of various occupational groups in rural parts which moved toward social reorganization based on professions and would

¹⁹⁸ Majumdar, 'Calcutta Sahitya-Parishat Copper Plate', lines 41-64, p.142.

¹⁹⁹ Majumdar, 'Barrackpur Copper plate', lines 37-39, p.63.

²⁰⁰ Barua and Chakravarty, 'Meher Plate', lines 28-32, p.189.

²⁰¹ Islam, 'Unpublished Stone Inscription', lines 4-5.

²⁰² *Ibid.* lines 2-3.

²⁰³ Gupta, 'The Bhatara Copper plate', *Epigraphia Indica*, 19, lines 45-51, p.282.

get consolidated in the Purāṇas. Thus, although the inscriptions do not give a very clear picture of rigid social stratification, this process was amalgamated into the narrative of Varṇasamkara jātis in 13th century *Vṛdhharmapurāṇa*.²⁰⁴

Coming now to a summary review of the literary trend noted in this phase, we find the conspicuous features to culminate into the regional trend during the Sena – Varman times. A common feature of the Sena and Varman inscriptions is that they follow an almost similar pattern. Besides, a notable feature of this period is the rise of a strong Brahmanical trend in the royal court of Varendra and Rāḍha. Amongst the Varman inscriptions, the Belava copperplate of Bhojavarman and the Bhuvaneswar Praśasti of Bhaṭṭabhavadēva were the best exemplars of this efflorescence. As noted earlier, the Kalachuri connection may have lent a richer tone to their inscriptions, with allusions to Purāṇic icons and legends.²⁰⁵ The magnificent overelaborate verses of the Bhuvaneswar Praśasti of Bhaṭṭabhavadēva was equally ornate and replete with glorious and voluble praise, and high sounding upamā. This Praśasti also provides clues to the emergence of a strong presence of Brahmanical socio-religious and intellectual values and culture which would have wielded increasing impact on the society in early medieval Bengal, especially from the 12th century CE onwards. The Belava Copper plate offers evidence for a thorough genealogy of the Varmans narrated with a flourishing literary tone which was balanced with the prosaic narration of the details of land charter describing the land evaluation process, land measurement and land grant matters in compact and practical prose format. Bhojavarman's reign being the most important among the Varmans, his influence is reflected in this elaborate inscription. This stream of literary style in early medieval Bengal reached its peak under the Sena dynasty. The Deopara Rock Inscription of Vijayasena, etched with nuances of beautiful literary expression, stands as an excellent achievement of the court poet. The composer Umāpatidhara, the poet of Vijayasena, was praised by Jayadeva as ‘Vācaḥ pallavajatyumāpatidharaḥ’ in his *Gītagovinda*.²⁰⁶ The fine picture of rural society found here endowed this composition with remarkable vivacity. His penchant for portraying the rural communities is also reflected in his anthological verses. The question here is

²⁰⁴ Haraprasad Sastri, ed. *Bṛhaddharmapurāṇam*, 2nd edition, (Varanasi: Krishandas Academy, 1974).

²⁰⁵ Islam, ‘Emerging Political entities’, pp. 644, 646.

²⁰⁶ Sarkar, *Nityakaler tui Puratan*, p.241.

why the image of rural society is becoming so important in this inscription. Indeed, even as the royal court flourished in Bengal during the 12th to the 13th century, rural society remained its main and strongest foundation.

The reign of Lakṣmaṇasena was especially famous as it witnessed the most remarkable literary achievements. It is during his reign that the literary creativity reached its crest. Numerous copperplates had been issued under him, such as the Govindapur, Tarpandighi, Sundarban, Anulia, Saktipur, Rajvadi, Madhainagar copperplates. All of these bear elaborate and ornate compositions describing lineage of the dynasty with flowery expression, portions that evidently bore the marks of the poets and their literary creativity. These were again balanced with the details of land administration and the business of land grant with land measurement, land sale figures and donative descriptions, clearly emanating from the scribes and local officials. The literary part of the epigraphic records bore clear association with the tonal quality of the grandiose textual creative literature, emerging within the courtly circuit especially during Lakṣmanasena's reign. Amongst these, *Āryāsaptaśatī* of Govardhanācārya (c. 12th century CE), *Pavanadūta* by Dhoyī (c.12th century CE) and *Gītagovinda* by Jayadeva (12th century CE) were the kinds of literature that were considered the finest poetic compositions in early medieval Bengal. Anthologies like the *Saduktikarnāmrta* by Śrīdharaḍāsa (1205 CE) again packed a rich bouquet of literary creation in verses, some of which were evidently composed by the poets from early medieval Bengal.

However, it is observable that this rich literary style did not carry over into the later days of Sena rule. This is evident from the more mundane contents of Viśvarūpasena's Madanpada and the Vangiya Sahitya-Parishat Copper Plates for example. Similarly, the inscriptions of later Devas in the Samataṭa, Śrīhaṭṭa area during the 13th century CE also exhibit lacklustre literary expression. This is undoubtedly due to the weakening rule of the rulers, loss of courtly patronage and languishing cultural environs.

However, overall, the literary style of this period represents creation of beautified expressions in embellished language, more often over-ornate and inflated and yet sometimes quite profound. The skilled projections of the Sena royal lineage and praśasti of individual rulers and personages characterized with metaphors would often be observed to reach beyond the simple parameters of classic language and adopt bombastic similes and hyperboles. These feats undoubtedly represented the work of accomplished composers, who were developing a regional orientation in which they

preferred to use the Sanskrit language. It is in this context, that the presence of eminent composers like Umāpatidhara, Dhoyī, Govardhanācārya, Jayadeva, etc. is significant during the time of Lakṣmaṇasena. The process carried forward the trends set in earlier phases which has been surveyed in the last chapter. The wider scene of this literary culture covered a wide range of participants, starting with the eminent brāhmaṇa scholar-authors like Purūṣottama, Bhaṭṭabhadra flourishing under the Varman rulers and Govardhanācārya, Halāyudha, etc. under the Senas. The peripheries of this cultural orbit comprised of the general communities of literates, authors and poets. They produced commentaries on grammar, philosophy, and works delineating religious practices as well as ritual texts and legal nibandhas which were gaining pre-eminence along with the Purāṇas. The target audience of these authors was not only limited to the courtly circuit and royal officials, but also influential villagers like mahattamas, mahattaras and kuṭumbinas, percolating orally and in ritual frames to the common artisanal class and dwellers of the rural society. Within this socio-cultural landscape the inscribed words and textual compositions represented the hierarchy and helped in extension of political and social control over the overwhelmingly rural society. This hegemony was not wielded by the dynastic rulers alone but by varied groups in the upper echelons of the literate society, brāhmaṇas and others.

CHAPTER V

The regional socio-cultural matrix (6th-early 13th century CE)

The previous chapters cover a review of epigraphic sources of Bengal from the 6th century CE up to the beginning of the 13th Century CE. This study illuminates the literary efflorescence of regional literary culture which is manifested not only in literary texts produced from the 11th-12th centuries but as we have traced, magnificent illustrations are available also in the inscribed words. The inscriptions indicate the flowering, maturity and even brilliant oration in the use of Sanskrit language. They are mostly land charters in prose and verse, but it is in the praśasti section that we come across a burst of literary excellence. On the other hand, however, the details of the land charters in prose also exhibit profound treatment of local practical knowledge at various levels. The expression of the compositions become more ornate as the dynasties take deeper roots and wield authority over larger domains. It may not be wrong to propose that this emergence of the regional literary style is more clearly tractable from the 6th to 13th century CE only through the study of the compositional aspects of the inscriptions which highlight how an overall Sanskrit literary style had emerged in early medieval Bengal and in its wider orbit.

Tracking the evolution of the literary culture:

Chronological evolution:

The literary style that grew throughout this period portrays an evolutionary trend through phases of the region's history since the Gupta rule. However, we have tracked the developments, especially from the 6th century CE. Of these phases, the sixth to eighth century CE was particularly important marking the initial trends of literary flourish. The records are related to several rulers, political heads of small political units, whose territorial provenance and lineage are often untraceable. They comprise rulers like Pradyumnabandhu in Puṇḍra, and Dharmāditya, Dvādaśāditya, Gopacandra and Samācāradeva in Vaṅga, the Rātas, Nāthas, Khaḍgas and Early Devas in Samataṭa - Śrīhaṭṭa. The most notable example of this period is the Nidhanpur copperplate inscription of Bhāskarvarman in the seventh century CE. We can cite this as a reflection of the most adorning and charming literary

composition of this period. This copperplate bore the historical symbol of the alliance between Bhāskaravarman with Harṣavardhana. As a result, a possible reflection of the writing style of Harṣa's poet Bāṇabhaṭṭa can be observed here, which reveals epitomic literary excellence in this composition. However, the other inscriptions of this period also exhibit different literary facets. For example, the copperplates of Pradyumnabandhu in Puṇḍra, Dharmāditya, Dvādaśāditya, Gopacandra and Samācāradeva in Vaṅga and the copperplates of Gopacandra in Rāḍha during the 6th century CE revealed a different kind of knowledge. In terms of analyzing the Maitraka copperplate charters from the 5th-8th century CE, Annette Schmiedchen observed that while the praśasti portion of a copperplate was a derivation of Indian classical kāvya, the portion belonging to the land charter portray a different kind of style.¹ In the case of the above-mentioned land charters in early medieval Bengal, rather than portraying poetical embellishments, they neatly documented the land sale figures, land measurement units and land evaluation methods. This reveals a different aspect of knowledge and literacy. Again, the seventh-century copperplates of Śaśāṅka from the Rāḍha sub-region were the first to indicate a sense of royal dominion. His rise as the first sovereign ruler in early medieval Bengal reflected this royal glory in his copperplates. However, the most enhanced form of this apotheosis during this phase is gleaned in the Nidhanpur Copperplate. On another plane, a different literary tone can be seen in the inscriptions of Rātas and Nāthas in South Eastern Bengal during the 7th century CE. Amongst them, the Tipperah copperplate of Loknātha and the Kailan copperplate of Śrīdhāraṇa Rāta were especially important. Radhagovinda Basak observed that the literary expressions used here were a reflection of Bāṇabhaṭṭa's *Harṣacarita*.² In this context, it may be said that Loknātha and Śrīdhāraṇa Rāta were subordinate rulers of Bhāskaravarman. Hence, the influence of Harṣavardhana's courtly literary air was a probable factor. Although not rich in poetic ornamentation like the Nidhanpur copperplate, they carry much poetic subtlety. These inscriptions were also an indication of the self-proclamation and legitimacy of the emergent rulers who issued them. Even though they were subordinate to Bhāskaravarman, their autonomous status has been reflected here. A somewhat enhanced form of this is seen in the copperplates of the Khaḍga and Deva rulers. The subtle precise literary tone used in their

¹ Annette Schmiedchen, 'Kings, Authors and Messengers: The Composition of the Maitraka Copperplate Charters', in *New Horizons in Indology (Prof. H.G. Shastri Commemoration Volume)*, eds. Bharati Shelat and Thomas Parmar, California, 2018, p.36.

² Basak, 'Inscriptions', p.404.

inscriptions gives a hint to subregional foci of power in a cultural sense as well as in administrative authority. This variation in literary styles at the sub-regional levels and temporal layers during the early phase soon transformed into a uniform style in the later Pāla Candra phase.

Literary creativity in the inscriptions of the Pālas

With the rise of the monarchical rule of the Pālas and Candras, the inscriptions portray a rich cultural scene not only in language style but also in content. Among them were mostly copperplates, which depicted a fine mixture of praśasti and land charter. If we look at the literary style of this period, we perceive a flow of it, which is sometimes upward and sometimes downward in keeping with the historical process of the time. This trend is evident in the numerous inscriptions of the Pālas. For example, the Khalimpur copper plate of Dharmapāla of the ninth century was the first testimony to an elongated and ornate composition of the Pālas, with fine expertise in literary style. This copperplate bears testimony to the involvement of the Pālas in the north Indian struggle for hegemony over Kanauj against the Gurjara-Pratīhāras and the Rāṣṭrakūṭas. In that respect, this copper plate is undoubtedly of great historical significance. The context of this inscription is subsequently referred to by D.C. Sircar in *The Kānyakubja - Gauḍa Struggle*.³ Here, Gauḍa is highlighted considering the importance of this inscription in the North Indian context. Equally, Devapāla's inscriptions were also of great historical significance. They were almost similar to the style of Dharmapāla's inscriptions. Of these, the Nalanda Copper plate of the 9th century CE was particularly notable. The composer of this copperplate had not only praised the Pālas, but also elevated the Śailendra dynasty of south-east Asia. The significance of this copperplate lay in the way it highlights the connections between Bengal and south-east Asia during the reign of Devapāla. According to Abdul Momin Chowdhury's article on 'Pāla realm', it has been claimed that the king of Suvarṇadvīpa surrendered to Devapāla which may be taken to refer to the construction of a temple at Nālandā, within the realm of Devapāla by Bālaputradeva of the Śailendra dynasty ruling over Indonesia and Malaysia.⁴ Equally important are other inscriptions of Devapāla, for example, the Munger Copperplate. From this period the influence of the subordinate rulers under the Pālas in Bengal became noteworthy and accordingly shaped the

³ Sircar, *The Kānyakubja-Gauḍa Struggle*, p.11.

⁴ Chowdhury, 'Pāla Realm', p.721.

structure of the inscriptions of that time. The increasing influence of the subordinate rulers was reflected in several inscriptions issued by them. For example, the Ramganj copper plate inscription of Ísvaraghoṣa, Ghosrava rock inscription of Devapāla etc. The Jagajjibanpur Copper Plate of Mahendrapāla and the Bhagalapur Copper Plate of Nārāyaṇapāla have also portrayed a rich literary composition. It is to be noted, that The Badal pillar inscription of Guravamiśra at the beginning of the tenth century CE was particularly significant among them. This inscription bears witness to the fact that the dominance of subordinate rulers was established during the reign of the Pālas. Hence, it inscribed the praśasti of a brāhmaṇa family, of which five generations were associated with the six Pāla kings by serving them mostly as political advisors and occasionally as priests or generals. Another such eulogy was the Bhaturia Rock Inscription of Yasodāsa in the 10th century CE. Yaśodāsa was a member of a non-brāhmaṇa literate family, which was hereditarily in the service of the Pāla kings. Yaśodāsa himself was raised to the position of a subordinate ruler. After this, during the weak reigns of Gopāla III and Vighrahapāla II in the late tenth century CE, there was no such visible spark in the literary styles of the inscriptions. Again, as the Pāla empire got revived under Mahīpāla I during the 11th century CE, fine literary compositions flourished once more as noted in the Rangpur, Belwa, Bangarh, and Biyala copperplates. If we look at the later Pāla copperplates, there is a fairly similar literary expression. For example, if we look at the Bharatkala Bhavan Copperplate of Rajyapāla during the first half of the tenth century CE and the two Rajibpur copperplate Inscriptions of Gopala IV and Madanapāla during the middle of the 12th century CE, we find that the laudatory verses used here are the same for the kings up to Nārāyaṇapāla. They followed a similar pattern of poetic style. But the inscriptions of Madanapāla, the last ruler of the Pāla dynasty (mid-12th century), for example, the Manhali Copperplate depict a distinct and interesting literary style. It is noteworthy that the rich literary composition of Sandhyākaranandi, the *Rāmacarita* was also written during the reign of Madanapāla. Besides, there were some other Pāla inscriptions that portrayed a fine literary tone through their poetic charm. For example, the Gaya Krsnadvarika temple inscription of Viśvāditya in the eleventh century CE was considered a beautiful literary creation. Again, the Kamauli Copperplate of Vaidyadeva of the 12th century CE was unique in nature. This copperplate was issued from Kāmarūpa by Vaidyadeva, a ruler appointed by Kumārapāla. It is to be noted, that although he was a minister of Kumārapāla, he had achieved a sovereign status, which is visible in the literary style of the Kamauli copperplate.

The Candras and the subregional literary efflorescence

Although the inscriptions of the Candra rulers were not as elaborate and glorious as those of the Pālas, these did reflect an entrancing and beautiful literary creativity. Their separate political entity in the south-eastern part of Bengal during the 9th-10th centuries brought uniqueness to their inscriptions. Moreover, based on the Candra records, Shariful Islam suggested that the ancestors of Trailokyacandra were subordinate to the Ākara kings of Harikela.⁵ According to Gouriswar Bhattacharya, king Attākaradeva of the Ākara dynasty was of Arakanese affiliation. Suchandra Ghosh also mentions Harikela's connection with Arakan.⁶ Perhaps these connections may have been reflected in their inscriptions. Among the Candra inscriptions, the Paschimbhag copperplate inscription of Śrīcandra in the 10th century CE bears a startling literary testimony. Śrīcandra's influential reign, in particular, was the reason for this efflorescence. It was a unique donative charter in which Śrīcandra granted lands to many brāhmaṇas and to nine monasteries. It hinted toward the reorganization of rural society and settling of brāhmaṇas in Samataṭa-Śrīhaṭṭa area. Apart from the Paschimbhag copperplate few other inscriptions of the Candras may project a probable expansion of literate culture in the subregion. Among the inscriptions, the Dhulla, Rampal, and Madanpur copperplates of Śrīcandra, and the Mainamati copper Plate of Laḍahacandra are illuminating examples of the creativity in the literary domain during the rule of the Candra dynasty. The Mainamati Copper Plate inscription of Laḍahacandra (10th century CE) is especially loaded with poetic hyperbolic exaggerations; whereas, the Mainamati Copper Plate inscription of Govindacandra was less ornate by comparison. This may be due to the fact that Govindacandra was the last known ruler of the Candra dynasty and was subsequently overthrown by the Varmans to establish their rule.

The Varmans

A rich literary trend was initiated in the next phase by the Varmans from the 12th century CE, culminating during the Sena times. Amongst the Varman inscriptions, the Belava copperplate of Bhojavarman and the Bhuvaneshwar Praśasti of Bhaṭṭabhavadēva are the best exemplars of this

⁵ Islam, 'Emerging Political Entities', p. 667.

⁶ Ghosh, 'Understanding the Economic Networks', pp. 91-94.

literary efflorescence. A special significance may have been attached to the Varman inscriptions due to their Kalacuri connection. Shariful Islam suggested that Kalacuri ruler Karṇa had invaded Kaliṅga and the Varmans became their active vassals.⁷ The Varmans came to Bengal during Kalacuri invasion as their subordinates. Jātavarman, as the first king of this dynasty, had entered into a marriage alliance by marrying Vīraśrī, the daughter of Kalacuri king Lakṣmi Karṇa.⁸ Shariful Islam also observed the similarities between the Cedī and Varman inscriptions, especially in respect of citing Puranic legends and figures. The magnificent overelaborate engravings of the Varmans are noticed in the Bhubaneswar Praśasti of Bhaṭṭabhavadeva. It was a glorious amplitude of the family of Bhaṭṭabhavadeva, who was employed as a minister of war and peace under the ruler Harivarman. This Praśasti was indicative of a strong Brahmanical network and their increasing influence in society in early medieval Bengal, especially from the 12th century CE onwards. It is considered a rich literary engraving of brāhmaṇa Bhaṭṭabhavadeva and a eulogy of seven generations of his family. The Belava Copper plate of the 12th century CE portrayed a thorough list of genealogy of the Varmans with a flourishing literary tone. Along with this, it is also important for depicting the land evaluation process, land measurement and land grant matters in wonderful prose format. Bhojavarman's reign being the most important among the Varmans, his influence is reflected in this elaborate inscription. The flow of literary style in early medieval Bengal reached its peak during the Sena period. A common feature of the Sena and Varman inscriptions is that they follow an almost similar pattern, as their geographical locations coincided with each other. Besides, a notable feature of this period is the rise of a strong Brahmanical trend in the royal court of Varendra and Rāḍha. But here, we can argue whether Brahmanical influence worked behind the literary excellence of this period or the grandeur of the royal court prevailed for its growth. The answer can be found by considering the literary genre of the inscriptions.

Literary flowering under the Sena rulers

Amongst the splendiferous compositions of the Senas, the Deopara Rock Inscription of Vijayasena in the 12th century CE etched the nuances of beautiful literary expression. The way in which a fine picture of rural society is found here is what gave this engraving such excellence. Rural society is reflected in the splendor of the royal court. The rural communities are beautifully depicted here in

⁷ Islam, 'Emerging Political Entities', p.644.

⁸ *Ibid.* p.646.

the author's writing. The creator of this inscription was Umāpatidhara, the poet of Vijayasena, whom Jayadeva introduced in his *Gītagovinda* as Vācaḥ pallavajatyumāpatidharaḥ.⁹ Jesse Ross Knutson said he had the largest number of verses ascribed to him in the *Saduktikarṇāmṛta* if compared to Jayadeva, Śaraṇa and Dhoyī.¹⁰ His penchant for portraying the rural communities is reflected in his verses. The eulogistic verses of this inscription throw important light on the history of the Sena dynasty, especially of Vijayasena. It carries the example of the finest writing style throughout early medieval Bengal. The question here is why the image of rural society is becoming so important in this inscription. Indeed, even as the royal court flourished in Bengal during the 12th to the 13th century, rural society remained its main and strongest foundation. Sequentially, the other inscriptions of the Senas have also exemplified a rich literary propensity. For example, Vallālasena's Naihati copperplate bears testimony to exquisite and embellished literary composition. The reign of Lakṣmaṇasena during the late 12th-13th century CE was famous for its remarkable literary achievements. It is during his reign that the literary evolution of early medieval Bengal reached its crest. Voluminous copperplates had been issued under his reign, for example, the Govindapur copperplate, Tarpandighi copperplate, Sundarban copperplate, Anulia copperplate, Saktipur copperplate, Rajvadi copperplate, Madhainagar copperplate etc. Beginning with the venerated verses intended for the divine being, these copper plates inscribed a detailed line of descent of the Senas with a flowery expression. Along with that, as copperplates, they have also depicted the nuances of land measurement, land sale figures and donative descriptions. Apart from the inscriptional references, we do have ample evidence of grandiose creative literature, raised within the courtly circuit of Lakṣmaṇasena's regime. Amongst them, the *Sadukti-karṇāmṛta* by Śridharadāsa (1205 CE), *Āryāsaptasatī* of Govardhanācārya (c. 12th century CE), *Pavanadūta* by Dhoyī (c.12th century CE) and *Gītagovinda* by Jayadeva (12th century CE) were the kinds of literature that were considered the finest poetic compositions in early medieval Bengal. The poetic amplification and charming literary tone of these compositions carried the rich artistic trend during Lakṣmaṇasena's reign. However, it is observable that this rich literary style did not carry over into the later Sena inscriptions; for example, Viśvarūpasena's Madanpada Copper Plate, Vangiya Sahitya-Parishat Copper Plate, etc. Undoubtedly, the weak rule of the later Sena rulers was the

⁹ Sarkar, *Nityakaler tui Puratan*, p.241.

¹⁰ Knutson, 'The Political Poetic', p. 386.

reason for this downward literary style. Similarly, the inscriptions of later Devas in the Samatāṭa, Śrīhaṭṭa area during the 13th century CE also portray an oversimplified literary expression.

Thematic evolution of literary style:

Thematically speaking the contents and tone of the inscriptions present rich historical evidence for the major sociopolitical aspects of history through phases of evolution. For example, some of the inscriptions were completely devoted to recording clauses of land charters like the copperplates of Pradyumnabandhu in Puṇḍra, the copperplates of Dharmāditya, Dvādaśāditya, Gopacandra and Samācāradeva in Vaṅga and the copperplates of Gopacandra in Rāḍha during the 6th century CE where specific and detailed documentation of land sale figures, land measurement units and land evaluation methods can be seen. This kind of documentation illuminates the reorganization of land administration and the economic functions of the burgeoning polities in the initial phase of the early medieval regional history. On the other hand, as a royal praśasti the Nidhanpur copperplate was a symbol of poetic extravagance. Here, an ornate praśasti is composed to glorify the royal majesty. Again, the inscriptions of the Rāta and Nātha rulers were of a different genre in which we observe stakes made to claim a position as local sovereign rulers. A somewhat extended form of the same style is seen in the inscriptions of the Khaḍgas and early Devas. There were some copperplates where a wonderful combination of praśasti and land charter is observed and these were on the increase with the dawn of the Pāla rule. The Khalimpur copperplate of Dharmapāla, for example, the Nalanda copperplate of Devapāla, the Pascimbhag copperplate of Śrīcandra, the Belavo copperplate of Bhojavarman, Naihati copperplate of Vallālasena, Govindapur, Tarpandighi, Anulia and Madhainagar copperplate of Lakṣmaṇasena, etc., bear this trend. The increased influence of the subordinate rulers in Bengal from the time of the Pālas is reflected in some of the voluminous praśastis written for them. For example, the Badal pillar inscription of Guravamiśra, Bhatua Rock Inscription of Yasodāsa, the Bhubaneswar Praśasti of Bhaṭṭabhadra etc. In this genre also belonged the Kamauli Copperplate of Vaidyadeva, an appointed ruler of Kumārapāla in Kāmarūpa. The only difference is that here Vaidyadeva also granted land charters, reflecting his sovereign authority as a ruler. What stood out from all this was the Deopara Rock Inscription of Vijayasena, which was a royal praśasti and a subtle reflection of rural society.

Creators and recipients: The social milieu of the regional literary culture

This variety of literary styles which spanned from the sixth to the thirteenth century CE was cultivated within a complex society which evolved through time. From a literary perspective, we can assume the society in early medieval Bengal to have comprised of a class of literati, who were the composers of this rich literature whether in text or in the inscribed words and also were the intellectuals and erudite scholars. Besides, there was a literate class who also participated in these compositional programs as well as being the primary consumers of these creations, whether of the more literary forms or of the more practical informative literature. Finally, there was the overwhelmingly numerous non-literate class who were on the periphery of this world of literacy but who were the recipients of these compositions in an indirect oral form and were impacted by the order created and valorized by these literary creations.

The literati:

First among the literati comes the eminent group of authors who composed these inscribed words. We shall try to trace some of those composers. The original composers of the inscriptions of the first phase (6th-8th century CE) of our study are hard to track. We find the identity of the literary composers to become more transparent from the time of the Pālas. A large section among them was brāhmaṇas. For example, brāhmaṇa poet Śrīkaṇṭha was the composer of Bangarh Rock Inscription of Nayapāla, where he declared himself to be an excellent scholar and mentor.¹¹ Śrīkaṇṭha was the younger brother of the great scholar Śrīvallabha. The Kamauli copperplate inscription of Vaidyadeva is significant because it contains the name Manoratha as the composer and his identity as the son of a brāhmaṇa, Rajaguru Murāri and Padmā.¹² A special mention may be made of Gauḍa Abhinanda, the author of *Kādambarī-Kathā-Sāra*. His great ancestor Śaktisvāmin hailed from Bengal and belonged to Bharadvāja gotra.¹³ The more prosperous identity of brāhmaṇas as composers dates back to the Varman and Sena times. Brāhmaṇa Puruṣottama was the composer of Belavo copperplate Inscription of Bhojavarman. Govardhanācārya, the author of *Āryāsaptaśatī*, was an ācārya brāhmaṇa and hailed a very prestigious position in the royal court of the Senas. He was an erudite scholar with vast knowledge in the Rāmāyana, Mahābhārata, Purāṇas, Nāṭyaśāstra,

¹¹ Sircar, 'Bāṅgaḍh Stone Inscription, verse 33, p.49.

¹² Venis, 'Copper-plate Grant of Vaidyadeva', verse 33, p.358.

¹³ Dasgupta, 'Sanskrit Literature', p.558.

Astrology, Ayurveda etc. Jayadeva referred to him as an expert in the field of śṛṅgāra genre. He was the best in erotic compositions. The brāhmaṇas upgraded their positions by composing Dharmanibandhas at the Sena and Varman court. For example, Bhaṭṭabhadra, the sādhivigrahika of Harivarman and his son, composed *Prāyścittaparakarṇa* and *Sambandhaviveka*.¹⁴ Bhaṭṭabhadra's father Govardhana was a brāhmaṇa scholar and a well-known warrior. Bhaṭṭabhadra's family was hereditarily engaged in the service of the king. Halāyudha, the author of *Brāhmaṇasarvasva*, was appointed to the court of Lakṣmaṇasena as dharmādhikāra, mahādharmādhyaṅga, mahādharmādhikṛta, dharmādhyaṅga or dharmādhikṛta.¹⁵ As ritual specialists, various Brahmanical norms had been acknowledged through these nibandhakāras by the royal authority of Sena and Varman reign. Apart from the compilation of various Dharmanibandhas, they compiled the Purāṇas to incorporate the local traditions into the fold of Brahmanical culture. Kunal Chakrabarti observed that the brāhmaṇas, especially in the border areas, wanted to enter into a dialogue with the indigenous people by composing the Purāṇas, as the success of the Brahmanical domination depended on the acceptance of their ideological norms by the local people and its cultural internalization.¹⁶ Kunal Chakrabarti provided a chart of the accepted Bengal Purāṇas, written in the early medieval period. These are *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa* (10th-16th century), *Kriyāyogasāra* which is claimed to be associated with *Padma Purāṇa* (not later than 11th century), *Bṛhannārādīya Purāṇa* which belonged to eastern Orissa or western Bengal (750-900 CE), *Devī Purāṇa* (cannot be placed later than 850 CE), *Kālikā Purāṇa* belonging to either in Assam or the part of Bengal which is adjacent to Assam (10th or the first half of the 11th century), *Mahābhāgavata Purāṇa* which belonged to eastern Bengal, close to Assam (10th or 11th century, not later than 12th century), *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa* (11th or 12th century) and *Bṛhaddharma Purāṇa* (later half of the 13th century).¹⁷ If we locate these Purāṇas and the group of composers responsible for their creation within the matrix of literati of a second category we may be able to argue for a rural sector of priestly literacy which is eminently supported by the numerous Brahmanical ritual and commentarial texts that were being composed during the Pāla but especially the Sena periods.¹⁸

¹⁴ Majumdar, 'Bhuvaneshvara Inscription', p.203.

¹⁵ Bhattacharya, *Brāhmaṇa-Sarvasva*, pp.2, 17, 85, 145,198.

¹⁶ Chakrabarti, *Religious Process*, p.23.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* p.50.

¹⁸ Dasgupta, 'Sanskrit Literature', pp. 549 – 552.

Coming back to the composers of 'inscriptional kāvya', a prominent example of the exuberant literature of this period is seen in the Deopara Inscription of Vijayasena. This inscription has been embellished by the great laureate of the Sena period, Umāpatidhara. His compositions have also been found in the Madhainagar copperplate inscription of Lakṣmaṇasena. Knutson said he had the largest number of verses ascribed to him in the *Saduktikarṇāmṛta* if compared to Jayadeva, Śaraṇa and Dhoyī.¹⁹ He adorned the royal court of the Senas till the time of Lakṣmaṇasena.

Dhoyī was another eminent poet who adorned the circuit of literati during the Sena regime. He was referred to as Kavirāja. Jayadeva in his *Gītagovinda* mentioned him as Dhoyī kavī-kṣmāpati.²⁰ He was renowned for his self-conceit and exaggerated self-acclamation as referred to in the *Rasamañjarī*, the commentary of *Gītagovinda*.²¹ Despite these critical remarks about him, it can be said that the title of Kavirāja was appropriate to him and was approved by the Sena authorities. Dhoyī's writings were also seen in the *Saduktikarṇāmṛta*, Jalhaṇa's *Suktimuktāvali* of the middle of the 13th century and the anthological work *Śārṅgadharapaddhati* of 11th or 14th century.²² Śrīdharadāsa, the compiler of *Saduktikarṇāmṛta* was another gem in the court of Lakṣmaṇasena. As mentioned in the introduction or prastāvaḥ of *Saduktikarṇāmṛta*, he was the son of Vaṭudāsa. Vaṭudāsa was the Pratirāja and Mūlamahāsāmanta of the king Lakṣmaṇasena. He was also a favorite ('anumpama premapātra') and a friend ('sakhā') of the king. Another noted figure during the reign of Lakṣmaṇasena was Śaraṇa. According to his contemporaneous Jayadeva, he could have mastered difficult verses quickly ('Śaraṇah ślāgho durūha drute').²³ In *Saduktikarṇāmṛta*, twenty verses had been composed by him. Here further reference had been made to one Śaraṇadeva, Śaraṇadatta and one Cirantana-Śaraṇa and some verses have been compiled in their names also. S.K.De had referred to one Śaraṇadeva who was a grammarian and the composer of *Durghaṭavṛtti* dated in 1173 CE.²⁴ It is doubtful whether they were the same person or not.

Most firm, stalwart, perfect in poetic style, and most talked about and controversial person of this phase was Jayadeva. He was skilled in all the guṇas and figures of speech as evidenced in the

¹⁹ Knutson, 'The Political Poetic', p. 386.

²⁰ Miller, *Jayadeva's Gītagovinda*, verse 1.3, p.129.

²¹ Chakravartisharmana, *Pavanadūtam*, p.10.

²² Dasgupta, 'Sanskrit Literature', p.577.

²³ Miller, *Jayadeva's Gītagovinda*, verse 1.3, p.129; Dasgupta, 'Sanskrit Literature', p. 577.

²⁴ De, 'Sanskrit Literature', p.367.

commentary *Rasamañjarī* of *Gītagovinda*.²⁵ Jayadeva claimed to have knowledge of Sandharvasuddhi which means the skill of sewing or weaving words in proper rhythm and sequence.²⁶ There has been a great deal of controversy over his provenance. Arguments have arisen between Bengal and Orissa regarding his origin. Those who believed his origin in Orissa, according to them the village of Kindubilva mentioned in *Gītagovinda* was originally at Kenduli Sasan in Orissa. Hence, he was patronized either by Anantavarman Coḍagaṅga (1078-1147 CE) or Anaṅgabhīmadeva II (1178-98 CE) of the Coḍagaṅga rulers. Again, those who agree on the Bengal origin of Jayadeva have been comparing this village of Kindubilva for a long time with the village of Kenduli on the banks of the river Ajay in Birbhum.²⁷

Apart from the composers, eminent scholars and intellectuals from different backgrounds were a part of the expansive circle of literati during the early medieval phase in Bengal. A large section of them belonged to the Brahmanical background. Scholarly titles like bhaṭṭaputra and upādhyāya were attached to them. Among them, a large number were Vātsyāyana brāhmaṇa of the Bhārgava lineage in association with the Dādhīchas which was the lineal identity of the eloquent Sanskrit scholar Bāṇabhaṭṭa. In this context, Vishwambhar Sharan Pathak shows how the brāhmaṇas of this lineage settled in eastern India in the early medieval period, the identity of which is found especially in the inscriptions of the Senas.²⁸ Highly erudite brāhmaṇas received land donations in the sub-regions of Puṇḍra, Vaṅga, Rāḍha and Samatāṭa. They have been identified with their gotra and lineage. Ryosuke Furui showed how the brāhmaṇas, by the end of the 8th century, made their clearer identity as donee with scholarly references, especially in Vaṅga and Rāḍha.²⁹ This category may be considered within an expansive circle of rural literati and may also be juxtaposed with the composers/promoters of the Purāṇas. The Pāla inscriptions show some brāhmaṇa donees of Varendra and Rāḍha, who were experts in various subjects. It indicated their academic qualifications and genealogical origin. The Amgachi Copper Plate of Vighrahapāla III records the Brahmin donee named Khoduladevaśarman who was well versed in mīmāṃsā, vyākaraṇa and tarka-vidyā.³⁰ He was a student of Kauthumi śākhā, a Sāmavedin, a Brahmacārin of the Haricarāṇa, belonged to Śāṅḍilya

²⁵ Chakravartisharmana, *Pavanadūtam*, p.10.

²⁶ Tripathy, 'Jayadeva', pp.13-14.

²⁷ Chakravarti, 'Sanskrit Literature in Bengal', pp.157-76; Dasgupta, 'Sanskrit Literature', p.580.

²⁸ Pathak, *Ancient Historians*, p.33.

²⁹ Furui, 'Brāhmaṇas in early medieval Bengal', p.229.

³⁰ Banerji, 'The Amgachi Grant', verse 15, line 40, p.298.

gotra and Śāṅḍilya, Asita and Daivala pravaras.³¹ His father was mahopādhyāya Arkkadeva and his grandfather was Padmāvanadeva who was well versed in Vedānta philosophy.³² Donees were also mentioned in the Candra inscriptions with their specific academic qualifications, particular Vedic school, gotra and pravara, genealogy etc. The Dhulla copperplate of Śrīcandra records a grant of 19 halas and 6 droṇas of land by the king to the brāhmaṇa Vyāsagaṅgaśarman, son of Vibhugaṅga and grandson of Nanagaṅga.³³ He belonged to the vārddhakauśika gotra, the pravara of the three ṛiṣis and kaṇva śākhā.³⁴

The reference to the brāhmaṇa donee's village of origin, residence and their donated village in the Pāla, Candra and Kāmboja inscriptions indicated the procedure for their network building. Furui depicts the rise of various Brahmanical centres during the 10th-12th century in Varendra and Rāḍha.³⁵ He located these centers through the inscriptions. He identified Śrāvasti in Varendra as a nodal point of the establishment of these centres, which is located near the hilly Balurghat area of the present south-Dinajpur district of West Bengal.³⁶ Tarkāri³⁷ or Tharkkārīkā,³⁸ Kroḍaṅca³⁹ or Kolāṅca,⁴⁰ Hastipadagrāma⁴¹ were some of the centres of Śrāvasti. The centre Tarkāri or Tharkkārīkā was specifically significant. Many arguments have been raised regarding the identification of this place. With the reference to a Candella grant of 998 CE Swati Datta noticed that brāhmaṇa Rudra Śrī Yaśodhara immigrated from Tarkkārīkā and settled down in Dūrvvāharā grāma.⁴² She identified this Tarkkārīkā with a place in Uttar Pradesh. According to D.C.Sircar, Tarkāri along with Śrāvasti was an old habitation area of the brāhmaṇas in U.P. Large number of brāhmaṇas have settled down

³¹ *Ibid.* lines 36,37,38, pp.297-98.

³² *Ibid.* lines 39-40, p.298.

³³ Sircar, 'Dhulla plate', lines 34-35, p.140.

³⁴ *Ibid.* p.140.

³⁵ Furui, 'Brāhmaṇas in early medieval Bengal', p.234.

³⁶ *Ibid.* p.234; Sircar, *Studies in the Geography*, pp.294-98.

³⁷ Radha Govinda Basak, 'Silimpur Stone-slab Inscription of the time of Jayapāladeva', *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XIII, Reprint, 1982, verse 2, p.290.

³⁸ Furui, "Rangpur Copper Plate", line 43, p.241.

³⁹ Banerji, 'The Amgachi Grant', line 39, p.298.

⁴⁰ Sircar, 'Bangaon Plate', line 39, p.56.

⁴¹ Banerji, "The Bangarh Grant", line 48, p.327.

⁴² Swati Datta, *Migrant Brāhmaṇas in Northern India: Their Settlement and General Impact c. A.D. 475-1030*, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1989), p.53.

in the hilly balurghat area in North Bengal and named it after their old habitations.⁴³ Taking the view of D.C. Sircar, Ryosuke Furui said that a large number of brāhmaṇas migrated from Śrāvasti and settled down in Varendra.⁴⁴ They named their settlements accordingly. It is to be noted that the brāhmaṇas of Tarkāri were highly demanded outside the Bengal region. For example, Swati Datta mentioned the settling of brāhmaṇa Rudra Śrī Yaśodhara of Tarkkārikā in Madhyapradesh during the reign of the Candellas in the first quarter of the 9th century CE. Again taking the reference to an inscription of Kolagallu of 964 CE, Puspa Niyogi said that the composer of this praśasti Madhusūdana was an immigrant of Tarkāri in Varendra.⁴⁵ From the early 12th century, Pūrvagrāma, Siddhalagrāma, Diṇḍisāya and Keśarakoṇa in Rāḍha and Cāmpahaṭṭī in Varendra developed as Brahmanical centres where the brāhmaṇas settled down.⁴⁶ The Manhali grant of Madanapāla referred to the settlement of the donee Vateśvarasvāmiśarman in Campāhiṭṭī which was identical with Cāmpahaṭṭī in Varendra.⁴⁷ The Belavo copperplate of Bhojavarman referred to a brāhmaṇa family originating from Madhyadeśa and settling down in Siddhalagrāma.⁴⁸ Eminent nibandhakāra Bhaṭṭabhavadēva of the Bhubaneswar Praśasti was also a resident of this Siddhalagrāma in the Northern Rāḍha. Puspa Niyogi said Siddhalagrāma was highly reputed for Brahmanic scholarship and rituals.⁴⁹ These centres developed as Brahmanical centres of learning by these scholarly brāhmaṇas, working as nodes of a network among them. In the Samataṭa- Śrīhaṭṭa sub-region, mass Brahmanical settlements were developed by large-scale brāhmaṇas as reflected in the Candra copperplates. For example, the Paschimbhag copperplate of Śrīcandra referred to 400 pāṭakas of land donation in the viśayas of Candrapura, Garalā and Pogāra belonging to the Śrīhaṭṭa-maṇḍala in favor of 6000 brāhmaṇas.⁵⁰ These brāhmaṇas were mentioned with their gotras, pravaras, and learning multiple śākhās of the four Vedic schools (‘nānā-gotra-pravarebhyaḥ/ catuś-caraṇa-nānā-śākh-ādhyāyibhyaḥ’).⁵¹ Furui opined that although no evidence could be found in Samataṭa- Śrīhaṭṭa

⁴³ Sircar, *Studies in the Geography*, p.297.

⁴⁴ Furui, ‘Brāhmaṇas in early medieval Bengal’, p.235.

⁴⁵ Niyogi, *Brahmanic Settlement*, p. 25.

⁴⁶ Furui, *Land and Society*, pp.204-05.

⁴⁷ Vasu, ‘The Manhali Copper-plate’, lines 43-44, p.72.

⁴⁸ Majumdar, ‘Belava Copper-plate’, lines 43-45, p.21.

⁴⁹ Niyogi, *Brahmanic Settlement*, p.32.

⁵⁰ Sircar, ‘Paschimbhag plate’, pp.30-35.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* line 50, p.68.

area regarding the development of distinct Brahmanical centres like that of Varendra and Rāḍha, these land donations to eminent brāhmaṇas indicated towards the making of such centres.⁵²

Ryosuke Furui's study has indicated how some of the learned brāhmaṇas were engaged in ritual services like propitiatory rites ('śāntivārika') to the king. Reference has been made to śāntivārika as evidenced through the two copper plate inscriptions of Gopāla II where both the donee bhāṭṭaputra Līlākara and bhāṭṭaputra Atthakara were incumbent to the said designation. They were attached to śāntigṛha.⁵³ Moreover, bhāṭṭaputra Atthakara was the son of bhāṭṭa purohita Śāntikara, who was a purohita of king Śūrapāla.⁵⁴ The donee Brāhmaṇ Vyāsagaṅgaśarman of Dhulla copperplate of Śrīcandra and the donee Pītavāsaguptaśarman of Rampal copperplate of Śrīcandra were engaged in ritual service like adbhutaśānti and koṭīhoma.⁵⁵ Suchandra Ghosh and Sayantani Pal referred to ritual services like Pañcamahāyajña, which was regularly performed in ordinary households by the esteemed brāhmaṇas to bring peace to the house.⁵⁶ From the 12th century CE, they enhanced their position in the royal court through ritual services. Brāhmaṇas were employed for the ritual performance of mahādānas which was regarded as a symbol of validating the royal power of the ruler. Especially in Varendra and Rāḍha, the brāhmaṇas were rewarded with land plots for their services in ceremonies like kanakatulāpuruṣamahādāna, hemāśvamahādāna etc.⁵⁷ Further, the Tarpandighi copperplate of Lakṣmaṇasena referred to donation as a fee to the donee ācārya Īśvaradevaśarman on account of his service in hemāśvarathamahādāna ceremony.⁵⁸ Sometimes, the grants were treated as remuneration to a brāhmaṇa who was responsible for performing any royal ceremony. In the Govindapur copperplate of Lakṣmaṇasena, the grant was made to upādhyāya Vyāsaedevaśarman during the coronation ceremony ('rājyābhiṣekasamaya') of the king Lakshmanasena.⁵⁹ The Idilpur copperplate of Viśvarūpasena was made to increase the auspicious

⁵² Furui, 'Brāhmaṇas in early medieval Bengal', p.236.

⁵³ Furui, 'Re-Reading two copper-plate Inscriptions', pp.320-21.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* pp.320-21.

⁵⁵ Sircar, 'Dhulla plate', lines 35-36, p.139; Majumdar, 'The Rampal copper-plate', lines 28-29, p.5.

⁵⁶ Ghosh and Pal, 'Everyday life', p.12.

⁵⁷ Majumdar, 'Barrackpur Copper plate', line 41, p.63; N.G. Majumdar, 'Naihati Copperplate', line 52, p.74.

⁵⁸ Majumdar, 'Tarpandighi Copper plate', lines 43-46, p.102.

⁵⁹ Majumdar, 'Govindapur Copper plate', lines 41-46, p.96.

year (śubhavarsha) and for the king's long life.⁶⁰ Śāntyāgārika Kṛṣṇadharadevaśarmman was also rewarded for his service as evidenced in the Sundarban copperplate of Lakṣmaṇasena.⁶¹ Śāntyāgārikas were specialists of śānti rituals.⁶² The Varman grants referred to titles like śāntivārika and śāntyāgārādhikṛta wielded by the brāhamaṇas, which indicate their ritual services.⁶³

Probable groups of literates: scribes, engravers, pustapālas, royal officials, urban elites and rural residents

Apart from the brāhmaṇa composers, there were references to eminent scholars who belonged to the karaṇika-kāyastha and other occupations, integrated into jāti lineages. Initially, they were referred to as scribes or lekhaka of the inscriptions. Chitrarekha Gupta said that the kāyasthas held important administrative positions and were skilled in writing state documents.⁶⁴ For example, Kāyastha Āryyadāsa was referred to as the scribe of the Mahati-Raktamala plate of the Gupta year 159 in Puṇḍravardhana.⁶⁵ The Jayrampur copper plate inscription of Gopacandra pertaining to the sub-region Rāḍha in the 6th century referred to Kāyastha Mānadatta as the writer (likhitam kāyasthamānadatteneti).⁶⁶ The eulogy of Gaya Rock Inscription of Govindapāla in the early 12th century was written (scribe) by Kā (Kāyastha) Jaśīyi and Jayakumāra.⁶⁷ The first reference to their literati status may be made of Sandhyākaranandī during the 11th – 12th century, the author of *Rāmacarita*. His father was appointed to the position of sāndhivigrahika during the Pāla rule. Śrīdharadāsa, the compiler of *Saduktikarṇāmṛta*, was the son of Vaṭudāsa. Vaṭudāsa was the Pratirāja and Mūlamahāsāmanta of the king Lakṣmaṇasena. Vaidyas have also emerged as esteemed composers. Vāji-vaidya Sahadeva composed the beautiful composition of the Gaya Krishnadvarika Temple Inscription of Nayapāla datable to the second half of the tenth century in Daṇḍabhukti of Rāḍha.⁶⁸ Vaidya Vajrapāṇi was the composer of the Gaya Gadadhar Temple Rock Inscription of

⁶⁰ Majumdar, 'Edilpur copper-plate', lines 49-50, p.125.

⁶¹ Majumdar, 'Sundarban Copper Plate', p.171.

⁶² Furui, *Land and Society*, p.203.

⁶³ Bhattasali, 'Samantasar Copper Plate', line 13, p.258; Majumdar, 'Belava Copper-plate', line 45, p.21.

⁶⁴ Gupta, *The Kāyasthas*, p.31.

⁶⁵ Griffiths, 'Conflicting Land Transactions', line 26, p.20.

⁶⁶ Tripathy, 'Jayrampur copper plate', line 50, p.178.

⁶⁷ Sircar, 'Gaya Inscription mentioning Govindapala', line 14, p.238.

⁶⁸ Sircar, 'Inscription of Viśvāditya', line 17, p.86.

Nayapāla.⁶⁹ Vaidya Dharmapāṇi was the composer of the Gaya Fragmentary Inscription of Viśvarūpa or Viśvāditya.⁷⁰

How do we situate these creative litterateurs within the context of the emergent regional literary culture? We may refer to how William V. Haris termed the literatus as ‘cultivated’ and the illiterates as ‘uncultured’.⁷¹ However, perhaps such watertight cultural binaries would fail to bring out the complex nature of cultural negotiations that went behind the creation of the phenomenon of literate tradition at the regional level in our context. The scribes formed an important group of agents in this process. In terms of early medieval Bengal Nupur Dasgupta observed in the light of early inscriptions of Bengal that Sanskrit literacy had emerged among the literate scribes.⁷² Meera Visvanathan’s brilliant study indicates the vibrant emergence of trained scribes or lekhakas as a separate entity with the reference to the early historic period.⁷³ According to her, these lekhakas gradually turned themselves into a jati like kāyastha and became a trained group of professionals. In early medieval Bengal, it is seen that scribes held the position of Kāyasthas or were appointed to important administrative posts. As an example, viṣayādhikaraṇika (district councilor) Śāmbudatta was referred to as the kāraṇika (scribe) of the copperplate inscription of Pradyumnabandhu pertaining to Puṇḍravardhana in between 550-650 CE.⁷⁴ We get another interesting piece of evidence from the Mallasarul copper plate inscription. Here, a Sāndhivigrahika (a Minister of Peace and War) named Bhogaçandra was mentioned as the writer of this text.⁷⁵ The Tipperah copperplate of Lokanātha was documented by sāndhivigrahika Praśāntadeva.⁷⁶ As discussed above, there were several references to kāyasthas as the scribe of the inscriptions. Eventually, these kāyasthas raised themselves into eminent authors. Thus, they were connected as a bridge between the literati and the literates. Not only the scribes but also the engravers and pustapālas (record keeper) has made out their separate identity in this literate world of early medieval Bengal. The pustapālas verified the petition and price of the land following the local custom of the area. Viṣayādhikaraṇika Kṛṣṇadatta

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* line 13, p.88.

⁷⁰ Sircar, ‘Fragmentary Inscription of Viśvarūpa or Viśvāditya’, line 26, p.92.

⁷¹ Haris, *Ancient Literacy*, p. 6.

⁷² Dasgupta, ‘Sanskrit Literature’, p.536.

⁷³ Visvanathan, ‘From the “Lekhaka” to the Kāyastha’, p.34.

⁷⁴ Griffiths, ‘Sale deed of the village Mastakaśvabhra’, line 18, p.30.

⁷⁵ Majumdar, ‘Mallasarul copper plate’, lines 24-25, p.161.

⁷⁶ Basak, ‘Tipperah Copper Plate’, line 55, p.309.

was referred to as the *pustapāla* (record keeper) of the copperplate inscription of Pradyumnabandhu.⁷⁷ The Jayrampur copperplate of Gopacandra was heated by *pustapāla* Bhogadatta.⁷⁸ The Mallasarul copperplate referred to *pustapāla* Jayadāsa as the person assigned to heat the copperplate ('*dūtakaḥ Śubhadatto likhitaṁ sāndhivigrahika Bhogacandreṇa tāpitāṁ pustapāla Jayadāseṇa*').⁷⁹ Although the reference to *Pustapālas* became obscure in the later inscriptions, the engravers grew up as renowned and officially acknowledged artisans from the Pāla period, especially during the time of the Senas. Some renowned and officially acknowledged artisans were involved in engraving the inscriptions as revealed through the text. For example, the eulogistic account of Guravamiśra of the Badal Rock Pillar Inscription was inscribed by *sūtradhāra* Viṣṇubhadra, the Bhaturia Rock Inscription of Rājyapāla was engraved by the artisan Śrīnidhāna, etc.⁸⁰ In the Pāla period, many artisans who worked as engravers, hailed from Poṣalīgrāma situated within the Bardhaman district during the reign of Mahīpāla I and Vīgrahapāla III. The Bangarh Copper Plate of Mahīpāla I was incised by the artisan Mahīdhara, an inhabitant of Poṣalī.⁸¹ The engraver of the Biyala Copperplate Inscription of Mahīpāla I, artisan Dāmāditya, had emerged from Poṣalīgrāma.⁸² Again, the engraver of the Amgachi Copper Plate of Vīgrahapāla III was Śaśideva, an inhabitant of Poṣalī.⁸³ This Śaśideva of Poṣalīgrāma has also been mentioned as an engraver in the Bangaon Copper Plate of Vīgrahapāla III.⁸⁴ This Poṣalīgrāma was identified with modern Poshela near Mangalkot in Bardhaman district.⁸⁵ This was a centre of artisans with special skills and literacy.⁸⁶ There are some examples of engravers from Samatāṭa who have worked on the Pāla inscriptions in a hereditary manner and formed their lineal identity. Such as Maṅghadāsa and Vimaladāsa, the engravers of Bhagalpur and Jajilpara copperplates, were father and son.⁸⁷ We also have the example of engravers like Dakkadāsa from Samatāṭa who had worked in various

⁷⁷ Griffiths, 'Sale deed of the village Mastakaśvabhra', line 18, p.30.

⁷⁸ Tripathy, 'Jayrampur copper plate', line 50, p.178.

⁷⁹ Majumdar, "Mallasarul Copper-plate", lines 24-25, p.161.

⁸⁰ Sircar, 'Bhaturiya Inscription', line 20, p.154.

⁸¹ Banerji, 'The Bangarh Grant', line 62, p.328.

⁸² Furui, 'Biyala Copper plate', lines 55-56, p.105.

⁸³ Banerji, 'The Amgachi Grant', line 49, p.298.

⁸⁴ Sircar, 'Bangaon Plate', p.51.

⁸⁵ Furui, 'Social Life', p.59.

⁸⁶ Furui, *Land and Society*, p.167.

⁸⁷ Furui, 'Social Life', p.59.

inscriptions like Mirzapur plate of Śūrapāla and Nimdighi stone inscription of Pāhila.⁸⁸ They share the name ending dāsa. These engravers from Samataṭa worked in a wide geographical region in Varendra stretching from the present Rajshahi district of Bangladesh to eastern Bihar.⁸⁹ In the Deopara praśati of Vijayasena, engraver rāṇaka Śūlapāṇi has been mentioned as the crest jewel of the śilpīgoṣṭhī of Varendra.

The role of the messenger was vital in making an inscription. Usually, in the case of these land deeds, the royal officials or high-ranking councilors can be seen as an envoy of the text. For example, Laksmīnātha, the son of Lokanātha was the dūtaka of the Tipperah copperplate.⁹⁰ Kailan copperplate also referred to yuvarāja śrī Baladhāraṇarāta as the dūtaka.⁹¹ The Devaparvata copperplate inscription witnessed the land grant of Bhavadeva made through the dūtaka, the chief mahāsāmantādhipati Nandadhara.⁹² The dūtaka of Khalimpur copperplate was Yuvaraja Tribhuvanapāla.⁹³ Once again, the Nalanda Copperplate of Devapāla referred to the ruler of Vyāghrataṭī-maṇḍala, Balavarmmā as the messenger of the charter.⁹⁴ The royal messenger of Jagjibanpur Copper Plate of Mahendrapāla was Śūrapāla.⁹⁵ The Bangaon Copper Plate of Vighrapāla III referred to the dūtaka mantrin Prahasitarāja, described as the son of the king.⁹⁶ Likewise, sāndhivighraṭika Bhīmadeva was the messenger of the Rajibpur copperplate inscription of Gopāla IV and Madanapāla.⁹⁷ Among the officials, sāndhivighraṭika sometimes acted as a royal messenger of the grant as evidenced in the Govindapur copper plate of Lakṣmaṇasena. Here the sāndhivighraṭika Nārāyaṇadatta acted as a dūta.⁹⁸ In the Rajvadi copper plate of Lakṣmaṇasena, the dūta of the grant was Śaṅkaradhara, the Gauḍa-mahāsāndhivighraṭika.⁹⁹

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* p.59.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* p.59.

⁹⁰ Basak, 'Tipperah Copper Plate', line 17, p.307.

⁹¹ Law, 'The Kailan Copper plate', line 17, p.238.

⁹² Sircar, 'Copper-plate Inscription of Bhavadeva Abhinavamṛgāṅka', p.744.

⁹³ Kielhorn, 'Khalimpur Plate', line 49, p.250.

⁹⁴ Majumdar, 'Nalanda Copper Plate', line 51, p.22.

⁹⁵ Ramesh and Iyer, 'The Jagjivanpur Copper plate', line 54, p.22.

⁹⁶ Sircar, 'Bangaon Plate', lines 47-49, p.57.

⁹⁷ Furui, 'Rajibpur Copper-plate', lines 62-63, p.45.

⁹⁸ Majumdar, 'Govindapur Copper plate', lines 52-53, p.97.

⁹⁹ Randle, 'India office plate', p.3.

Naturally, the social classes mentioned above played an active role in the formation of the inscriptions. Now it is through the inscriptions that we also get to know the audience for whom they were written. Barbara Stoler Miller can be mentioned in this context who said, the audience, cultivated in a rich, refined language like Sanskrit, was undoubtedly limited.¹⁰⁰ Now the question is who were the readers of these Sanskrit inscriptions in early medieval Bengal and to what extent were they able to read them? In this context, it can be said that the way in which Furui classified the addressees based on the inscriptions illustrates a stratification of this literacy. Providing those terms, the first category can be identified as the royal officials and subordinate rulers. They can be included into this literate category. The royal functionaries were referred to as the first category of addressees in the copperplates of Pālas, Candras, Varmans and Senas pertaining to the areas of Puṇḍra, Vaṅga, Rāḍha, Samataṭa. An elaborate list of royal functionaries was obtainable in these inscriptions as dependents of the king ('rājapādopajīvin') or the dependents of the royal favor ('rājapādaprasādoopajīvin').¹⁰¹ Among the subordinate rulers, an instance of Yasodāsa as a possible composer of the Bhaturia inscription, who had been appointed as a mantrin and then promoted to tantrādhikārin under king Rājyapāla, can be found. According to this inscription, Yaśodāsa was a member of a non-brāhmaṇa literate family, who were hereditarily in the service of the Pāla kings.¹⁰²

Meera Visvanathan said, 'literacy is a product of urban society'.¹⁰³ In early medieval Bengal, during the 5th-6th century CE urban elite classes like śreṣṭhīn, sārthavāha, prathamakulika and prathamakāyastha were influential people in the urban sector in Puṇḍravardhana who dealt with the matters of rural areas as administrative agents. Later, kulikas and kāyasthas became the only explicit members of the urban sector. Suchandra Ghosh and Sayantani Pal illuminated the life of elite and non-elite groups. This article reflects with the reference to nāgaraka, how the urban elite people had an advanced level of intellect and had an inclination to share their thoughts with each other.¹⁰⁴

During the 6th-8th century CE, landholders like kuṭumbins have been mentioned as influential rural residents in the subregions like Puṇḍravardhana, Vaṅga, Rāḍha etc. Later from the 6th century CE

¹⁰⁰ Miller, 'Microcosmos of a complex world', p.163.

¹⁰¹ Furui, *Land and society*, p.133.

¹⁰² Sircar, 'Bhaturiya Inscription', pp.150-54.

¹⁰³ Visvanathan, *Writing, Gifting and Identities*, p.69.

¹⁰⁴ Ghosh and Pal, 'Everyday Life', p.14.

onwards, the kuṭumbins were replaced by mahattaras. The mahattaras became mahattamas from the Pāla period. As influential landholders, they formed a bridge between the literates and non-literates. Rural residents like jyeṣṭhakāyastha, mahāmahattara, mahattara, dāśagrāmikas, karaṇas etc have been referred to as addressees in Varendra, as is evidenced by the Khalimpur copperplate of Dharmapāla.¹⁰⁵ In the inscriptions of Pālas and Candras, brāhmaṇas were referred to as the foremost member of rural residents. In the Candra grants related to the sub-regions of Vaṅga, Samatata and Śrīhaṭṭa, janapadas have been mentioned as the rural residents to whom the inscriptions were addressed. The janapadas constituted scribes, artisans and musicians as referred to in the Paschimbhag copperplate of Śrīcandra.¹⁰⁶ In Varman and Sena grants, rural residents like brāhmaṇas and brāhmaṇottaras (highly qualified brāhmaṇas) were mentioned as addressees. They created their own literate sphere during the early medieval period in Bengal and formed a link between each category.

There was another social class that got included into this category. They were the Kaivartas. They came up as another essential social group during the Pāla realm. Initially, they were referred to as one of the lowest categories of rural residents along with medas, andhras and caṇḍālas in a copperplate inscription of Gopāla II.¹⁰⁷ They held the profession of fishing. Gradually, they upgraded themselves to the landholding class. Furui stated that lands have been given to them for their subsistence or as a reward for some service.¹⁰⁸ During the Pāla reign, they were especially noticed for the sake of political affairs. They were getting involved in the administration. It is assumed by Abdul Momin Chowdhury that Yaśodāsa of the Bhaturiya stone inscription belonged to Cāṣī Kaivarta class and was raised to the position of a subordinate ruler.¹⁰⁹ Finally, the kaivartas led a joint revolt of the sāmantas against the Pālas and removed them from power for a certain period. Even after the rebellion, their presence as a social group and landholder was maintained. During the 11th-12th century, Kaivartas were regarded as Kevaṭṭa in Bengal. Niharranjan Ray

¹⁰⁵ Kielhorn, 'Khalimpur Plate', line 43, pp.253-54.

¹⁰⁶ Sircar, 'Paschimbhag plate', lines 38-47, pp.67-68.

¹⁰⁷ Furui, 'Re-Reading two copper-plate Inscriptions', line 36, p.325.

¹⁰⁸ Furui, *Land and Society*, p.154.

¹⁰⁹ Chowdhury, 'Pāla realm', p.740.

observed that some of them have even got engaged in Sanskrit literary studies, and poetry compositions and got incorporated into the Brahmanical culture and religion.¹¹⁰

The peripheries of literate society: Medas, andhrakas and caṇḍālas

Meera Visvanathan has pointed to the existence of ‘different communities of response to interpreting the same text in different ways.’¹¹¹ It is in this context that the mention of certain social classes in the inscriptions gives us the possibility to assume a non-literate class in Bengal during the early medieval period. The copperplates of early medieval Bengal, in the Pāla period, have been addressed to rural residents of whom brāhmaṇas were foremost, headed by mahattamas and kuṭumbins reaching to some lowest strata of the society like medas, andhrakas and caṇḍālas. In Varendra and Magadha, medas, andhrakas, and caṇḍālas denoted social groups during the Pāla period. They were placed at the bottom of society and were kept out of the village as mentioned by Ryosuke Furui.¹¹²

In the Candra grants, general cultivators (‘kṣetrakara’) were included in the list of the addressee. The Mainamati copperplate of Laḍahacandra referred to Rural residents like supakāra (cook), vardhaki (carpenter) and kaṃsāra (brazier) in Samataṭa during the 11th century CE.¹¹³ In the 10th century, during the rule of the Kāambojas in Daṇḍabhukti, Rāḍha, the rural residents, for example, the vyavahārins accompanied by karaṇas and cultivators accompanied by residents were referred to as addressee in the Irda copperplate of Nayapāla.¹¹⁴ Landholders like kārada and bhārada have been mentioned in the metal vase inscription of rājādhirāja Attākaradeva pertaining to Harikela.¹¹⁵ The Varman and Sena grants also mentioned addresses like janapadas, kṣetrakaras as rural residents. There are some social classes among which the chances of literacy were very low like the kṣetrakaras, medas, andhras, caṇḍālas and various other artisanal classes. They have been mentioned as a category of the addressee in the inscriptions. In this case, we can rely on the information provided by Ryosuke Furui to shed light on the needs of these lower-class people in

¹¹⁰ Ray, *Bangalir Itihas*, p.229.

¹¹¹ Visvanathan, *Writing, Gifting and Identities*, p.90.

¹¹² Furui, *Land and Society*, p.136.

¹¹³ Sircar, ‘Mainamati Copper Plate Inscription of Laḍahacandra, year 6 (no.1)’, lines 38-39, p.73; Sircar, ‘Mainamati Copper Plate Inscription of Laḍahacandra, year 6 (no.2)’, lines 10, p.75.

¹¹⁴ Majumdar, ‘Irda copperplate’, lines 20-22, p.155.

¹¹⁵ Bhattacharya, ‘An Inscribed Metal Vase’, line 14, p.335.

society. According to Furui, in Varendra, in the field of agrarian expansion, they served the need of agrarian laborers during the reign of the Pālas.¹¹⁶ In Samatāṭa-Śrīhaṭṭa area also, kṣetrakaras served the need of agrarian laborers during the reign of the Candras. This scenario was the same during the Varman and Sena times. But the question here is, how are they addressed and if so, how could they be aware of the content of the inscriptions in terms of their limited literacy? In this context, we can cite a verse from Vijayasena's Deopara inscription where women of urban descent used to identify village women with various precious gems with their familiar objects. Like pearls with seeds of cotton, emeralds with leaves of śākhā, silver coins with bottle gourd flowers, gold with the blooming flowers of the creepers of pumpkin-gourd etc. ('muktāḥ karpāsavījairmarkataśakalāṃ śākapatralālvū puṣpai rūpyāṇi ratnaṃ pariṇatibhiduraiḥ kukṣibhirdādimānām kuṣmāṇḍivallarīnām bikasitakusumaiḥ kāñcanaṃ nāgarībhiḥ śikṣyante jatprasādādvahuvibhavajuṣām joṣitoḥ śrotrijāṇām').¹¹⁷ Kunal Chakrabarti suggests that various professional narrators retold the puranic myths and legends in vernacular so that the native people can understand them whereas they were written by brāhamaṇa authors in incomprehensible Sanskrit language and were intended for the local clientele.¹¹⁸ In an all-India context, Meera Visvanathan showed in the light of early historical evidence during 300 BCE- 250 CE, how in a time of limited literacy, the common man was made aware of a written culture through an oral propagation.¹¹⁹ To take an example from a context historically widely different but culturally resonating with the process we are discussing here, we may refer to an observation made with regard to a similar phenomenon from the late Roman empire (CE 337 to CE 425). Averil Cameron and Peter Garnsey's work in this historical context brings out the seminal significance of oral communication as a mode of dissemination of literary culture, creating a bridge between the literate and the non-literate.¹²⁰ It may be surmised that in the early medieval period there was a similar tendency in Bengal. Here, too, the locals became aware of this literary culture in the vernacular or through oral dissemination or visual display. As stated in the inscriptions, the

¹¹⁶ Furui, *Land and Society*, p.153.

¹¹⁷ Majumdar, 'Deopara Inscription', verse 23, p.48.

¹¹⁸ Chakrabarti, *Religious Process*, p.26.

¹¹⁹ Visvanathan, *Writing, Gifting and Identities*, pp.90-91.

¹²⁰ Cameron and Garnsey, *The Cambridge Ancient History*, p.704.

designation of the messenger ('dūtaka') had a special significance in this case. The presence of this term in inscriptions proves that professionals were hired to transmit its content.

The political-economic and cultural context of the efflorescence of literary & literate culture

Overall, the historical sources reveal a complex and layered social structure to have emerged which hosted the foundations of the literate society composed of various levels of intellectuals, ordinary knowledgeable persons and also non-literates. In order to be nurtured, this society must have had strong patronage. Was the society impacted by a courtly culture or any culture that was predominated by an elitist environment? Here, our surmises may be guided by the theoretical frames offered by scholars like Sheldon Pollock, Daud Ali and Jesse Ross Knutson to some extent. According to Pollock, Sanskrit was the appropriate vehicle for expressing royal will. 'Sanskrit gave voice to imperial politics not as an actual, material force but as an aesthetic practice, and it was especially this poetry of politics that gave presence to the Sanskrit cosmopolis'.¹²¹ Daud Ali said the spread of courtly ethos through the royal praśastis was partly facilitated by the rise of Sanskrit as a lingua franca for royal courts.¹²² Can its reflection be seen in early medieval Bengal? Is there such a strong courtly influence reflected in the inscriptions and literature? Do these also reflect a powerful court culture in Bengal? Daud Ali has talked about the aura and affective circuit of courtly culture and aesthetics and talked about refinement and demonstrations of rasa or emotive elements as illuminated through the 'inscriptional kāvya'. He observed how the 'inscriptional kāvya' points to the existence of an 'interpretive community' or a 'literary public' and how they were produced and sustained through the court culture.¹²³ By following these approaches, we can see how this royal or political influence existed or how strong it was in early medieval Bengal. It is also to be noted whether this political influence is reflected only from the poetry or praśasti part of the inscriptions, or is the prose part equally important in this case. In fact, there is no doubt that the prose section bore the heavy mark of the state authority, whether regional or sub-regional since it related to the crux of the land charters which emanated from the necessity of land administration, which was the very basis of state operations.

¹²¹ Pollock, 'The Cosmopolitan Vernacular', p.15.

¹²² Ali, *Courtly Culture*, p.80.

¹²³ *Ibid.* pp. 18-19.

Early medieval Bengal's rich inscriptions and literature hinted toward a potential elitist cultural influence irrespective of its association with rural society or the royal court. The central figure of this cultural tone, however, was inevitably the king. The king became the main protagonists of the entire poetic world. As Knutson said, 'Poetry creates him and he becomes a poetic being, beyond rationality'.¹²⁴ Poetry is enriched by the glory of the king. Thus, whether the poetic orb in early medieval Bengal reflected the spark of a king-centered, elitist-courtly arena through the numerous rich inscriptions and literature, is, therefore, the main argument here. Of particular importance is how this royal majesty or the subtleties of the royal court are illumined, especially through the inscriptions. Not only the poetic portion, but it is also through the prose portion of the copperplate inscriptions that the real political impact is reflected. The prose part of the copperplate inscriptions generally describes the donative portion and reflects the authoritarian power behind the land valuation. From the middle of the 6th century, in Vaṅga, Rāḍha and Puṇḍravardhana, this administrative impact was restricted purely to the rural society only. The local influential people and landed magnets of the rural society were dominating at that time. Gradually this rural political impact took the shape of a monarchical form. This has been reflected from the beginning of the 7th century CE, especially in the royal issues of the Pālas during the 9th-11th century or the royal documents of the Candras in the 10th-11th centuries. It has further enhanced in the time of Varmans in the 12th century and reached the apotheosis during the Senas in the 12th-13th century CE. Reference to 'rājapādopajīvin' (dependents of the king) or 'rājapādaprasādoopajīvin' (the dependents of the royal favor) in the copperplates of Pālas, Candras, Varmans, and Senas indicated the royal dominance. Jesse Ross Knutson chose to study the profound learning of high literature at the court of king Lakṣmaṇasena of Bengal at the end of the twelfth to the thirteenth century CE. Knutson observed Sena literature as a reflection of political poetic. They dealt with the king's military valor, spiritual exercise, and virtues. The same applies to the members of the royal family as well. We shall briefly trace through the literary devices that illuminate the courtly aura in our sources and discuss the indications of such manifestations of 'inscriptional kāvya'.

According to Daud Ali, alaṅkāra was the language of ornament, through which the concepts of beauty were reflected in an individual's appearance and speech at court and in his or her

¹²⁴ Knutson, 'The Political Poetic', p.381.

surroundings to some extent.¹²⁵ For this reason, he thinks praise in the alamkṛta language was the source of valor and fame at the court. These alamkāras were expressed through royal magnification, praiseworthy idioms, and exaggerated words. Some glimpses of this royal glorification and flattering expressions were first found in the Rāḍha region during the reign of Śaśāṅka. Śaśāṅka's rule marked the emergence of monarchical rule in Bengal. His reign hints at a radiant royal majesty that is evident, albeit somewhat in his inscriptions, in particular in his Medinipur copperplates. The overemphasized literary expressions hinted toward his royal majesty. The Nidhanpur copperplate of Bhāskarvarman during the 7th century CE was considered one of the richest illustrations of royal glorification in early medieval Bengal. This lengthy inscription provided a narration of detailed Varman lineage and each of the kings has been glorified here in fancy expressions. They were endowed with innumerable virtues and immense power. The main protagonist of this text Bhāskarvarman, had been praised in aesthetic expressions emphasizing his personalized and martial virtues. In the seventh to eighth centuries, some small dynasties in southeastern Bengal like Nāthas and Rātas issued copperplates for self-proclamation and for the legitimacy of their rule. Reference to their bravery and strength has come up in the context of Lokanātha and ŚṛidhāraṇaRāta. The Khaḍgas and Devas of Samataṭa also possessed similar multitudinous qualities as reflected in the ornate expressions used in their inscriptions. Gradually with the rise of powerful and expansive monarchical dynasties like the Pālas from the second half of the eighth century CE and with the increasing royal control, a balanced, monarchical structure of state power got evident. The beautiful ornate inscriptions of their rule bear witness to this. The Khalimpur copperplate of Dharmapāla carries the first testimony to this. Here the immense power possessed by Dharmapāla, the protagonist of this text, is evident from the alamkṛta expressions used here. The Bengal inscriptions thus entered the arena of courtly classicism under the early Pālas ruler and matured into a style in the Pāla- Candra phase. Eventually, the Sena period witnessed the apotheosis of this cultural development around the end of the 11th century CE. This is the period when Sanskrit poetry reached a profound level of aesthetic expression.

The glory of the royal palace was an emblem of the courtly world. The Nidhanpur copperplate of the 7th century CE referred to the royal residence of Karṇasuvarna, which was possessed of splendid ships, elephants, horses and foot soldiers. The existence of pleasure houses inside the

¹²⁵ Ali, *Courtly Culture*, p.176.

royal palace is evidenced in the Jagjivanpur copperplate of Mahendrapāla during the 9th century CE. Terms like ‘vilāsa bhavanam’, ‘bhavanāṅgana lilāyeva’ referred to the same.¹²⁶ In *Rāmacarita*, the city Varendrī was praised in alaṅkṛta verses. It was decorated with houses and lines of furrows.¹²⁷ Varendrī was considered a land of virtues and purity. Rāmapāla built the city of Rāmāvātī, which was resonant with the music of tabor of many varieties that were especially practiced in Varendrī and pervaded by scholars who were devoted to truth.¹²⁸ The palace of Rāmāvātī was grandeur because of the ornaments set with diamonds, lapis lazuli, pearls, emeralds, rubies and sapphires, charming necklaces with central gems and many other articles made of gold with fine artistic designs.¹²⁹

According to Daud Ali, the concept of service and devotion formed the structure of verbal expressions and actions in the court. It is in this context that reference can be made to the Munger copperplate of Devapāla where the term ‘bhṛtyānām’ hinted at the presence of servants under the royal power.¹³⁰ It would ultimately instill a sense of etiquette and decency between individuals. The interior environment and nature of the then royal court are reflected in these inscriptions. A reference to a seraglio in the court of Sāmalvarmadeva during the Varman period was reflected in the Belava copperplate of Bhojavarman.¹³¹

The importance of the Brahmanical śāstric procedures in the circuit of the royal court is expressed through these inscriptions. The Badal Pillar inscription of Guravamiśra in the 9th century CE under the Pāla reign referred to the attendance of scholarly councils (‘vidvatsabhāsu’), among whom a regular practice of the Śāstras was prevalent.¹³² *Rāmacarita* referred to the king's discussion of political affairs with the ministers and princes which was an important part of a royal meeting.¹³³ The demand for paṇḍit brāhmaṇas in the court and the presence of a learning environment was evident in the Bhubaneswar Praśasti of Bhaṭṭabhadra. Cultural accomplishments and enjoyment of aesthetics and eloquence appear to have become a part of courtly life. Besides regular

¹²⁶ Ramesh and Iyer, ‘The Jagjivanpur Copper plate’, verses 5,6, p.19.

¹²⁷ Sastri, ‘Rāmacarita’, cantos I, verse 38, p.26.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.* cantos III, verse 29, p.71.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.* cantos III, verses 33-34, p.73.

¹³⁰ Barnett, ‘The Mungir plate’, verse 7, p.305.

¹³¹ Majumdar, ‘Belava Copper-plate’, verse 12, p.20.

¹³² Kielhorn, ‘Badal Pillar Inscription’, verse 22, p.164.

¹³³ Sastri, ‘Rāmacarita’, cantos I, verse 42, p.28.

practice of siddhānta, dharmasāstra, arthasāstra, mīmāṃsā, Vedic sūtras, special knowledge like tantra, gaṇita and medical sciences were also prevalent in the court. This inscription mentions the pleasant cultural atmosphere of listening, reciting and singing in the court. Most of all, Bhaṭṭabhavadēva's Bhubanesvar Praśasti projects how the free expressions of erotica in literary form might have found a place in this atmosphere. The theme of strong love and embrace comes up in the opening verses of this praśasti. The Deopara inscription portrays a similar treatment of eroticism referring to the moment of confluence between Śiva- Pārvati.¹³⁴ Few works of literature of the Sena period, for example, the *Āryāsaptaśatī*, *Gītagovinda*, etc. have also portrayed the same literary tone of erotica. The *Āryāsaptaśatī* mainly dealt with erotic love or sentiments as stated in the concerned verses of the text.¹³⁵ On the other hand, the verses of *Gītagovinda* are considered simple love chants composed in a classical mode.¹³⁶

The economic base and urban-rural contexts

Thus, we see that the emergent literary culture of early medieval Bengal, whether in texts or inscriptions, had been nurtured largely in the orbit of the royal courts, whether of the paramount kings of important dynasties or those of the subregional or subordinate rulers. Rene Wellek and Austin Warren have projected in their *Theory of Literature* that any literature in order to flourish must have an economic basis and was entangled with its patron upon which it is dependent financially.¹³⁷ Royal eulogies and references to political grandeur in the praśastis of early medieval Bengal indicate the overwhelming source of patronage and direction of loyalty. We may also refer to Meera Visvanathan, according to whom literacy is one of the necessities of urban life.¹³⁸ Now looking at the fact that most of the inscripational kāvya from early medieval Bengal derived from royal patrons, can we then assume the economic base for this literary efflorescence to be urban? One may assume that the royal political powers in early medieval Bengal in their heydays were based in urban centres. B.D.Chattopadhyaya had pointed out how the early historic urban centres in Varendrī continued to flourish in the early medieval times and how at least Mangalkot in Rāḍha may be looked upon as another important urban node. These urban centres served as centres of

¹³⁴ Majumdar, 'Deopara Inscription', verse 1, p.46.

¹³⁵ Chakraborty, *Āryāsaptaśatī o Gauḍabaṅga*.

¹³⁶ Miller, *Jayadeva's Gitagovinda*.

¹³⁷ Wellek and Warren, *Theory of Literature*, p.95.

¹³⁸ Visvanathan, *Writing, Gifting and Identities*, p.69.

political power.¹³⁹ So, can we hold the economic basis of this literary culture to have been urban-centric? How strong was this base in the case of early medieval Bengal? Bengal in the early medieval period was indeed supported profoundly by clusters of rural settlements. Referring to Karṇasuvarṇa, Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya has said that it was the epicenter of peasant settlements, mainly represented by Brahmanical settlements which indicated surplus agrarian production.¹⁴⁰ This is true of all subregions of Bengal in our period. The expansion of the urban centers of early medieval Bengal was thus founded on this rural production economy. B.D. Chattopadhyay observed some nodal urban centres in different sub-regions of Bengal surviving in the early medieval period. Among them, two were located in the Varendra or Puṇḍravardhana. They were Mahasthan (Bogra district, Bangladesh), located on the right bank of Karatoya and Bangarh (south Dinajpur district), on the left bank of Punarbhava.¹⁴¹ Among them, Bangarh was referred to as Koṭivarṣaviṣaya in the Gupta inscriptions. Evidence that it was an urban center can be found here through Adhiṣṭhānādihikaraṇa of Koṭivarṣaviṣaya which constituted urban influential members like an eminent merchant (‘Śreṣṭhīn’), caravan trader (‘Sārthavāha’), chief artisan (‘Prathamakulika’), and chief scribe (‘Prathamakāyastha’). Sheena Panja accepted this site as an important settlement and a significant administrative centre because many inscriptions of the Pāla period have been obtained here including the Bangarh grant of Mahipāla I, Bangarh Stone Inscription of Nayapāla, Rajibpur Copperplate Inscription of Madanapāla etc.¹⁴² Both the urban centres had successive cultural phases since the post-Gupta times and both of them had reached a prosperous level during the Pāla period. Besides, cities like Rāmāvati have been mentioned in Sandhyākaranandī’s *Rāmācarita*. Flourishing agricultural settlements in this sub-region pointed to the emergence of these urban centres. Ryosuke Furui indicated agrarian expansion in the area of Puṇḍravardhana.¹⁴³ Agriculture in this area in riverine lowland with clustering of settlements is evidenced by the Copperplate inscription of Pradyumnabandhu where the clustering of 14 rural settlements is

¹³⁹ Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya, *Studying Early India: Archaeology, Texts and Historical Issues*, (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003), pp.85 – 86.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.* p.88.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.* p.69.

¹⁴² Sheena Panja, ‘Jagjivanpur and Bangarh: Northern West Bengal’, in *The History of Bangladesh: Early Bengal in Regional Perspectives (up to c.1200 CE)*, eds. Abdul Momin Chowdhury and Ranabir Chakravarti, Vol.I., (Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh,2018), p.222.

¹⁴³ Furui, *Land and Society*, p.105.

mentioned.¹⁴⁴ Furui observed an extensive agrarian development and commercialization of the rural economy during the 9th-11th century in the areas of Varendra.¹⁴⁵ Agriculture in riverine low land enabled the process of implementing some artificial water bodies by local magnets as evidenced by the Khalimpur copperplate, Indian Museum copperplate etc.¹⁴⁶ This expanded agriculture led to the flourishing of urban centres which can be supported by the observation of B.D.Chattopadhyaya. He showed the heightened structural activity in Mahasthan or Pundranagara during the Pala period from 8th/9th- 11th/12th century.¹⁴⁷ The situation was similar in the case of Bangarh or kotivarsa visaya. Furui observed the expansion of rural markets ('haṭṭa') and implementation of monetary transactions through currency units like purāṇa, paṇa and gaṇḍa in the process of rural commercialization.¹⁴⁸ Comparatively, during the 12th-13th century, Varendra witnessed a limitable expansion of agriculture due to the process of kaivarta revolution and their immediate recovery after it. This resulted in the restricted enrichment of urban centres in Varendra during that phase. B.D. Chattopadhyaya observed sustainable development of urban centres in Rāḍha sub-region. Among them, the first was Karṇasuvārṇa, excavated on the right bank of Bhagirathi in the Murshidabad district.¹⁴⁹ This developed as an important political centre in the post-Gupta period under the rule of Śaśāṅka. Karṇasuvārṇa later became identified as the archaeological site Rajbadidanga, situated on the west side of the river Bhagirathi.¹⁵⁰ The urban settlement of Mangalkot, excavated at the confluence of the Kunur and Ajay, in the Burdwan district was a prominent node in Radha.¹⁵¹ Agricultural settlements in this area during the 6th-8th century accelerated the emergence of urban centres there. Ryosuke Furui noticed the clustering of settlements in elevated lowlands and forest tracts under the sub-region of Rāḍha through agrahāra establishments.¹⁵² Centres like Vikramapura and Devaparvata in Vaṅga- Samataṭa sub-region may have had some urban propensity as they were mentioned as jayaskandhāvāra in several inscriptions

¹⁴⁴ Griffiths, 'Sale deed of the village Mastakaśvabhra', lines 4-10, p.19.

¹⁴⁵ Furui, *Land and Society*, p.153.

¹⁴⁶ *viṭakāli* Kielhorn, 'Khalimpur Plate', line 33, 249; *rahayyādityapuṣkariny* Ryosuke Furui, "Indian Museum Copperplate Inscription of Dharmapāla, year 26: Tentative Reading and Study", *South Asian Studies* 27, no.2, 2011, line 31, p.153.

¹⁴⁷ Chattopadhyaya, *Studying Early India*, p.74.

¹⁴⁸ Furui, *Land and Society*, p.154-55.

¹⁴⁹ Chattopadhyaya, *Studying Early India*, p.80.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.* p.88.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.* p.88.

¹⁵² Furui, *Land and Society*, pp.103-04.

of the Candra, Varman and Sena rulers during 10th to 13th century.¹⁵³ It was primarily the agricultural economy which had facilitated not only the rise of urban administrative centres but also provided the economic base for the polities at all levels and zones.

The rural scenario:

In the early medieval period in Bengal, urban centers were formed centering on the developed agro-based settlements in very few places. These urban centers developed as significant political centers in the early medieval period. Of course, it has to do with court patronage, the glory of which is reflected in the inscriptions as the medium of this literary culture. This raises the question: was the rich cultural perspective of Bengal an emblem of an urban culture despite the absence of any significant urban center and archeological evidence? Although there are references to royal expressions in inscriptions and literature, it is noteworthy that the courtly reflection in Bengal was not so strong that it could patronize this rich literary culture and the society formed around it. The court culture that characterizes the structure of urban elitist society was less influential here. This is because Bengal was based on rural society from the very beginning. The rural influence was dominating here. Agriculture was their economic basis. Land was their main recourse. This was clearly reflected in the prose portions of the copperplate inscriptions of early medieval Bengal from the very beginning. The various power relations in the society would change and amplify around the land assessment process. Although this land evaluation process varies according to different sub-regions, the associated power relations also underwent proportional variation. This process of land assessment from the Gupta period clearly illustrates the various power relations of rural society, whose identity is found in the numerous copperplates of that time. In Puṇḍravardhana, the annexation of khilakṣetra (uncultivated wasteland to be converted in cultivable fallow land) and vāstu (uncultivated waste land to be converted in homestead land) into the agricultural circle gave rise to the kuṭumbins as the dominant section of landholding class. From the middle of the 6th century, in Vaṅga, Rāḍha and Puṇḍravardhana various kinds of lands like low lands, riverine tracts, wild forest tracts etc. had been incorporated into the agrarian sector. This created the possibility of consolidating a large labor force, which resulted in the

¹⁵³ Chattopadhyaya, *Studying Early India*, p.87; Sufi Mostafizur Rahman, et al, “Vikrampur”, in *The History of Bangladesh: Early Bengal in Regional Perspectives (up to c.1200 CE)*, eds. Abdul Momin Chowdhury and Ranabir Chakravarti, Vol.I., (Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh,2018), p.441.

domination of the landed magnets in the rural society like the mahattaras and brāhmaṇas. The mahattaras gradually replaced the kuṭumbins and further to that they had a stratified entity among them. They collaborated with the local body of administration or adhikaraṇa. The urban elite groups like kāyasthas, kulikas constituted the adhikaraṇas. The state, although the superior authority, was, however, less visible in terms of land-related issues then. During the rule of Śaśāṅka in the seventh century, pertaining to Rāḍha, these landed magnets had mainly played the role of the petitioner under the dominance of the state. Whereas in Samataṭa, agricultural development in riverine tracts from the 5th century C.E. gave rise to individual and collective landholdings by different professional groups. From the seventh century CE onwards, in the areas of Śrīhaṭṭa and Samataṭa, during the reign of semi-independent kingdoms like Rātas and Nāthas and independent rulers like Bhāskarvarman, Khaḍgas and Devas, large forest tracts, unreclaimed lands had been donated to a large number of brāhmaṇas by the subordinate rulers. The sub-region of Harikela during the 8th century CE, attested to the appearance of different landholders which include a mahāpradhāna, brāhmaṇas, artisanal groups, vihāra etc. These local dominants or local chieftains hereditarily enhanced their position into sāmantas, as reflected through several rock and pillar inscriptions issued by subordinate rulers. The increasing influence of the subordinate rulers over the rural society in the case of land transactions can be noticed during the Pāla phase, pertaining to the areas of Varendra, Rāḍha and eastern Vihara in the 9th century CE. With the emergence of a wide-ranged monarchical rule in Bengal like the Pālas and Candras, the nature of overlordship transformed into absolute state domination. From the 10th century CE onwards throughout the Bengal, during the rule of Pālas, Candras and Kāmbojas, the enhanced state control over the rural society were apparent through the nexus of land donations to highly qualified brāhmaṇas by the king himself, although Harikela at the same time evidenced some individual landholdings. This process of enlarged state control was further enhanced during the reign of Varman and especially of Senas. The king became the superior being. The brāhmaṇas, under the patronage of these dynasties, especially of the Senas, turned out to be the most important section of the state and society. By donating lands to highly qualified brāhmaṇas under royal patronization, the state enhanced its network all over the society. The strong inclination towards Brahmanical tradition led to social and cultural reorientation. Thus, the establishment of a full-fledged monarchical authority started predominating in the backdrop of a rural society-centric administrative sphere.

Although as an official poetic representation, these inscriptions and literature certainly have some limitations in describing these local sensibilities; the rural milieu has been illuminated through poetic expressions of some inscriptions and literature of the time. The Khalimpur copperplate of Dharmapāla delineated the picture of a rural scenario.

‘Gopaiḥ sīmni vanecarair vanabhuvī grām opakaṅṭhe janaiḥ krīḍadbhiḥ praticatvaram śīśu gaṇaiḥ pratyāpaṇam mānapaiḥ līlā veśmani pañjarodara śukair udgītam ātma stavaṁ yasyākarmṇayatas trapā vivalitānamram sadaivānanam’.¹⁵⁴

Hearing his praises sung by the cowherds on the borders, by the foresters in the forests, by the villagers on the outskirts of villages, by the playing groups of children in every courtyard, in every market by the elderly people and in the pleasure houses by the parrots in the cages, he always bashfully turns aside and bows down his face.

A glimpse of a rural level impression is also found reflected from the Bhaturiya rock Inscription of Yasodāsa where it was stated ‘digantara gocara tvarita’.¹⁵⁵

Sometimes the inscriptions show a contrasting picture of the king’s luxuriance and the life of the rural village people. Their poverty and state manipulation over them are prominent. They even used familiar fruits and vegetables to identify the precious gold earrings of the riches that clash with their rustic ornaments of flowers. The Deopara Rock inscription of Vijayasena delineates such beautiful simile

‘muktāḥ karpāsavījairmarkataśakalaṁ śākapatirairālāvū puṣpai rūpyāṇi ratnaṁ pariṇatibhiduraiḥ kukṣibhirdādimānām kuṣmāṇḍivallarīnām bikasitakusumaiḥ kāñcanaṁ nāgarībhiḥ śikṣyante jatprasādādvahuvibhavajuṣām joṣitoḥ śrotrijāṇām’.¹⁵⁶

Some literary works like the *Subhāṣitaratnaśoṣa* and the *Kṛṣiparāśara* belonging to two very different genres, written especially since the eleventh century portrayed the image of rural society in a detailed manner. The *Subhāṣitaratnaśoṣa* of Vidyākara (c.11th-12th century) is a Sanskrit poetry of village and field. The agricultural text of *Kṛṣiparāśara* has purely dealt with a local and

¹⁵⁴ Kielhorn, ‘Khalimpur Plate’, verse 13, pp.248-49.

¹⁵⁵ Sircar, ‘Bhaturiya Inscription’, line 7, p.154.

¹⁵⁶ Majumdar, ‘Deopara Inscription’, verse 23, p.48.

rural culture viewed from a technical perspective nurtured within the mainstream of Sanskrit treatises.

This trend of observation culminated during the period of the Senas which we can get a glimpse of through the lens of some creative Sanskrit literature like *Sadukti-karnāmr̥ta*, *Āryāsaptaśatī* etc. Knutson described how the high courtly register of Sena literary salon mutated into a vulgar intimate register. In addition to this, these were also considered idiosyncratic poems carrying their provincial aspects. Knutson says, ‘there is an even deeper, slightly impenetrable interior to this poetry, which verges on a proud provincialism. These poems have a tone and language of their own. Sanskrit literature demonstrates that it truly had a life of its own at the Sena court. Sanskrit could begin to affirm the existence of different sizes and shapes in this political context, and in the process reveal against all odds a new singularity’.¹⁵⁷ So, the Sanskrit cosmopolitan culture we are talking about here is not only indicative of royal patronage, but also a unique indigenous rural ambiance of Bengal rising above it.

Knutson observed that, along with the royal flattery (‘cāṭupravāha’), the sena poems were idiosyncratic in character, as in the collections of the *Saduktikarṇāmr̥ta*. The *Subhāṣitaratnaśoṣa*, *Saduktikarṇāmr̥ta* and the *Āryāsaptaśatī* all project the rural in deeply aesthetic yet realistic descriptions. The figures of speech like *svabhāvokti* and *anyokti* which were the tools of literary realism in Sanskrit poetics were employed to project this kind of reflections. In the *Saduktikarṇāmr̥ta*, a section called *uccāvaca* includes subsections on poverty (dāridryam), poverty along with royal flattery (sacāṭudāridryam), the poor man and woman of the house (‘daridragṛhī’ and ‘daridragṛhīṇī’) and the house of the poor person (‘daridragṛham’). According to Knutson, Govardhanācārya, the author of *Āryāsaptaśatī*, was regarded as the most realistic author, who has always registered the tension and contrast between rural and urban.¹⁵⁸ *Āryāsaptaśatī* is a poetry of poverty and here grāmya world written in a high Sanskrit literary art. The *Pavanadūta* of Dhoyī is a depiction of Lakṣmaṇasena’s representation. But it mostly signifies female degradation under the radiance of the king’s magnificence. Thus, this kind of poetic realism expressed in later-day compositions of the Sena period marks the entry of a new kind of expression in literary creation of the region in these times.

¹⁵⁷ Knutson, ‘The Political Poetic’, p.397.

¹⁵⁸ Knutson, *Into the twilight*, p.8.

So, even though the royal court was behind the literary culture of Bengal in the early medieval period, the rural economy was its main basis. The rise of these royal courts under the various sub-regional dynasties although characterized by the emergence of urban centers as political centers at times, these were founded on agricultural surplus distribution. Again, it was not the royal court alone which nurtured this literary culture. We have to track the influential patrons outside the orbit of the royal court to see other agencies who helped sustain this literary culture along with the preponderant support of royal courtly patronage. The answer can be found in the presence of influential rural communities in society since the 6th century CE. Among them, the name of the kuṭumbins comes first in the form of land owners. Later Mahattaras, brāhmaṇas, pradhāṇas became prestigious landholders. As landowners, their economic base was strong. Under their auspices, land charters from the sixth to the eighth century CE are being written. Among the landholding classes, the brāhmaṇas became particularly influential. A strong Brahmanical network developed in early medieval Bengal from the 6th century CE. Their migration from the Madhyadeśa and the acquisition of land as a gift based on various sub-region-based agricultural expansions made their influential presence in the rural society. The granting of land to brāhmaṇas based on educational qualifications, *gotra* and lineal identity, and their establishment as landowners also strengthened their economic base. From the 10th to the 11th century, Brahmanical centers developed because of the strong connections of these highly educated aristocratic brāhmaṇas, especially in Varendra and Rāḍha. Later, in the 12th and 13th centuries, they became influential in the royal court through their strong connections from the time of Varman and Sena. They bring the local traditions under the Brahmanical circle by composing dharmanibandhas and various Purāṇas. This journey from a rural society to the royal court is indicative of their social prestige, which was associated with their strong economic base and academic qualifications. It is among this society that the identity of other categories of patrons of this literary culture may be located.

CONCLUSION

This research was begun with the intent to trace the history of evolution of the regional literary culture in early medieval Bengal through a study of the pertinent epigraphic records available from 6th to the thirteenth century CE. In this regard it is noteworthy that, despite originating from the pan-Indian trend of the 5th – 6th centuries, the literary culture reflected in the inscriptions of early medieval Bengal gradually exhibited a certain kind of regional character. We generally tend to employ epigraphic records to delve into the details of the historical conditions and events of a certain context, here we seek to read them to look into the background of their composition and track the participants in this exercise, including the issuers, creators, readers and the audience. As a mode of communication, the content and structure of the compositions inscribed and posted on durable medium bore the footprints of the language, script and emergent mode of written communication which also developed into a literary style in the more creative parts of the messages. Altogether these body of evidence contain significant hints that may be used to understand the intellectual history of the society. Most importantly we have to note that the entire body of this evidence was created at the behest of and for the purposes of the polities that were mainly responsible for their issuance. In the context of the early medieval Bengal, this society was variously connected with the rise and fall of dynastic rulers in the varied sub-regions of Bengal, namely, Puṇḍravardhana, Rāḍha, Vaṅga, Samatāṭa- Harikela etc. Although the picture was not very evident between the 6th and 8th centuries, but from the beginning of the 9th century CE a somewhat clear emergence of literary efflorescence could be observed. This phenomenon was largely supported by agrarian and secondary economy which provided the base for political and administrative organisations in the various sub-regions of Bengal throughout the early medieval times. The role of the regional polities in their varied orders and orbits had, over time, provided patronage and thus impacted the direction of this literary culture. Although primarily important, patronage to this culture was not solely emanating from the royal orbit or the political powers. A larger social world of the writing culture has been pointed out by Meera Visvanathan, which was beyond the monopoly of the royal or priestly aristocracy.¹ Our study also tends to reveal a similar situation.

We have begun with a review of the pan-Indian trends of literary culture. It is in this regard that reference has been made to the concept of ‘gauḍī rīti’ first discussed by Bāṇabhaṭṭa in the

¹ Visvanathan, *Writing, Gifting and Identities*, p.74.

7th century CE, and reiterated by other eminent literary figures and experts in poetics like Bhāmaha, Daṇḍin and Rājaśekhara between the 7th and the 10th centuries CE. However, there is little extant evidence to account for the prevalence of a regional literary style as early as this time in Bengal except for a few regional land charters and the Nidhanpur copperplate inscription of Bhāskarvarman. This last inscription provides a glimpse of the kind of style that Bāṇabhaṭṭa had been probably referring to, and which exhibits the features of the gauḍī rīti. The rīti has been typified with certain especial characteristics, not all very appreciated by the exalted poets and composers of the time. For example, they talked about the use of high literary tone, overbearing exaggerations and volubility or ‘atīśayokti’, and over endowed with similes and metaphors or ‘upamā’. It was truly from the 9th century CE that we can locate the regular exhibition of worded compositions in epigraphic form first and then gradually in the literary texts, which were extant and have come down to us. This last category can be dated to the late 10th to 11th century CE at the earliest. Again, our choice of inscriptions as the source to trace the history affords us the wonderful opportunity to observe the evolution of a regional style in script, which was turning into a proto-Bengali script by the 12th century CE. This observation of course is derived completely from our reading of secondary works penned by stalwarts in palaeographic and epigraphic studies. In this light we get to understand that an eastern variety of late brāhmī script was used in the inscriptions of Dharmāditya, Dvādaśāditya, Samācāradeva and Gopacandra during the 6th century CE which transformed into the Magadha variety of the Nāgarī script in the Khalimpur inscription of the 9th century. This finally culminated into the proto-Bengali alphabet during the 12th century CE, as observed in the Deopara rock inscription during the Sena rule. We took recourse to the seminal works of Georg Buhler², Kielhorn³ and Rakhaldas Banerji⁴ to understand about this transition to a proto-Bengali script. The parallel developments of the language style, literary trend and progression of regionality in the form of the script, put together, afford us with a clear perspective on the theme of our research. Our study also turned towards the observation of the regional social matrix and attempted to chart the processes through which these identities evolved. This was important for our research since it targets to understand the social background for the history of the evolution of the regional literary culture.

² Buhler, *Indian Paleography*, p.77.

³ Kielhorn., ‘Deopara Stone Inscription’, p. 305.

⁴ R.D.Banerji, *Origin of the Bengali Script*, (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1919), pp. 81 – 84.

Tracing the evolution of literary style through the inscriptions of early medieval Bengal we note a consistently evolving trend, if not in terms of overall quality but certainly in terms of the regional style and quantity. Nupur Dasgupta had observed a trend of evolution in the creation of literary works in Bengal from the early part of our context to the end of the early medieval phase. She has tracked the processes of composition, and the thrust on different genres of literature, including Brahmanical and Buddhist scholarly literature, religious, philosophical, commentarial and technical treatises, etc., which evolved with each passing phase of history. These phases again were curiously observed to have coincided approximately with the processes of state formation. A similar evolutionary pattern has been observed here in the light of early medieval Bengal inscriptions and therefore we have discussed this history within the frames of these phases.⁵ The compositions, which were in majority inscribed on copperplates, and combined verse and prose, offered information and clues of many kinds, all of which offered us great clarity about the progression of literary culture and the world in which it was developing.

Thematically speaking, the inscriptions can be classified according to their contents and tone. For example, the early inscriptions were completely devoted to recording clauses of land charters like the copperplates of Pradyumnabandhu in Puṇḍra, the copperplates of Dharmāditya, Dvādaśāditya, Gopacandra and Samācāradeva in Vaṅga and the copperplates of Gopacandra in Rāḍha during the 6th century CE. The first glimpse of courtly presence can be observed in Śaśāṅka's inscriptions in the seventh century CE. The most enhanced form of literary representation of the sovereign authority was reflected in the Nidhanpur Copperplate. Here we see the example of derivations from the classical Indian form praśasti which had gained currency among the royal orbit. A more flourishing form of this is seen with the rise of monarchical rule in the Pāla Candra phase. Royal documents of this period were a charming combination of ornate praśastis and minutely detailed formal declarations of land charters. The praśastis were dedicated to the grandeur dynastic narratives of the Pāla and Candra kings. Among these one may consider a few like Dharmapāla's Khalimpur copperplate inscription, Devapāla's Nalanda and Munger copperplate and later Mahīpāla I's Rangpur, Belwa, Bangarh copperplates, Madanapāla's Rajibpur, Manhali copperplate inscriptions, etc. Again, during the Candra rule, Śrīcandra's Pascimbhag copperplate, Rampal copperplate, Laḍahacandra's Mainamati Copper Plate inscription, etc. are significant to the understanding of the history of this literary culture. This trend got further embellished during the reign of the Varmans and

⁵ Dasgupta, 'Sanskrit Literature', pp.536-80.

Senas, as seen in the Belava copperplate of Bhojavarman, Naihati copperplate of Vallālasena, Govindapur, Tarpandighi, Anulia, Madhainagar copperplates of Lakṣmaṇasena etc. The praśasti featuring in the Deopara Rock Inscription of Vijayasena stands out in its ornate poetic glory and in the subtle reflection that it carries of the impressions of the contemporary rural society.

Besides the royal charters, we have noted the most interesting development in the form of eulogies which were devoted to subordinate officials, feudatories, religious personages, etc. which exemplify the expanding horizon of literary creativity. To this genre belonged the Ghosrava rock inscription of Devapāla, Badal pillar inscription of Guravamiśra, Bhaturia Rock Inscription of Yasodāsa, Śaiva Inscription from Bangarh, Kamauli Copperplate of Vaidyadeva, the Bhubaneswar Praśasti of Bhaṭṭabhavadēva etc.

The socio – cultural aspects of the first phase ranging from the sixth to eighth century CE emerged as the most interesting. This phase was characterized by a varied and rather ambiguous political condition. From the very beginning of this period, i.e., in the inscriptions of the early 6th century CE we note thorough and skillful documentation of land measurements, land sale figures etc. in the copperplates of Pradyumnabandhu in Puṇḍra, Dharmāditya, Dvādaśāditya, Gopacandra and Samācāradeva in Vaṅga and of Gopacandra in Rāḍha. The grand manifestation of literary creativity in the form of royal eulogy found in the Nidhanpur inscription bore a reflection of association with the uttarāpatha culture. As a result, we get a glimpse of derivations from Bāṇabhaṭṭa's style here. Again, in the 7th century CE, the inscriptions of the subordinate Rāta and Nātha rulers from Samataṭa-Śrīhaṭṭa also portray the influence of Bāṇabhaṭṭa's style. On the other hand, the inscriptions of Khaḍga and early Devas, issued during the 7th-8th centuries CE depicts regional contexts of polity, religion and socio-economic life. Subsequently, if we locate the inscriptions dynastically, we can see that, especially from the Pāla-Candra period onwards, the inscriptions took an affluent format as is evident from the Khalimpur inscription of Dharmapāla, Nalanda inscription of Devapāla, Badal Inscription of Guravamiśra, Kamauli inscription of Vaidyadeva, Paschimbhag inscription of Śrīcandra. The historical significance of these inscriptions is also undeniable. For example, the Khalimpur and Nalanda copperplates of Dharmapāla and Devapāla of the 9th century CE testify to their important historical achievements. On the other hand, the Badal pillar inscription of Guravamiśra and the Bhaturia Rock Inscription of Yasodāsa in the 10th century CE symbolized the rise of subordinate rulers under the Pālas. A significant example was seen in the Kamauli inscription of Vaidyadeva in Kāmarūpa during the 12th century CE. We note the tendency to commission and the ornate flowery compositions created to uphold the authority of these

subordinate rulers. The records thus offer distinct dimensions to the shifting dynamics of power and patronage, which have to be read into the social history of the literary culture too. Similarly, we have to note how from the 10th century CE onwards, the instances of literary creativity was found to be floundering. The only exception was noted in those issued during Mahīpāla I (late 10th to early 11th century CE) and Madanapāla's (early 11th to mid -12th century CE) reigns. Again, this was obvious since their times saw brief spurts of resurgence of Pāla power and reconnection with the northern India. Madanapāla's reign may be considered as having been a rich juncture in the literary history of the region. Some very important literary works were composed during this time. For example, we can cite Sandhyākaranandi's *Rāmacarita* and Vidyākara's anthology, the *Subhāṣitaratnakoṣa*. On the other hand, a possible Arakanese association may be observed in the context of the Candra rule, although how much of this is reflected in their inscriptions remains a matter of consideration. It is clear however, that the tonal quality and form of presentation noted in the Candra inscriptions were different from those of the Pālas. The most important of these is the Paschimbhag copperplate inscription of Śrīcandra. As an important land deed donated to many brāhmaṇas, it depicted the reconstruction of rural society in the Samataṭa-Śrīhaṭṭa area. Apart from this, the Dhulla, Rampal and Madanpur copperplates of Śrīcandra, and the Mainamati inscriptions of Laḍahacandra further represent the sub regional cultural scene.

With the next phase of history, we note the rise in over-ornate style of composition and this is well reflected in the inscription of the Varmans. We may consider the possibility of the influence of the Kalacuris of Cedī in this instance. A notable example of this emerging style is observed in the Belava copperplate of Bhojavarman. It is a beautiful literary record of the genealogical eulogy of the Varman kings along with land-related matters. But the culmination of stylistic trend is observed in the Bhubaneswar Praśasti, one of the most significant inscriptions of early medieval Bengal. Narration of the rise of a brāhmaṇa family centered on the powerful Brahmanical center of Siddhalagrāma in Rāḍha offers the evidence of compositional paradigm of the times and also throws light on the background of the emergent culture. This evolutionary trend is noted to culminate under the Senas. The Deopara inscription probably bears the imprint of the finest example of writing style in the long history of literary culture in early medieval Bengal. The variety of a proto-Bengali alphabet used in this inscription was considered much advanced too. The nuanced literary representation of the rural society and social communities leaves one wondering about the emotional and evocative aspects of compositions of the times. In fact, in the Lakṣmaṇasena's reign was the most significant in terms of literary achievements during the Sena period. This is equally evident

from the several copperplates of his reign, for example, the Govindapur, Tarpandighi, Sundarban, Anulia, Madhainagar etc. which, if not matching in poetic excellence with the Deopara example, reflected the prolific environs of literary activity. Along with this, some grandiose creative kinds of literature of his times comprise of the *Sadukti-karnāmṛta*, *Āryāsaptaśatī*, *Pavanadūta* and the most magnificent, the *Gītagovinda*.⁶ However, it is noticeable that this high stylistic trend of writing does not seem to have sustained the declining status of the dynasty. The weakening of political patronage was perhaps evident in the decline noted in the literary tone of their inscriptions. We have to consider the fact that our sources are actually by their very nature aligned with political processes, as devices of state administration. Hence tracking the history of literary culture through epigraphic records inevitably binds us with the fate of polities. Although, we have to accept that historically speaking, all kinds of literary endeavours in early medieval times were, to a large extent, dependent on state patronage.

The overall orbit of literary culture flourished in a wide and complex society as we note in the context of early medieval Bengal. From a literary perspective, we can assume this society to have comprised of the Literati, the society of the literates and the most numerous sections, the non - literates. The literati comprised the composers who styled the inscribed words as well as authored the numerous creative works of literature and scholarly writings on different subjects. This intellectual domain again was increasingly nurtured and styled within the Brahmanical framework, while as we know the Buddhist treatises on philosophy and ritualistic texts were generally composed in the cultural milieu of the regional monastic world. Since the present work mainly dwells on the general trends of literary culture, we have focused on the former scene associated with the court, the laity and the mundane life of early medieval Bengal. Drawing attention to this orbit of the literature we can look for the qualities and functions the literati brought into the domain of the writing culture. We observe that in these early societies the skill of writing imparted a specific kind of authority.⁷ Those who were invested with the task of writing the state documents naturally gained access to significant social status and represented high culture.⁸ Skilled in the courtly language, they were proficient in various literary disciplines.⁹ The light that the sources throw on the identity of some of the illustrious

⁶ See for example, Knutson, *Into the twilight*.

⁷ Also see Pollock, 'The Cosmopolitan Vernacular', p. 8.

⁸ Also see Visvanathan, *Writing, Gifting and Identities*, p. 79.

⁹ See, for example, Buitenen, *Two Plays*, p.11.

composers of the period, reveals that a large section of them belonged to the Brahmanical background. Amongst them were Śrīkaṇṭha, Gauḍa Abhinanda from the Pāla- Candra phase and Purūṣottama, Govardhanācārya, etc. during the Varman – Sena times. Many had penned the dharmanibandhas at the Sena and Varman courts, including Bhaṭṭabhavadēva and Halāyudha. Myriad others had been employed in incorporating Brahmanical rituals, divine myths and popular epic legend along with the local traditions into the fold of the purāṇas.¹⁰ There were others, however, whose social identities were obscure. They included perhaps the most esteemed creative writers like Umāpatidhara, Jayadeva, Śaraṇa, Śrutidhara, Dhoyī etc. Thirdly we have Sandhyākarnandī, and Śrīdharadāsa among the karaṇa occupation and vājī vaidya Sahadeva, Vaidya Vajrapāṇi and vaidya Dharmapāṇi.¹¹ They arose in the backdrop of the royal courts and sub-regional polities. This offers a small window to the world of the literati where the literary merit of the scholar emerged as the primary factor beyond varṇa identity.

But the culture of literates was nurtured overwhelmingly within the brāhmaṇa circuit. There was the expansive circle of the literates which included eminent scholars and intellectuals from different parts of the region, who mostly belonged to the rural Brahmanical scene. Their influence in rural society grew with land grants on one hand and on the other hand with employment in the royal court and administrative circuits as literate personnel. They developed their own networks which led to the rise of various Brahmanical centres in Varendra and Rāḍha during the 10th-12th century. D.C. Sircar and Ryosuke Furui indicated the rise of these centres, in places named in the records, like Tarkāri or Tharkkārikā, Kroḍaṅca or Kolāṅca, Hastipadagrāma in Varendra during the 10th century CE, Pūrvagrāma, Siddhalagrāma, Diṇḍisāya and Keśarakoṇa in Rāḍha and Cāmpahattī in Varendra during the 12th century CE.¹² It is from within these circles that the tradition of priestly culture evolved and spread in distant sub regional parts in association with the normative, purāṇic and ritualistic literature.

On the other hand, the karaṇa-kāyasthas and the vaidyas had naturally emerged within the higher fold of the literates. The latter were also prominently authoring medical texts, besides contributing to scholarship and administrative functions. But it was the occupation group of the kāyasthas, initially employed as draft writers holding important administrative positions,

¹⁰ Chakrabarti, *Religious Process*.

¹¹ The last three composed the Gaya Kṛṣṇadvārikā, Gaya Gadādhara and Gaya fragmentary inscriptions.

¹² Furui, 'Brāhmaṇas in early medieval Bengal', p.234; Sircar, *Studies in the Geography*, pp.294-98.

who were much notable. They were later to grow into literary eminence like Sandhyākaranandi and Śrīdharadāsa. This bridge of transition from the literate to the literati is indicative of the expansions that took place in the intellectual domain of early medieval Bengal in the high points of its history. Nonetheless, we also have to note, that the cultural high points were not bound within the ups and downs of the dynastic politics, as exemplified by the flourish noted in the cultural environs in Lakṣmaṇasena's court, at a time when the power of the Senas was much curtailed.

Apart from scribes, there were other occupational categories, for example, the pustapālas, engravers, and messengers, who were involved in the writing, documenting and preserving of the state records. The royal officials and subordinate rulers, urban elite people and influential rural residents also fall within this category as knowledgeable personnel and administrative functionaries. It is in this connection that we can refer to Sheldon Pollock who said that literature addressed particular socio-textual communities.¹³ This society of addressees has been sought by us through the works of historians, who looked deeply into the sub-regional structure of the society.¹⁴ As rural influential landholders and possessors of adequate knowledge of land assessment procedures, the kuṭumbins, mahattaras and mahattamas, built a bridge between the literates and non-literates. Another kind of cultural mobility between the circles of literates and non-literates can be seen in the case of Kaivartas. From the profession of fishing, they upgraded themselves to the landholding class and attained high political role.¹⁵ Quite interestingly one comes across verses composed by poets who identified themselves as kevaṭṭa or kaivartta in the *Saduktikarṇāmrta*, which led Niharranjan Ray to suggest their entry into the fold of higher Brahmanical culture and religion.¹⁶

Finally, there was the largest section of the non-literates. It is historically evident that the chances of literacy would have been very low indeed among the lower social classes and castes in these days. This would include the kṣetrakāras, medas, andhras, caṇḍālas and various other artisanal communities. In the circumstances of their limited literacy or absence of it, the officials of the state like the dūtakas would have been responsible for transmitting the contents of the land charters and other state messages to them. It is in this context that, with the reference to the purāṇas, Kunal Chakrabarti had suggested that it was consumed by the indigenous people either through oral propaganda by Brahmanical agents or through annotated commentaries in

¹³ Pollock, 'The Cosmopolitan Vernacular', p.8.

¹⁴ Furui, *Land and Society*; Ghosh and Pal, 'Everyday life'.

¹⁵ See Furui, 'Characteristics of Kaivarta', p.96; Pal, 'Revisiting the Kaivartta Revolt', p.509.

¹⁶ Ray, *Bangalir Itihas*, p.229.

the local language composed by professional narrators which were read during ritual functions.¹⁷

Indeed, a rich literary culture had emerged and developed within this complex society, where participants represented varied social categories, socio-political nexus and interrelations. The socio-economic base of the patrons and creators would naturally bear immense impact on the cultural product that was created, in this case literary works and literary style.¹⁸ This base of patronage was variably offered by the different polities at different historical junctures in our context. They wielded different degrees of power and possessed varied structures of authority in different geographical and ecological contexts. The fluctuating fate of these patrons also bore down on the fate of those they patronized. However, the final sustenance for both the polities and the cultural personnel came from the agrarian base and wider rural economy, including artisanal and mercantile. Surplus economy led to urban developments in certain areas in Varendra, Rāḍha, Vaṅga and Samataṭa.¹⁹ These urban centres developed as strong political centres in the early medieval period under respective ruling dynasties like the Pālas, Candras, Varmans and Senas. Courts under these royal authorities nurtured this literary culture to a very large extent but the environs of this courtly culture²⁰ in early medieval Bengal was neither uniform nor universally central. Although in certain contexts we observe a supreme king, the royal household, the court and political processes bearing down with profound impact on Sanskrit literary culture in our context, there were other, provincial, sub-regional and feudatorial orbits of power and patronage as well. Finally, there was the rural world of the landed magnates. This is the evidence that we have been able to observe through our study in the inscriptions of early medieval Bengal. In this context, Sheldon Pollock²¹ suggested that Sanskrit literacy arose from the centres of authority and tentatively points to it as the poetry of politics that gave life to the Sanskrit cosmopolis. But the instance of early medieval Bengal, offers us the more complex dynamics of literary creativity in a wider domain, outside the royal and stately circuit. We find the answer in the presence of influential rural communities in society since the 6th century CE.²² The rural kuṭumbins, mahattaras, brāhmaṇas, and pradhānas

¹⁷ Chakrabarti, *Religious Process*, pp.23-26.

¹⁸ Discussed by Ingalls, *An Anthology of Sanskrit Court Poetry*, p.51.

¹⁹ Chattopadhyaya, *Studying Early India*, p.88.

²⁰ See discussions in Ali, *Courtly Culture*.

²¹ Pollock, 'The Cosmopolitan Vernacular', p.13.

²² Brajadulal Chattopadhyay and Ryosuke Furui's studies traces the emergence of the hierarchical structure of the rural communities which leads us to ponder on deeper dynamics of sustenance for this literary growth.

would have to be factored into our understanding of the fabric of patronage from below which sustained the patronage from above. A large part of this process of cultural negotiations from below stemmed from the rise of the brāhmaṇas in rural communities. The process of Brahmanical migrations, settlements, and establishments can be noted to emerge from the 5th to 13th century CE.²³ Brahmanical learning spread with time, as they gradually emerged as dominant landed magnets in the rural society in Rāḍha, Vanga, Varendra. Reclamation of forest land and acquisition of land for large-scale brāhmaṇa settlements led to a similar scene in Samatāṭa-Śrīhaṭṭa area from the 7th century CE. Their enhanced position as subordinate functionaries, their association with the ruling polities where they served in various administrative capacities strengthened their status both as patrons as well as the contributors of literary culture. A strong literary base which remained almost exclusive within this fold gradually spread a network of patronage at the lower levels of literary practices. From the 10th century onwards, almost an overall trend had developed towards acknowledging brāhmaṇas of high qualifications through land donations by the king. Brahmanical norms had been acknowledged through these ritual specialists and nibandhakāras by the Sena and Varman rulers. But that culture did not remain exclusively within the reach of the brāhmaṇa caste as there were other claimants to literacy and literary excellence. In fact, we observe this literary culture to evolve to an extent cutting across varṇa – jāti affiliations. But the exclusion of the largest section of the people continues to point to the historical fact of exclusivity where literacy and literary accomplishments still remain bound. Literary efflorescence thus would have qualified the cultural chasm that grew between the social and economic strata of the regional society.

²³ Furui, 'Brāhmaṇas in early medieval Bengal', p.223.

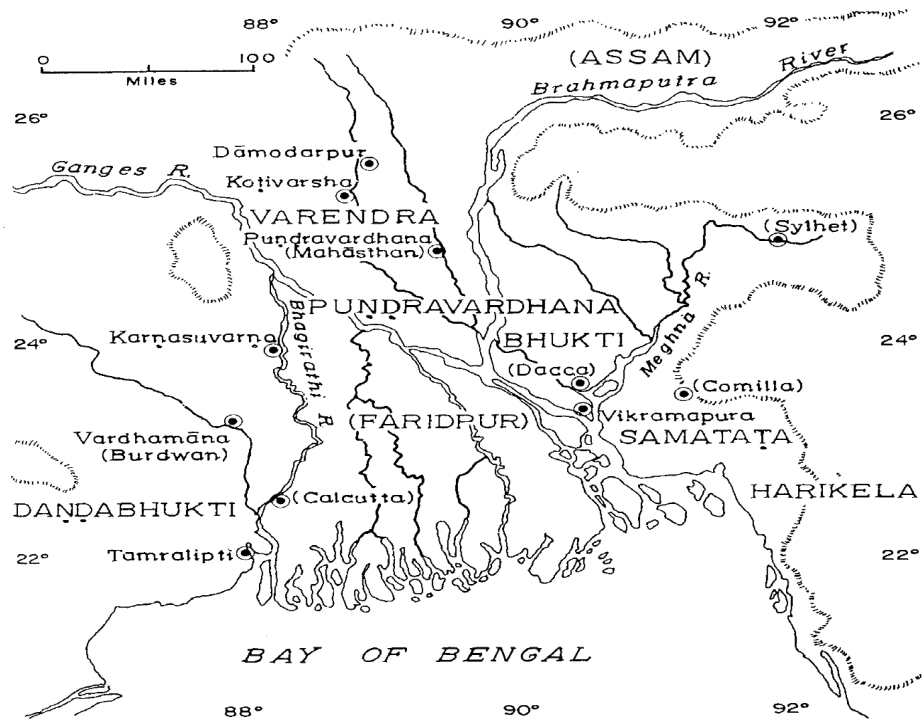
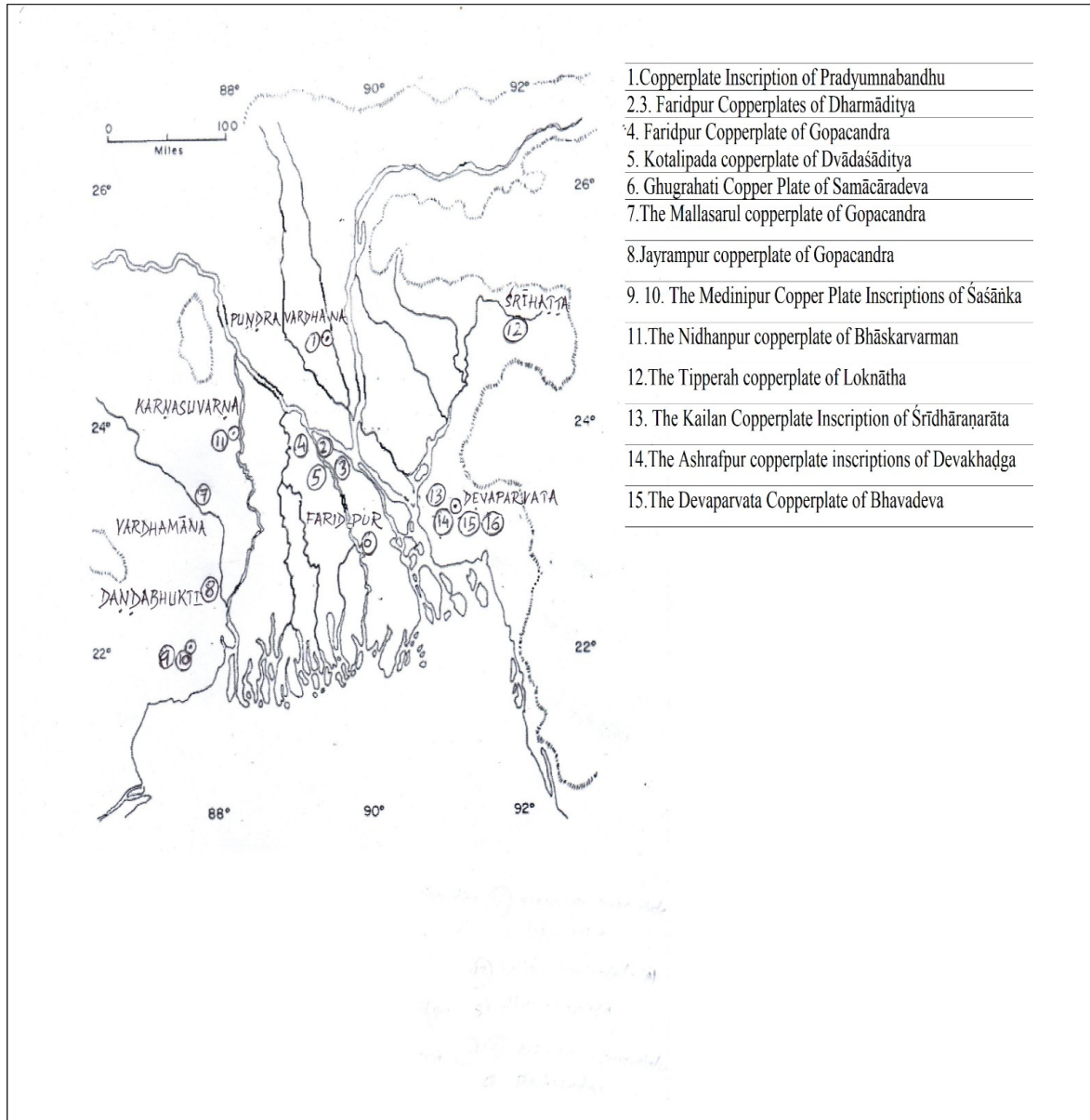


Figure 2. Principal political centers and divisions.
(Modern names are bracketed.)

MAP I

Sub-regional divisions of early medieval Bengal

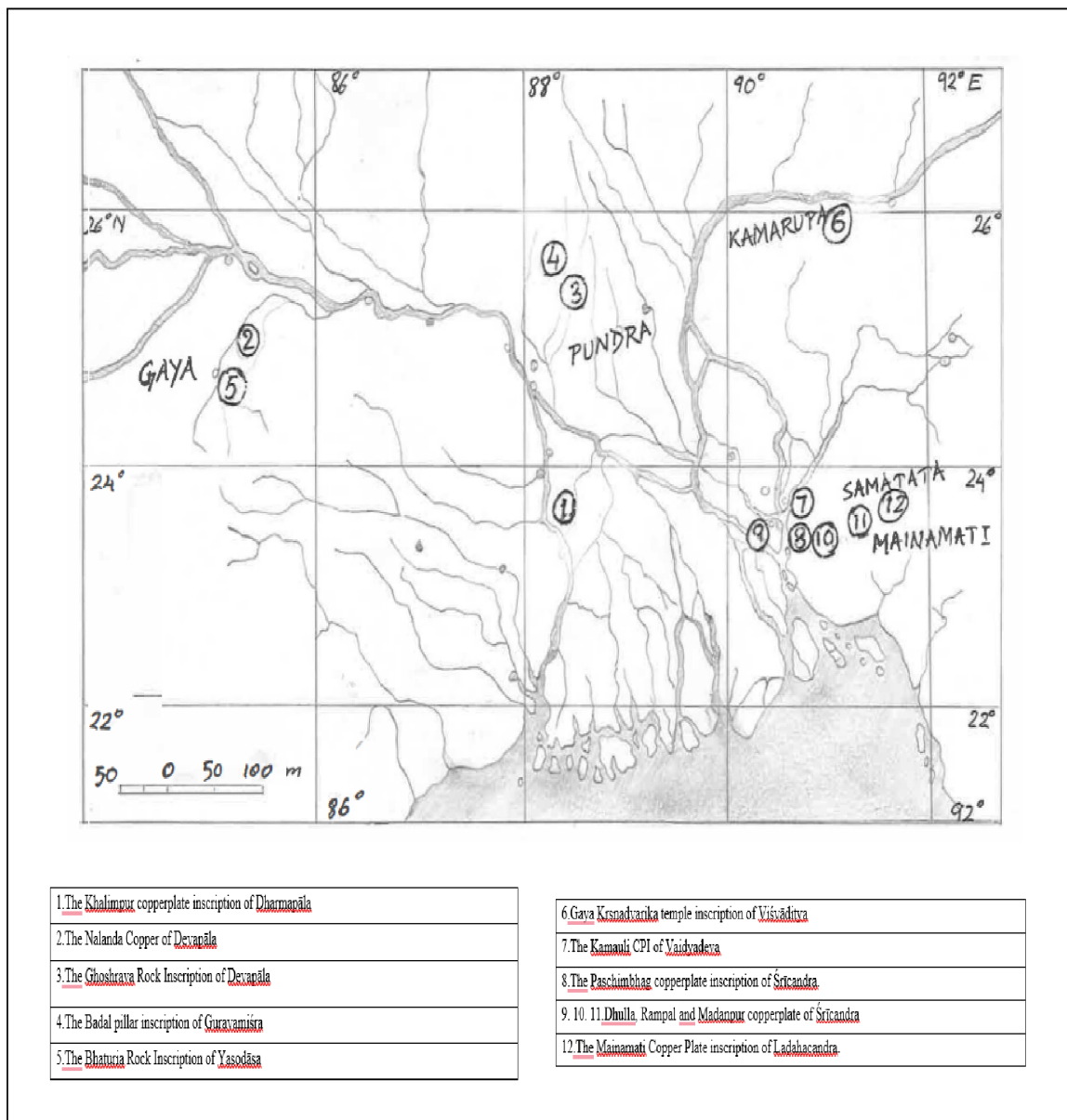
Source: B.M.Morrison, *Political Centres and Cultural Regions in Early Bengal*, (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1970), p.11.



MAP II

Inscriptions of 6th-8th century CE

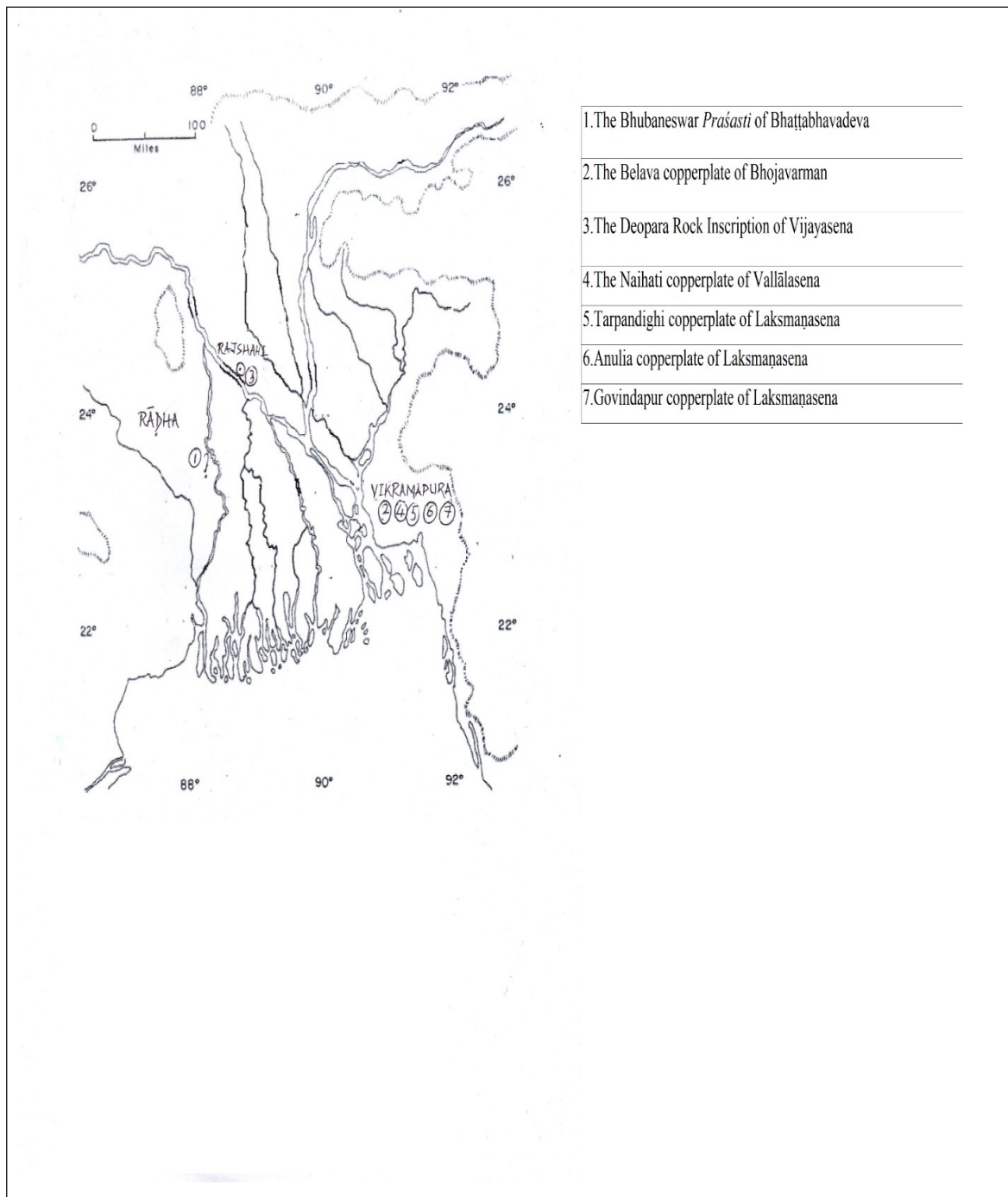
Courtesy: B. M. Morrison, *Political Centres and Cultural Regions in Early Bengal*, (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1970), p.11.



MAP III

Inscriptions of the Pāla and Candra Period

Courtesy: Abdul Momin Chowdhury and Aksadul Alam, 'Historical Geography', in *The History of Bangladesh: Early Bengal in Regional Perspectives (up to c.1200 CE)*, eds. Abdul Momin Chowdhury and Ranabir Chakravarti, Vol.I., (Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2018), p.19.



MAP IV

Inscriptions of the Varman and Sena Period (12th-13th century CE)

Courtesy: B.M.Morrison, *Political Centres and Cultural Regions in Early Bengal*, (Tuscon: The University of Arizona Press, 1970), p.11.

TABLE I:**Stylistic Trend of the Inscriptions of the 6th-8th century CE:**

Inscriptions	Time Period	Sub-region	Stylistic Trend or Significance
<p>The copperplate inscription of Pradyumnabandhu</p> <p>Faridpur plates of Dharmāditya and Gopacandra, Kotalipada copperplate of Dvādaśāditya and the Ghugrahati Copper Plate of Samācāradeva</p> <p>The Mallasarul and Jayrampur copperplate of Gopacandra</p>	c. 6 th century CE	<p>- Puṇḍravardhana</p> <p>- Vaṅga</p> <p>-Rāḍha</p>	Beautiful documentation of land sale figures, land measurement units and land evaluation methods.
The Medinipur Copper Plate Inscriptions of Śaśāṅka	c. 7 th century CE	-Rāḍha	The first indication of royal domination. Glimpses of royal glorification are reflected in the literary tone.
The Nidhanpur copperplate of Bhāskarvarman	c. 7 th century CE	Rāḍha	The most adorning and charming literary composition of this period. This copper plate resulted from the alliance with Harṣavardhana and the concurrent reign of Bhāskaravarman at Karṇasuvarṇa. Therefore, the possible reflection of the writings of Harṣa's poet Bāṇabhaṭṭa is found here.

<p>The Tipperah copperplate of Loknātha</p> <p>The Kailan Copperplate Inscription of Śrīdhāraṇarāta</p>	<p>-middle of the seventh century C.E.</p> <p>-middle to the last quarter of the 7th century CE</p>	<p>-Śrīhaṭṭa</p> <p>-Samataṭa</p>	<p>Being subordinate rulers of Bhāskaravarman, Loknātha and Śrīdhāraṇarāta's inscriptions were considered a reflection of Bāṇabhaṭṭa's <i>Harṣacarita</i>. They reflect subtle poetic expressions.</p>
<p>The Ashrafpur copperplate inscriptions of Devakhaḍga</p> <p>The Devaparvata Copperplate of Bhavadeva</p>	<p>-middle of the 7th century CE</p> <p>-c. 8th-9th centuries CE</p>	<p>Samataṭa</p>	<p>Reflection of self-proclamation and legitimacy as emergent sovereign rulers.</p>

TABLE II:**Stylistic Trend of the Pāla Inscriptions:**

Inscriptions	Time Period	Sub-region	Stylistic Trend or Significance
The Khalimpur copperplate inscription of Dharmapāla	c. 9 th century CE	Varendra, Puṇḍravardhana	The first testimony to an ornate literary composition of the Pālas. This copperplate is significant for witnessing the involvement of the Pālas in the north Indian struggle for the hegemony over Kanauj against the Gurajara-Pratīhāras and the Rāṣṭrakūṭas. It is also significant for its eulogistic poetry and donative charter with fine expertise in literary style.
The Nalanda Copper of Devapāla	c. 9 th century CE	Magadha, Bihar	This was not only the praśasti of the Pālas but also contained the praśasti of the Śailendra dynasty in southeast Asia. It bears testimony to the fact that the king of Suvarṇadvīpa Bālaputradeva surrendered to Devapāla. At Bālaputradeva's request, Devapāla granted him five villages for the construction of a temple at Nālandā.
The Ghoshrava Rock Inscription of Devapāla	late 9 th or beginning of 10 th century CE	Ghosrava, Bihar	This is a eulogy of a Buddhist named Vīradeva loaded with embellished similes and allegorical verses. Illuminates the tone of philosophical and moral aspects of Buddhism as a religion that had lent a distinct ethos and sentiment.
The Badal pillar inscription of Guravamīśra	c. 10 th century CE	Dinajpur district, Puṇḍravardhana	Praśasti of a brāhmaṇa family, who were hereditarily in service of the Pāla kings as their subordinates. It portrays the dominating influence of the subordinate

			rulers under the Pālas. Full of poetic beauty and elegance.
The Bhaturia Rock Inscription of Yasodāsa	c. 10 th century CE	Rajshahi district, Puṇḍravardhana	Praśasti of Yasodāsa, who came from a non-brāhmaṇa literate family and was subordinate to the Pāla kings.
Śaiva Inscription from Bangarh	c.11 th century CE	Bangarh, Dakshin Dinajpur District, Puṇḍravardhana.	An eulogy of the Śaivāchārya named Murtiśiva. An interesting reading of the emergence of the religion and a centre manned by Śaiva ascetics in and around the subregion at the time which is significant to reveal another source of literary genesis in the process of the evolution of literary culture in early medieval Bengal.
Gaya Krsnadvarika temple inscription of Viśvāditya	c.11 th century CE	Gaya, Magadha	Praśasti of a local ruler in Gayā. As a temple inscription reflected a beautiful literary creation.
The Kamauli CPI of Vaidyadeva	c.mid-12 th century	Kāmarūpa	This copperplate was issued from Kāmarūpa by Vaidyadeva, an appointed ruler of Kumārapāla. Although Vaidyadeva was appointed by Kumārapāla, this inscription reflected his autonomous status.

TABLE III:**Stylistic Trend of the Candra Inscriptions:**

Inscriptions	Time Period	Sub-region	Stylistic Trend or Significance
The Paschimbhag copperplate inscription of Śrīcandra.	c.10 th century CE	Samataṭa	A startling literary testimony. A unique donative charter in which land grants to many brāhmaṇas indicated the reorganization of rural society and settling of brāhmaṇas in Samataṭa-Śrīhaṭṭa area.
Dhulla, Rampal and Madanpur copperplate of Śrīcandra	c. 10 th century CE	Samataṭa	A fine mixture of praśati and donative deed.
The Mainamati Copper Plate inscription of Laḍahacandra.	c.11 th century CE	Samataṭa	Loaded with poetic hyperbolic exaggerations.

TABLE IV:**Stylistic Trend of the Varman and Sena Inscriptions:**

Inscriptions	Time Period	Sub-region	Stylistic Trend or Significance
The Bhubaneswar Praśasti of Bhaṭṭabhavadeva	c. late 11 th - early 12 th century CE	Rāḍha	A beautiful praśasti of the family of Bhaṭṭabhavadeva. Bhaṭṭabhavadeva was a Dharmanibandhakār and employed as a minister of war and peace under the ruler Harivarman. This was indicative of a strong Brahmanical influence in the society in early medieval Bengal, especially from the 12 th century CE onwards.
The Belava copperplate of Bhojavarman	c.12 th century CE	Vikramapura, Vaṅga	It portrayed a thorough list of genealogy of the Varmans with a flourishing literary tone. Along with this, it is also important for depicting the land evaluation process, land measurement and land grant matters in a wonderful prose format.
The Deopara Rock Inscription of Vijayasena	c. 12 th century CE	Rajshahi, Puṅḍravardhana	Considered the finest literary creation in early medieval Bengal. Main highlight is the beautiful depiction of rural

			communities. The eulogistic verses of this inscription throw important light on the history of the Sena dynasty, especially of Vijayasena.
The Naihati copperplate of Vallālasena Tarpandighi, Anulia, Govindapur and Madhainagar copperplate of Lakṣmaṇasena	12 th century CE	Vikramapura, Vaṅga	Beautiful, yet over-ornate and exaggerated wordings of praśastis bear the hallmark of epigraphic literary style. Characterized by neat documentation of land-related matters. Evolution of Proto-Bengali script (precursors of modern Bengali, according to N.G. Majumder) is noted in most of these inscriptions.

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