

8

INSCRIPTIONS, SEALS AND SEALINGS

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Early Historic period

Engravings of any script or text on any hard materials are known as inscriptions. Inscriptions were engraved on the surfaces of hills, caves, stones, wooden pillars, metal plates, etc. in the subcontinent. Sometimes inscriptions were engraved on bricks, clay or terracotta objects, shells of conches and tortoises, and ivory plaques as well. Legends of the coins and seals are also considered as inscriptions. Inscriptions found in Bangladesh and its neighbouring countries widely vary in length and breadth. Inscriptions are usually of one or more lines. However, inscriptions having merely one or two words have also been found. The inscriptions on seals and pedestals of images are usually small. Land grants were generally engraved on both the sides of copperplates, and these plates are called 'copper plate inscriptions'. Eulogistic verses were engraved on stones or the surfaces of pillars. However, land grants are also evident in the engravings on stone pillars and slabs. The names of inscriptions by which they were known to the ancient people are unknown to us; nevertheless, modern people have named them according to the places they are found in (such as the names of Mauzas, villages, etc). For instance, a copperplate of King Dharmapala is known as Khalimpur Copperplate since it was found at Khalimpur village.

During the Mauryan period, inscriptions were engraved on *Brahmi* or *Kharoshti* script, and their language was Prakrit. Some mixed inscriptions with *Brahmi* and *Kharoshti* scripts have also been found in South-West Bengal.¹ In the Mauryan *Brahmi*, there is no head mark (*matra*) in the top portion of the vowels and consonants.² The letters were attached to each other with line of different types, and the vowels were attached to the consonants with horizontal or vertical lines. The head marks appeared first in the Kusana inscriptions, and were placed at the top of the letters. The Kusana head marks are like dots which became small horizontal lines in the later periods. The head marks of the fourth century AD were triangular to look at. Later, their appearance changed into shapes like English 'V' or 'U' letters. Eastern India saw the transformation of the *Brahmi* script into the Gupta *Brahmi*, which again transformed into the *Kutil* script in the Post-Gupta period (the 7th century AD). The *Gaudiya Bangla* script evolved from this very *Kutil* script.

The inscriptions of the Pre-Muslim period did not succeed to keep its place as it was during the Muslim period.

The Mahasthan *Brahmi* stone inscription is considered to be the earliest epigraphic evidence in Bengal. It is generally accepted that it was issued in the 3rd century BC. Many inscriptions of the ancient and the Early-Medieval periods have been discovered in Bengal while some other inscriptions of the Bengal kings have been found outside its border. We may divide the epigraphic evidences of ancient and Early-Medieval Bengal into two divisions: the inscriptions of the Mauryan and Post-Mauryan Period, and those of the Gupta and Post-Gupta Period. The Mahasthan *Brahmi* stone-plaque inscription and the Susunia rock-cave inscription, the Mauryan and the Post-Mauryan inscription are respectively worth mentioning in this regard. The *Kharoshti-Brahmi* mixed inscriptions of the Post-Mauryan and the Pre-Gupta periods have been obtained from some places.³

Mauryan Inscription

The Mauryan inscriptions have been found in present India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Nepal and Bangladesh; and the Mauryan empire was evidently extended to these five countries. The Asokan inscriptions are generally accepted as the earliest epigraphic evidences of the subcontinent. They are roughly divided into two categories: (a). Cave Inscriptions and (b). Pillar Inscriptions. Evidences of the above mentioned types have not been found in Bengal. The Mahasthan stone *Brahmi* inscriptions been considered to be of the Asokan or the Mauryan period.^{4, 5, 6} The Mahasthan *Brahmi* stone inscription is in fact a royal order which was issued to the Governor (*Mahamatra*) of Pundranagar (Plate- 1). The King ordered the Mahamatra of Pundranagara to help the famine affected '*Samvamgiya*' people with paddy from the granary and *Gandaka* coins from the treasury, and expressed his hope that better days would certainly return and the granary and treasury would again become full. The order was inscribed in the *Brahmi* script with *Prakrit* language which indicates that its issuer was the Mauryan King Asoka. The Mahamatra of this inscription was in fact a civil servant of the Mauryan period, and the term '*Samvamgiya*' probably indicates the people of all the parts of Bengal. The inscription reveals the state-controlled economy of the Mauryan period; and the central Government controlled the fate of the citizens with its administrative authority.



Plate- 1: Brahmi stone inscription (3rd century BC), Mahasthangarh

Kusana and Early Gupta Period (*Kharoshti-Brahmi* mixed inscriptions)

The state-controlled economic system came to an end after the Mauryan period had been over, and private industries, trades and commerce had developed widely during the Sunga-Kusana period. The artisans and traders had stamped their goods with seals before they sent them to the markets. Some pieces of pottery, terracotta plaques, seals

and sealings having the *Kharoshti*, *Kharoshti-Brahmi* or *Brahmi-Kharoshti* mixed inscriptions (used by the traders and producers) have been found in the southern portion of West Bengal, especially in North 24 Parganas. The inscriptions in terracotta plaques found at Parvatipur near Tamluk in Midnapore district, the stone seals found at Pandu Rajar Dhibi in Burdwan district, the clay vessels found at Hamidpur in North 24 Parganas and the pot sherds found in Chandrakhetugarh are the instances of the mixed inscriptions. Apart from these ones, terracotta seals with the mixed inscriptions have been found in Hadipur, Chandrakhetugarh and Bangarh. Most of these inscriptions are seals and sealings, which are personal, governmental, commercial, religious and literary and artistic in nature. *Ganajharad* or *Ganarajyata* i.e. *Ganarajya* (People's Republic) is inscribed in a seal of the first or the second century AD.⁷ Besides, seals bearing the names of the kings Tazata and Ladhapeya have also been found, which indicate the transformation of the Republic into the Kingship.

The *Brahmi* inscriptions were widely used in Eastern India. The *Kharoshti* and *Kharoshti-Brahmi* mixed inscriptions were used in the seals and other artefacts found in the river and seaport areas especially in the South-West Bengal. These are in fact the evidences mainly of the Kusana period. Some artefacts of the Early Gupta period are also evident.⁸ The traders and travellers used the mixed inscriptions during the period between the 1st and the 5th century AD. The language of the mixed inscriptions was not Eastern Prakrit, that is, not local. In fact, their language was *Gandharian* or Northwest Indian.⁹ The inscriptions reveal information about the migration and settlement of the Gandharians in the lower Bengal.

The regions beside the sea and the river port regions of South Bengal had direct trade relations with South-East Asia, China, Sri Lanka and the Mediterranean region in the Early Historic period. Many native and foreign traders and travellers permanently settled in the Vanga region of the Lower Ganges since this area was enviously rich in wealth and economy. Many settlers coming from Northwestern India used *Kharoshti*; and it is believed that they inscribed *Prakrit* language in *Kharoshti* scripts.¹⁰ The inscribing of various designs like *yupas*, boats, ships, corn-*sisas*, shells, *swastikas*, etc. is undoubtedly a significant event.

Susunia Hill Inscription

A *Brahmi* inscription of the fourth century AD has been found in the Susunia Hill-cave.¹¹ It is the early form of the Gupta *Brahmi* inscriptions. Susunia Hill is located at Susunia village in Chhatna thana in Bankura district, West Bengal, India. The name of Maharaja Chandravarman, son of Maharaja Singhavarman, of Puskarana Kingdom is inscribed here. Chandravarman was the devout worshipper of Chakraswamin (God *Vishnu*) and established this cave temple, which possesses a replica of the *Vishnu*-Wheel. However, no other Hill Cave temples have been discovered in Bengal. After this period, various types of Sanskrit inscriptions have regularly been found during the period between the 5th and the 13th century AD.

Gupta Inscriptions

The Gupta Empire was established in almost whole of Bengal during the reign of Emperor Samudragupta. Ten Gupta copperplate inscriptions and at least one clay seal have been found in Varendra region in Bengal. Many Gupta inscriptions have been discovered outside the territory of Bengal. A copperplate is a registered valid document of land grants, mainly for religious purposes, by the king or other persons.

Information has been revealed about the Dhanadaha copperplate (Natore district) (Plate- 2), the Sultanpur-Kalaikuri copperplate (Bogra district), two Damodarpur copperplates (Dinajpur district), the Jagadishpur copperplate (Rajshahi district) and the Baigram copperplate (Dinajpur district) of Emperor Kumaragupta I. The Paharpur copperplate (Naogaon district) and two Damodarpur copperplates (Dinajpur district) were reportedly issued during the reign of Budhagupta (Plate- 3). One copperplate of Emperor Vishnugupta have been found in Damodarpur. A portion of the last plate bearing the



Plate- 2 (top): Dhonaidah copper-plate inscription (432-433 AD), Emperor Kumargupta I



Plate- 3 (bottom): Damodarpur copper-plate inscription (478 AD), Emperor Budhagupta

Purvapada of the name of the emperor is broken and missing. On the other hand, the decipherment of the date is also not unanimous. Some identified the emperor of this record as Bhanugupta while some others called him Damodaragupta of the later Gupta dynasty. However, the Gupta period was the golden age of the Sanskrit language and literature. The inscriptions of the Gupta period are known as *Gupta-Brahmi* through which the Sanskrit language sought its expression.

At least 10 copperplates have been found in the Varendra region of whom nine were issued during the reign of Emperor Kumaragupta I and Emperor Budhagupta. These plates were issued from some local offices, such as Kotivarsa *Visaya*, Panchanagari *Visaya* and Sringavera *Vithi*, of Varendra region. Each plate contains the office seal horizontally on one side. The symbol of a 'bull' has been found engraved on the seals of Kotivarsa *Visaya* (district). These plates found in Varendra contain the names and titles of the Gupta emperors. The emperors have been described as *Prithivipati*, *Paramadaivata*, *Paramesvara*, *Paramabhataraka* and *Mharajadhiraja*. The names and titles of the lords of the *Bhuktis*, *Visayas* or *Vithis*, who enjoyed the favour of the emperor, were also engraved. The lords of the *Bhuktis*, *Visayas* and *Vithis* were known as *Uparikas* or *Uparika Maharajas*, *Visayapatis* and *Ayuktakas* respectively. Pundravardhana was the sole *Bhukti* in North Bengal while Kotivarsa was a *Visaya*

under Pundravardhana. The names of Chiratadatta, Jayadatta, Brahmadata and prince Devabhattacharaka have been revealed as the ruler of Pundravardhana *Bhukti*.

The inscriptions also tell about the participation of the mass people in the local administrations during the Gupta period. Kotivarsa *Visaya* was a local administrative unit having a Board of Counsellors which consisted of four members: the *Nagarsresthin* (richest man of the city), the *Sarthavaha* (importer and exporter), the *Prathama Kulika* (Chief artisan) and the *Prathama Kayastha* (chief secretary or scribe).

The copperplates of the Gupta period would possess the date in the Gupta Era (GE), which could be converted into Christian Era by adding 320 to the dating. This system of dating did not go far in the period after the Gupta rule had ended. However, the dates of the Pala-Sena periods were recorded in the copperplates with the regnal year of the incumbent king. This is why, this type of dating is complicated and not absolute. However, some copperplates of the 13th century AD recorded their dates in *Shaka* Era, and this event made the date calculation easier.

The copperplates also had benedictory and imprecatory verses. These verses would tell about the transience of life, and would promise sixty thousand years in heaven as the prize of one's donation and its approval. Besides, the inscriptions warn that the **and deslployens of the deed of the donated lands thanequessous** would have to live in hell for the same period along with their ancestors being the worms of stool. This tradition of imprecation was prevalent in later times as well.

The Gupta copperplates would record the documents of the purchase and donation of government-owned fallow lands. Sometime people would buy government-owned fallow lands and donate them to religious persons or institutions forever. The aims of donations were twofold: to acquire gods' blessings for the donors themselves and their parents and to help the recipients or institutions maintain their expenses. The local or outside donors would buy lands with cash money and donate them for religious purposes. The donors of the Gupta period in Bengal were the persons of the classes and professions, and were not the royal members. However, the kings would decline the tax of the land and share the one-sixth portion of the religious merit of the donations. It indicates that the tax of agricultural lands was the one-sixth portion of their production.

The tradition of the public donation of land gradually underwent some changes, and the kings themselves started to donate lands. The Pala-Sena, Chandra and Varman kings themselves donated lands to the priests and religious institutions.

The tradition of engraving Land grants on the copperplates started in the Gupta period and continued until the 13th century AD. And the priests, and temples and monastic authorities who received those lands gradually appeared to be the intermediary classes between the king and the peasants regarding the ownership of land. As a result, the signs of a feudal socio-economic system started becoming noticeable in Bengal as well as the Indian subcontinent. The Gupta copperplates inform us that there were land registry offices as well. *Pustapalas* (Registrars) numbering from one to three were the

officials who served in the *Visaya* (district) offices. Their job was to keep records of the locations, demarcations and nature of land along with their ownership and price. The preservation of the records of land transactions was also their responsibility, and their opinion regarding approval of transactions was vital. They had also the duty of conducting surveys and handing the sold lands over to the purchasers.

The Gupta copperplates inform also about the nature and measurement system of lands. The nature of lands generally includes *Ksetra* (cultivated), *Khila Ksetra* (periodical fallow), *Aprahata* (uncultivated), *Aprada* (un-transacted) lands together with the homestead lands and the shrubless fallow lands. Lands were measured with *Nala* (reed), and *Kulyavapa* and *Dronavapa* were the units for measuring lands. Eight *Dronavapa* was equal to one *Kulyavapa*. Probably, one *Kulyavapa* referred to the area of land that was usually needed for sowing the seeds contained by a *Drona* or *Kulya*. The price of each *Kulyavapa* of land was two or three Dinaras, the gold coins of the Gupta period. Bengal has yielded a great number of these gold coins that have the name of the emperor on one side while an image of the female deities on the other.



Plate- 4 (top): Seal discovered during Mahasthangarh excavation

An excavation at Mahasthangarh in North Bengal has yielded a clay seal with *Brahmi* (Plate- 4). It has not been possible to decipher the seal; however, it depicts three stalks of wheat plant united at the lower end. There are twenty-two *Brahmi* letters inscribed on the border of the seal.¹² Though the seal has been claimed to be of the Gupta period, it is difficult to be sure about that. This seal might even be a Pre-Gupta object.¹³ BN Mukherjee finds that the sealing possesses the *Kharoshti-Brahmi* mixed scripts.¹⁴ Some seals discovered in Bangarh also have paddy plants and *Brahmi* characters engraved on them. In 1834, a small slate-stone inscription of the great navigator Buddhagupta, an inhabitant of Raktamrittika, has been found in the ruins of an



ancient Buddhist temple at Wellesly district in Malaya peninsula. This inscription has the image of a Buddhist *stupa* in the middle with scripts on its two sides. This inscription records a Buddhist formula and a wish for a good journey of Buddhagupta by a Buddhist monk. The discovery of Raktamrittika Mahavihara near Karnasuvarna proves that Buddhagupta was an inhabitant of the Bengal region. It also supplies with an epigraphic evidence of the maritime communication between Bengal and South-East Asia, and it may easily be assumed that the Bengali navigators had an important role in it (Plate- 5).¹⁵

Plate- 5 (left): Gupta seal (4th-6th century AD)

Inscriptions of Independent Vanga, Gauda and Samatata kingdoms (6th-7th centuries)

During the Post-Gupta period, regional kingdoms evolved in Bengal and other parts of India. The independent Vanga kingdom, the Gauda kingdom and the Samatata kingdom of the 6th and the 7th century AD are the mentionworthy names found in the inscriptions. The inscriptions, coins and arts of this period amalgamated the Gupta tradition with the local elements. The available findings and publications reveal that most of the inscriptions were engraved on copperplates, and these inscriptions were influenced by the Gupta style.

Vainyagupta was the first known king of the Post-Gupta Bengal. An important inscription of the king is the Gunaighar copperplate. It has been found at Gunaighar village near Devidwar town in Comilla district, and now it is in the possession of the Bangladesh National Museum (Dhaka Museum). Maharaja Vainyagupta issued it from his victory camp Kripura/Tripura in 188 Gupta Era (508 AD). He donated 11 *patakas* of land to the Vaivartika Bhiksu Samgha living in Asrama Vihara for their consumption, worshiping, medicines and the renovation of the monastic structure. The Gunaighar copperplate is the record of this document.¹⁶ It is the first land grant discovered in Bengal, which mentions the name of *Jayaskandhavara*. The Ashrafpur copperplates (Narsingdi district) of Devakhadga of the Khadga dynasty and the Nidhanpur copperplates (Sylhet district) of the Assam king Bhaskarvarman, both belonging to the 7th century AD, mention the names of Jayakarmantavasaka and Karnasuvarna respectively as the *Jayaskandhavaras*. Evidently, Gunaighar copperplate is the earliest evidence of the royal land grants in Bengal. Vainyagupta was the earliest king who donated tax-free land from his own *Jayaskandhavara*. *Mahsamanta* Vijayasena, the *Dutaka* (Executor of the grants in favour of the king) of the Gunaighar grant is the earliest *Dutaka* in Bengal. According to the records found in the Bengal inscriptions, Vijayasena is the earliest feudal chief. Evidently, the Gunaighar copperplate is the first land grant in Bengal, where a Bull seal with the name of the king has been used. This copperplate also mentions *Pataka* as the unit of land measurement for the first time. The fact might also be that Vainyagupta declared independence from the Gupta Empire or the Gupta dynasty, but his father was not an independent king, and for that reason, he enjoyed the favour of god Mahadeva. According to the copperplates, the feet of the kings favoured the provincial or centrally administered rulers during the Gupta period. The Gunaighar copperplate is an exception in this regard. The Pala-Sena copperplates mention that the reigning kings were favoured by the feet of their deceased fathers. A clay seal has been found at Nalanda in Bihar with the name of Vainyagupta; but this Vainyagupta has been the king of the Gupta dynasty of Magadha.

The independent Vanga kingdom emerged in the 6th century AD. The names and inscriptions of three kings of this kingdom have been discovered. Gopachandra, Dharmaditya and Samacharadeva are these three kings. They probably ruled their kingdoms from Kotalipara. Most of their inscriptions have been found at Kotalipara

in present Gopalganj district. No other inscriptional evidences except copperplates of these kings have been discovered; however, some gold coins of Dharmaditya and Samacharadeva have been obtained.

Gopachandra's Jayarampur copperplate and the Mallasarul copperplate have been found in Orissa and West Bengal in India respectively while his Kotalipara copperplate has been obtained from Gopalganj district in Bangladesh. Maharaja Vijayasena, a feudal chief under King Gopachandra, purchased eight *Kulyavapas* of land at Vetragorta village in Vakkattaka *Vithi* in Vardhamana *Bhukti* and donated it to Brahman Vatsapalavamin. The Lokanatha seal of Vijayasena is attached to this inscription. Gopachandra's Kotalipara copperplate was issued from the Varakamandala *Visaya* (district) office in Navyavakasika province. Vatsapalavamin, the lord of Varakamandala *Visaya*, purchased a *Kulyavapa* of land at Dhruvilati village with four Dinaras from some Bharadvaj Brahmans and donated it to Bhatta Gomidattasvamin. Two Kotalipara copperplates of Dharmaditya and the Ghugrahati copperplate of Samacharadeva were issued from Varakamandala *Visaya* office with the Gajalaksmi seal stamped on them (Plate- 6).¹⁷ This seal is also called the Sri Laksmi seal or the Abhiseka Laksmi seal.

Though the copperplates of the independent Vanga kingdom in the 5th and the 6th century AD had followed some of the previous traditions of the Gupta period, remarkable changes were noticeable in the social picture of Vanga in the 6th century AD. The council of the Gupta Kotivarsa *Visaya* consisted of the *Nagarasresthin* (moneyed Bussinesmen), the *Sarthavaha* (importer-exporters), the *Prathama Kulika* (artisans) and the *Prathama Kayastha* (secretary/scribe), and the *Nagarasresthi* enjoyed the highest rank among them. On the other hand, the leading councillor in the Varakamandala *Visaya* was the *Jyesthyakayastha* (Chief Secretary). Nevertheless, the position of the *Jyesthyakayastha* was the lowest one in the Kotivarsa *Visaya* council. There was no position for the traders in the Varakamandala *Visaya* council; but, there were many *Mahattaras* and *Vyavaharins* in the council. The Mahattaras were probably the local aristocrats dependent on lands while the *Vyavaharins* were the local businesspersons, or lawyers, or other professionals. This fact indicates that the participation of the representatives in trade and industries was gradually declining while that of the bureaucrats and the other classes was increasing in the society and administration.

The Vanga kingdom collapsed, and the independent Gauda kingdom emerged in North-West Bengal with Karnasuvarna as its capital. The inscriptions of the Gauda king Jayanaga and Sasanka have been discovered. Narayanabhadra (a feudal chief under the Karnasuvarna king Jayanaga) donated the Vappaghoshavata village in Audumbarika *Visaya* to Chandogya Brahman *Bhatta* Brahmavirasvamin by the

Plate- 6: Gograhati copper-plate inscription (6th century AD), Samachardeva

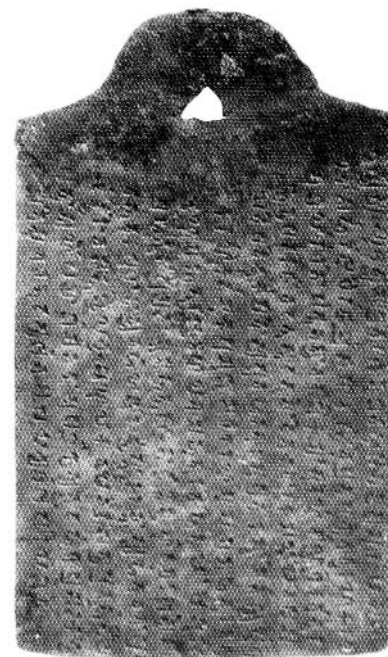




Plate- 7: Copper-plate inscription (7th century AD), Sasanka

Vappaghoshavata copperplate (old Nadia district). The copperplate was issued from Audumbarika *Visaya* office, whose administration was entrusted to *Mahapratihara* Suryasena. The *Visayapati* was the administrator of a *Visaya* during the Pre-Gupta period; however, during the period of Jayanaga, a *Visaya* was ruled by a feudal chief who administered it by another subordinate feudal chief. The seal of Vappaghoshavata copperplate possesses the symbol of Sri Laksmi. The Audumbarika *Visaya* was located inside Virbhum-Murshidabad area.¹⁸

The copperplates issued during the reign of the Gauda king Sasanka have been found in West Bengal and Orissa (Plate- 7).

In addition, a seal matrix has been found at Rotasgarh fortification wall in Bihar, and this seal mentions Sasanka as the *Mahasamanta* (the great feudal chief). It indicates that Sasanka was a feudal king in his early life, and later he became independent. Midnapore has yielded three copperplates of Sasanka, which are known as the Midnapore copperplates I & II and the Egra copperplate. The first two were issued from the Tavira office while the last one was from Ekatakaksa *Visaya* office. Sasanka's Ganjam copperplate (Orissa) was issued by his feudal king Madhavavarman II.

Though the copperplates of Sasanka retain some aspects of the Gupta tradition, tremendous change has been noticed in their portrayal of the socio-economic phenomena. The social life and the administration of Bengal became highly dependent on feudalism during his reign. Sasanka's copperplates mention *Samanta* (feudal chief), *Mahasamanta* (higher feudal chief), *Agraharin*, etc. which are absent in the Gupta inscriptions. The *Agraharins* enjoyed tax-free lands, which he gave to the cultivators in exchange of some taxes. They would use this tax in religious and other purposes, but did not pay tax to the state. Thus, the *Agraharins* evolved to be the new land lords and became very powerful. These *Agraharins* and feudal kings became so powerful that they involved themselves in warfare and conflict and even denied to show loyalty to the king. As a result, a hundred year long anarchy and chaos appeared in North-West Bengal after the demise of Sasanka, and continued to prevail until the rise of the Pala dynasty. It is to be mentioned the Tavira office council during the reign of Sasanka consisted of a *Samgha* of *Vipra-pradhanas* (organization of the chief Brahmins). The word *Vipra* literally means 'Brahman'. These Brahmins played a vital and organized role in the local administration, a fact which was absent during the Gupta period. The names of the 35 councillors of the Ekatakaksa *Visaya* have been found among whom the names of *Mahamahattara* and *Mahattara*, *Mahapradhan* and *Pradhan*, *Agraharin*, *Bhatta*, *Vaisayika*, *Karanika*, *Pustapala*, and *Sthayipala* are worth mentioning.¹⁹ Here, *Karanika* and *Pustapala* were government servants while the others were the representatives of the land based feudal chiefs and the Brahman priests. There was no representative of commerce and industries here.

No inscription of the 7th century AD has been found in North Bengal. However, the Nidhanpur copperplate of the Assam king Bhaskaravarman has been found in Sylhet, a territory of his kingdom at that time. By this copperplate, Bhaskaravarman redistributed the lands which were previously donated by his ancestor Bhutivarman among the successors of 205 donee Brahmans. Since the previous document was burnt, a newer one was necessary to be issued. It is a long document for which seven plates were united with a ring. There was a seal attached inside the ring which is missing now. There is no other instance of a document consisting of several plates in the history of this country. The burning of the landgrants document indicates the *Matsyanyayam* 'the Anarchy'. Nevertheless, several dynasties and kings ruled South-East Bengal during the Post-Gupta period since this part of Bengal was free from the *Matsyanyayam*. The inscriptions of these kings and dynasties have also been found. Vainyagupta, Gopachandra, Dharmaditya and Samacharadeva ruled in the sixth century AD. The Natha and the Rata kings also ruled in the later half of the sixth century AD in the Samatata and Srihatta regions.

Lokanatha's Tippera copperplate (Comilla-Tripura area), Murundanatha's Kalapur copperplate (Maulavibazar district) and Sridharanarata's Kailan copperplate (Comilla district) are specially mentionworthy in this regard. These three copperplates show the influences of the Gupta style along with some newer features. The Kalapur copperplate has decayed. All of these three plates were issued from *Kumaratyadhikarana* (office of prince minister). No copperplate had been issued from *Kumaratyadhikarana* before and after these ones. All of these Natha and Rata copperplates of the sixth century AD had the Sri Lakshmi seals attached to them. The copperplates issued from Varakamandala *Visaya* office of the independent Vanga kingdom in the sixth century AD also had Sri Lakshmi seals.

The Natha-Ratha copperplates possessed the depiction of the genealogy of kings and their eulogy as a new feature. The Gupta and the Gupta-style copperplates did not contain any genealogy and eulogy of the kings. However, they had been present in the copperplates of the later periods. According to the Tippera copperplate, the ancestors of Lokanatha were *Adhimaharaja* (king of kings) and *Samanta* (feudal chief). He was a *Karana Kayastha* (secretary or scribe) in *Varna* (profession), and his maternal family was Brahman. However, Lokanatha's maternal grandfather was a *Parsava* (the offspring of a *Sudra* woman and a *Brahman*). The information of Lokanatha's military achievements is also recorded in this copperplate. The Kalapur copperplate of Murundanatha also mentions his ancestor Srinatha who was a *Samanta Sainyapati* (army chief of a feudal lord). Sridharanarata's Kailan copperplate contains the names of his father *Samatatesvara* Jivadharanarata and his mother *Agramahisi* (chief queen) Bandhudevi who had favoured him.

The Rata kings were contemporary with the Nathas and ruled Samatata and its adjacent areas. They described themselves as *Samatesvara* (lord of Samatata) in their copperplates. The office of *Kumaramatyadhikarana* was situated in Devaparvata, the

capital of Samatata. Though the Kailan copperplate was issued from the office of *Kumaramatyadhikarana* in Devaparvata, the name of Sridharanarata is found engraved on the obverse of its seal. It indicates that the king controlled the *Kumaramatyadhikarana*, and it also was situated in the capital. Besides, it is indicative that the king, the prince and the prince-minister had important roles in land administration. There is no mentioning of *Jayaskandhavara* in the Rata copperplates; however, *Kumaramatyadhikarana* enjoyed almost the same status of the *Jayaskandhavara*. *Kumaramatyadhikarana* could issue copperplates with the countersignature of the king. At the request of *Mahasamanta* Pradosasarman, King Lokanatha donated land for the maintenance of the Bhagavan Ananta Narayana Temple and for the settlement and maintenance of more or less 200 Brahmans.²⁰ Pradosasarman built the temple in the forest region of the Suvvanga Visaya. Prince Laksmi-natha was the Dutaka (executor) of this grant. With his Kalapur copperplate, Murundanatha donated land to the same temple and Brahmans.²¹ At the request of Mahasandhivigrahika Jayanatha, King Sridharanarata donated 4.5 *patakas* of land to Ratnatraya Buddhist institution, 13 *patakas* to 13 Brahmans and 5.5 *patakas* to Jayanatha with his Kailan copperplate. The donated lands were located in the Guptinatana and the Patalayika Visayas. Three other copperplates of Sridharanarata have been found at Uriswar village in Muradnagar Upazilla in Comilla district, and they are now in the possession of the Bangladesh National Museum.²² However, it has still not been possible to decipher these plates.

After the Rata kings, Samatata was ruled by the Khadga kings. Most of the scholars have described the Natha-Rata kings as the contemporaries and the vassals of the Khadgas. However, according to N.K. Bhattasali and Barrie M Morrison, the Natha-Rata kings were independent rulers in the 6th century AD, while the Khadgas ruled in the 7th century AD. This particular view seems reasonable since the Ratas had issued coins as the symbol of their independence, and donated lands directly inside the territory of their kingdom.

The Khadga kings ruled South-East Bengal during the 7th century AD. At least five copperplates and an image inscription of the Khadga dynasty have been discovered. There are Devakhadga's two Ashrafpur copperplates (Narsingdi district) and two Shalvan Vihara copperplates (Comilla district), Balabhatta Khadga's Shalvan Vihara copperplate and Deulbari Sarbani image inscription of Prabhavati, queen consort of Devakhadga. Devakhadga donated 9 *patakas* and 10 *dronas* of land in Peranatana *Visaya* to preceptor Acharya Samghamitra for his *Vihara-viharika-chatustaya* with his Ashrafpur copperplate-I. The king acquired the property for this grant from his queen consort Prabhavati and the feudal chief Bantiyoka. Devakhadga donated six *patakas* and eight *dronas* of land with his Ashrafpur Copperplate-II to the same Samghamitra. The writer and the Dutaka of these two grants were Puradasa (a Buddhist) and Yajnavarman respectively.²³ Balabhatta Khadga donated land to Mahabhogasrama institution with his Shalvan Vihara copperplate. Mahabhogasrama with 8 monasteries

adorned with white-coloured *Mahachaityamala* was a wonder of the world. ‘*Parimita Matam*’ and ‘*Danachandrika*’ were studied and taught in this institution. The Dutaka of this grant was Yajanvarman, a *Praptapanchamahayajna* and *Mahasandhivigrahika*. Prabhavati, the queen consort of Devakhadga, was a devout worshipper of goddess Sarvani, and she installed a gold plated bronze image of this goddess with an inscribed pedestal at Deulbari in Dharmapur village in Chauddyagram upazilla in Comilla.²⁴ Some interesting and new features of the Khadga copperplates have made them unique in the epigraphic history of Bengal. These features are much different from those of the classical Gupta tradition, which are considered as the sources of the Pala-Sena style. All of the copperplates of Bengal issued before the Khadga period were horizontal in their appearance with a seal attached to one side horizontally. The lines of these plates were engraved along the longer dimension of the plates from top to bottom. This tradition was instituted in the Gupta period and continued to exist in West Bengal up to the issuance of the copperplates of Sasanka. But, the Khadga kings, who ruled Vanga-Samatata in the 7th century AD, ceased following this tradition, and instituted a new one. The Khadga kings started engraving copperplates within vertically drawn line from left to right keeping the plate in the perpendicular position. The Khadga kings started the tradition of attaching the seal to the mid point of the top line. This style of engraving copperplates continued to be in practice in the later periods. The information of *Jayaskandhavara* has been found first in the Gunaighar copperplate of Vainyagupta. But, the independent kings of Vanga and Gauda, the immediate successors of Vainyagupta, were not interested in this style. The *Jayaskandhavara* style of Vainyagupta for land grants started permanently from the Khadga period onwards. The Khadga copperplates had another interesting feature that there was a bull-image seal attached to top of plates. It is to be mentioned here that the bull is the mount of the Hindu god *Shiva*. But, the Khadga kings were the followers of Buddhism, and their copperplates would also start with the invocation of Buddhist Trinity – the *Buddha*, *Dharma* and *Samgha*. On the other hand, Prabhavati, the chief queen of Devakhadga was a devout Saivaist, which has been known from the inscription engraved on the gold-plated bronze image of goddess *Sarvani*. Probably, this queen consort had immense influence on royal matters, which can further be authenticated by the seals of the Khadga copperplates.

Some inscribed clay seals, sealings and two clay-stone images have been discovered in the excavation of the central *stupa* at Kotilamura in the Lalmai-Mainamati region.²⁵ These artefacts are assumed to be of the 7th century AD after assessing them on palaeographic and stylistic grounds. The issue of the legends on the coins comes inevitably while discussing the seals and sealings. Though various types of coins were in circulation during the period between the *Mahajanapada* periods (6th century BC) and the Mauryan and the Post-Mauryan period (the first century AD), they had no inscriptions on them. Coins with inscriptions came into circulation during the Kusana period.

Pre-Medieval Period

The inscriptions, seals and sealings of Bengal belonging to the period between the 8th and the 13th century AD are referred to as the Pre-Medieval inscriptions.

The Pala king Gopala founded the rule of the Pala dynasty in the 8th century AD; however, no inscriptions have been traced to be issued before his son and successor Dharmapala. The Khalimpur copperplate is the earliest Pala inscription of Bengal issued in 802 AD.²⁶ This is why, the inscriptions of the 8th century AD literally refer to the ones issued by the Deva kings of South-East Bengal, that is, Vanga-Samatata. Kantideva's Nasirabad copperplate is the only instance of the ninth century AD copper plate inscriptions of South-East Bengal. South-East Bengal has yielded the inscriptions of the Chandra and the Varman dynasties which were issued between the 10th and the 12th century AD. The Senas supplanted the Varmans and extended their empire almost all over the Bengal region. But, the Sena kingdom became limited to the South-East Bengal in the beginning of the 13th century AD. After the Sena rule had collapsed, there came the rule of the Deva kings. On the other hand, the Pala kings continued to rule North and West Bengal from the 8th to the 12th century AD with some minor interregnums. The two image inscriptions issued in the reign of Mahipala reveal that the Pala empire was extended over South-East Bengal for a short period. Inscriptions of North and West Bengal are hardly found to be issued in the 8th century AD. But, the history of South-East Bengal from the 7th and the 8th century AD onwards has more or less been revealed to us. There the Rata, Deva, Harikela, Chandra and Varman kings had contributed to upholding the political identity of this region. However, this separate identity was temporarily interrupted during the Sena period when the Sena kings established an All-Bengal empire.

Deva Inscriptions (8th century)

The Buddhist Deva dynasty was a significant dynasty in South-East Bengal. The Deva kings ruled the kingdom from the capital Devaparvata during the 8th century AD. The Buddhist institutions of Lalmai-Mainamati underwent an unprecedented development during the Deva period. Six copperplates, a stone-plaque and a clay seal have been found at Ananda Vihara, Shalvan Vihara, Itakhola Vihara, and Rupbankanya Mura in Lalmai-Mainamati.²⁷ In addition to the Shalvan Vihara copperplate of Anandadeva and Bhavadeva and the Anada Vihara/Calcutta Asiatic Society copperplate of Bhavadeva, three more Deva copperplates have been found in Shalvan Vihara. The stone-plaque inscription has been found at Rupbankanyamura while the clay seal has been retrieved from Shalvan Vihara. The Deva copperplates had some exclusive features which were absent from the earlier ones in Bengal. One of the special features was that they had a Deer Park seal attached to the top mid point. This type of seal depicted a *dharmachakra* (the Wheel of Law) with two worshipping deer on both sides. It symbolizes the First Sermon of the Buddha at Deer Park in Sarnath. The Sarnath seal was in use in the subcontinent even before the Deva rule. This type of seal is engraved on the pedestal of a 5th century Buddha image preserved in Sarnath Museum. The

Sarnath seals have also been discovered in Nalanda, Karnasuvarna, Mainamati and Paharpur (Somapura). But, it is to be noted that the Sarnath seal had no use in the copperplates of Bengal before the rule of King Anandadeva whose tradition was unquestionably followed in the later periods by the Pala and the Chandra kings. The Buddhist Khadgas, the predecessors of the Deva kings, used Bull Seals, a symbol of the Hindu Saiva tradition, in their copperplates. There was evidently no Buddhist symbol in the copperplates of the Khadgas or even before them.

The Deva copperplates give some information about some new titles. One of these titles is *Paramasaugata* which denotes a devout worshipper of Sugata or the Buddha. This Deva title was used by the Pala and the Chandra kings in their inscriptions. Kings Anandadeva and Bhavadeva used *Vangalamriganka* and *Abhinavamriganka* as their titles respectively in their copperplates and gold coins though the later kings declined to use them in theirs. These copperplates reveal the names of four Deva kings: Santideva, Viradeva, Anandadeva and Bhavadeva all of whom assumed the title *Maharajadhiraja*.

The Shalvan Vihara copperplate of Anandadeva and Bhavadeva is unique in the sense that it records the act of granting lands to a single person by two different kings from two different *Jayaskandhavaras*. Anandadeva donated 7.5 *patakas* of land to Jayabhuti for the maintenance of his temple while Bhavadeva donated 3 *patakas* of land to the same person. Anandadeva and Bhavadeva's grants were issued respectively from Vasantapura and Devaparvata in the 39th and the 2nd regnal year. It is a rare instance of two land grants by two kings in a single plate. However, at the request of *Mahasamanta* Nandadhara, King Bhavadeva donated 7.5 *patakas* of land for Vendamati Viharika with Ananda Vihara copperplate. Only one stone-plaque inscription of the Deva period has been found at Rupbankanyamura in Lalmai-Mainamati.²⁸ The plaque is quadrangular; and since it is partly broken and some parts are missing, it is still un-deciphered.

A clay seal of the Deva period retrieved from Shalvan Vihara is specially significant.²⁹ The seal is divided into two registers: Sarnath seal in the upper part and 3 lines of Sanskrit inscription in the lower part. The inscription is as follows: '*Sri Bhavadeva Maha Vihara-Arya Bhiksu Sanghasya*' (Of the noble organization of the monks of Sri Bhavadeva Mahavihara)

This clay seal reveals that the original name of Shalvan Vihara was Bhavadeva Mahavihara, and some monks of the noble rank would live there. It also reveals that the monastery was built by the Deva king Bhavadeva and was named after him.

Harikela Inscriptions (8th-10th centuries AD)

Modern Chittagong region was previously known as Harikela Mandala. At least three inscriptions of Harikela kings had been found; one of them is a copperplate while the other two are copper vase inscriptions. King Kantideva (9th century AD) issued his Nasirabad copperplate which contained only the genealogy with some introductory speeches, but main section of land grant was absent. On the other hand, King

Devatideva (8th century AD) and King Attakaradeva (10th century AD) issued vase grants, which are unique in the subcontinent. These vases have been found in Chittagong.³⁰ These kinds of land grants engraved on copper vases are unprecedented not only in Bengal but in South Asia. The vase inscription of Devatideva informs that he was a Buddhist king of Harikela Mandala belonging to Khasa tribe. The Khasas were in fact non-Aryans who later accepted Buddhism. Secondly, this inscription was issued in 77 Burmies Era which started being counted from 638 AD onwards. So, the date of the inscription is $(638+77) = 715$ AD. This dating is consistent from the palaeographic point of view as well since this inscription has been written in the Siddhmatrika scripts of the 8th century AD.³¹ The third significant feature of this vase inscription is that half a dozen of grants have been engraved on it. This vase inscription records that some socially important persons bought private lands and donated them to the religious persons or institutions. This inscription also records *pataka* and *dronavapa* as the units of land measurement. It also informs about the Tandaka coins³² whose reference has not been found from other source. The officials mentioned here held different titles viz. *Kumaramatya*, *Mahavaladhikrita*, *Mahamahattara*, *Dharmapatha*, *Sandhivigrahika*, *Mudrapala* and *Mahavarika*. According to Attakaradeva's vase inscription, his subordinate *Mahapratihara* and *Praptapanchamahasabda* Sahadeva built a *Mathika* in the name of *Munindrabhattaraka* and donated it. Sahadeva was the son of Kalyanadeva and Varadevi and the grandson of Buddhadeva. The titles of Attakaradeva were *Rajadhiraja* and *Samgramanka* (Moon of Warfield). However, the land grants of Kantideva and Attakaradeva record Vardhamanapura as the capital of Harikela Mandal. According to some scholars, Vardhamanapura was located in Chittagong.

Inscriptions of the Chandra Dynasty (10th -11th century)

The rule of the Chandra dynasty is the most significant part in the history of South-East Bengal. The whole of South-East Bengal came under the rule of this dynasty. Eleven copperplates and at least 3 definite image inscriptions of this dynasty have so far been found. In addition, a black-stone image inscription from Bairagir Mura and a bronze Dhyani Buddha Amoghsiddhi image inscription from Shalvan Vihara in Lalmai-Mainamati are placed in the 10th -11th century AD, that is, the Chandra period.³³ Both the images have inscriptions engraved on their pedestals. The inscriptions that have been revealed include Srichandra's Paschimbhag copperplate (RY 5; Maulvibazar district), Dhulla copperplate (Manikganj district), Kedarpur copperplate (Shariyatpur district), Idilpur copperplate (Shariyatpur district), Rampal copperplate (Munshiganj district), Madanpur copperplate (RY 46; Dhaka district) and BNM copperplate (RY 46; Comilla district?), Kalyanchandra's Dhaka copperplate (RY 24; Dhaka district), Ladahachandra's two Charpatramura copperplates (RY 6; Comilla district) and Govindachandra's Charpatramura copperplate. Information about Ladahachandra's Bharella Nattesvara image inscription (RY 18; Comilla district), Govindachandra's Kulkuri Surya image inscription (RY 12; Madaripur district) and his Paikpara-Vetka Vasudeva image inscription (RY 23?; Munshiganj district) has also been obtained.

All of the Chandra copperplates were issued from Vikramapura *Jayaskandhavaras*. The Chandras issued copperplates first from Vikramapura. Later, the Varmans and the Senas also issued land grants from here. The copperplates of the Chandra dynasty are very much informative as those of the Pala dynasty. For example, we can tell about Srichandra's Paschimbhag copperplate. The initial verse of the copperplate with Wheel of Law seal records the invocation of the Buddhist three gems. The genealogy and the heroic activities of the kings are described in the later verses. After that comes the *danangsa*, the real donation portion, which includes the description of the granted lands and their boundaries along with the profession of the donee. The people who were informed of the land grant and requested to follow it include the queen consorts, *Ranakas* (feudal chiefs), princes, *Mahasandhivigrahika* (minister for war and peace), *Mahasainyapati* (General), *Mahaksapatalika* (minister for audit and accounts or finance), *Padamulika*, *Mahapratihara* (higher grade feudal chief), *Mahatanradhikrita* (minister for religious affairs?), *Mhasarvadhikrita*, *Mahavaladhikaranika* (defense secretary), *Mahavyuhapati* (a kind of army leader), *Mandalapati* (ruler of a Circle), *Kottapala* (controller of a fort), *Daushsahasadhanika* (head of the difficult jobs or secret service), *Chaurodharanika* (officer in charge of police), *Nauvalahastyasvagomahisajavikadi Vyaprataka* (officer in charge of naval, elephant, cavalry, cows, bedfellows, etc.), *Gaulmikas* (artillery soldiers or officer in charge of grass land), *Saulkika* (customs officer), *Dandika* (officer in charge of punishment), *Dandapasika* (Judge or officer in charge of capital punishment with hanging), *Dandanayaka* (Judge or officer in charge of punishment), *Visayapatris*, *Rajapadopajivins* (dependents on Royal family), persons



Plate- 8: copper-plate inscription of Chandra dynasty, Mainamati, Comilla

cited with honor in *Adhyaksa Prachara*, *Chattas* and *Bhattas* (regular and irregular soldiers), inhabitant of the *Janadadas*, *Ksetrakaras* (cultivators) and Brahmins.^{34,35}

Like the Pala kings, the Chandras donated lands with their grants by sacrificing some royal rights. These types of rights mentioned in Paschimbhag copperplates included water and land, bottom and surface, mangoes and jackfruit trees, coconut and betel nut trees, low and barren lands. The administrative jurisdiction, such as the authority of judging ten crimes, catching thieves and all kinds of coercing activities of the royal authority, was also given off. They were exempted of all types of taxes and liabilities, and even the soldiers were stripped off the right of entering these lands. The donees could enjoy the fixed taxes and jewels of the lands. The donation was executed excluding the lands of the Buddhist three jewels and Indresvara naval port. The people and the peasants together with the Brahmins are ordered to perform their respective responsibilities towards the donees.

Thus, the characteristic features of the copperplates of the Chandras and the Palas are more or less identical. These copperplates record the regnal years of the kings, but the common systems of Eras are absent. The Chandra copperplates inform about the feudal chief Purnachandra and his son Suvarnachandra. Trailokyachandra, the son of Suvarnachandra, was the first independent king of this dynasty. His son Srichandra was the greatest ruler of the dynasty. Kalyanchandra, Ladahachandra and Govindachandra were the successive rulers after Srichandra. The rule of the Varmans appeared after the Chandras.

Inscriptions of the Varmans (11th century AD)

Only three copperplates and two stone inscriptions of the Varmans have so far been discovered. The copperplates include Harvarman's Samantasar copperplate (Shariyatpur district), Samalavarman's Vajrayogini copperplate (Mushiganj district), and Bhojavarman's Belavo copperplate (Narsingdi district) while the stone inscriptions include the Sujanagar stone inscription (Munshiganja district) and Harivarman's minister Bhatta Bhavadeva's Bhuvanesvar Prasasti (Orissa). Engraved on a stone slab at Ananta Vasudeva temple in Bhuvanesvar, the *prasasti* is the eulogy

of a Brahman ministerial family which lived in Siddhala village in Northern Radha.³⁶ The *prasasti* is inscribed on a stone slab in Ananta-Vasudeva Temple in Bhuvaneswar. It was Bhavadeva who built this temple.³⁷ There were a water tank and a garden inside the temple premise. The temple had one hundred Devdasis (women temple servants). A verse in this eulogy expressed a strong sense of sectarianism, which is totally absent from any other Bengal inscriptions. Verse 20 of the eulogy

Plate- 9: Inscription of Bhojavarman (approximately 1137-45 AD), Sujanagar, Munshiganj



describe that Bhatta Bhavadeva was antagonistic towards Buddhism, and won over the atheist scholars in a debate.³⁸ The Sujanagar inscription is also engraved on a black stone slab just like the Bhuvaneshvara Prasasti. It is deposited in the Bangladesh National Museum and still un-deciphered. Harivarman donated 86 *dronas* of land of Varaparvata village in Mayuravidda *Visaya* of Panchavasa Mandala to his Santivarika with the Samantasar copperplate.³⁹ Samalavarman with his Vajrayogini plate donated land to Bhimadeva for his temples of Prajnaparamita and other Buddhist deities.⁴⁰ It indicates that the Varman kings were not antagonistic towards Buddhism. Bhojavarman with his Belavo copperplate donated a *pataka* and 9.25 *dronas* of land of Upyalika village in Kousambi-Astagaccha Khandala of Adhapattana Mandala. The Sena rule came into existence after the Varman Kingdom had collapsed. The Senas occupied North Bengal by ousting the Palas who were then known as the rulers of North Bengal and Bihar. It was the Pala copperplates that succeeded to come up with a full-fledged and novel tradition of the copper inscription.

Pala Inscriptions (9th-12th century AD)

Many copperplates, stone pillars, images, seals and sealings containing inscriptions have been found in Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand (Eastern India) and Uttar Pradesh. The instances of the 25 Pala inscriptions found in Bengal include Dharmapala's Khalimpur copperplate (Malda district), Murshidabad copperplate and two Paharpur clay seals (Naogaon district), Mahendrapala's Jagjivanpur copperplate (Malda district), Paharpur stone pillar inscription (Naogaon district), Gopala's (Surapala's son) Los Angeles copperplate (provenance unknown), Narayanapala's Badal/Mangalbari stone pillar inscription (Dinajpur district), Rajyapala's Bhaturiya stone slab inscription (Rajshahi district), Gopala III's Jajilpara copperplate (Malda district), Mahipala I's Belwa copperplate (Dinajpur district), Bangarh copperplate (South dinajpur district), Biyala copperplate (Jaypurhat district), Panchbibi copperplate (Jaypurhat district), Nayapala's Bangarh Murtisiva's *Prasasti* (South Dinajpur district), Siyan stone slab inscription

Plate- 10: Inscription of Pala king Gopala IV (approximately 1128-1143 AD), Inscription: ancient Bengal, Language: Sanskrit, Badarganj, Rangpur



(Birbhum district), Vighrahapala III's Belwa copperplate, Amgachhi copperplate (Dinajpur district), Mahipala II's Baghaura Narayana stone image inscription (Brahmanbariya district), Narayanpur Vinayaka stone image inscription (Chandpur district), Gopala III/IV's Mandhuka Ganesa image inscription (Comilla district), Gopala IV's Rajhibpur Sadasiva stone image inscription (South Dinajpur district), Manda stone inscription (Naogaon district), Madanapala's two Rajhibpur copperplates (South Dinajpur district), and the Manhali copperplate (Dinajpur district).⁴¹ Of the above Pala inscriptions, 15 are copperplates while the others are stone image, pillar, slab and plaque inscriptions and clay seals. Mahendrapals' Paharpur stone pillar inscription is probably the earliest instance of the pillar inscription erected and engraved by the Bengal kings. The Pala inscriptions found outside the territory of Bengal include Dharmapala's Nalanda copperplate (Bihar), Devapala's Munger copperplate (Bihar) and Nalanda copperplate, Surapala I's Mirzapur copperplate (Uttar Pradesh), Narayanapala's Bhagalpur copperplate (Bihar), Mahipala I's Sarnath stone inscription (Uttar Pradesh), Vighrahapala III's Bangaon copperplate (Bihar) and Madanapala's Arma pillar inscriptions. Devapala's Nalanda copperplate is very significant in the sense that King Devapala donated 4 villages in Rajgriha *Visaya* and a village in Gaya *Visaya* to the Buddhist monks at the request of Suvarnadvipa king Balaputradeva.⁴² It is an evidence of the amicable relationship of the Pala kings with the kings of Suvarnadvipa who ruled South-East Asia. Sarnath stone inscription has a significant role in fixing the date or chronology of the Pala dynasty. The Pala inscriptions would generally contain only the regnal years of the kings while the Sarnath inscription recorded the date in Shaka Era (1083) which made it easy to determine the chronology of the Pala kings. In addition, this inscription bears ample significance because of the accounts of Mahipala's pilgrimage to Sarnath-Varansi and the establishments of new religious institutions and renovation of the old monuments under the guidance of his younger brothers - Sthirapala and Vasantapala. Arma inscription is the only evidence of land grant engraved on a pillar. Stone pillars would generally contain eulogistic verses, not land grants. The copperplates of the Pala kings came up with some new styles. Their copperplates would contain their genealogy and eulogistic verses engraved in the introductory section. For example, Dharmapala's Khalimpur copperplate and Mahendrapala's Jagjivanpur copperplates contain 13 and 16 verses respectively eulogizing their dynasty. Imprecatory and admonitory verses regarding religious merits of land grants and sins of its confiscations were engraved in the concluding part of the Pala copperplates. The Pala copperplates provide information about their genealogy as well. Dayitavisnu, the earliest recorded forefather of the Pala dynasty, was a person with wisdom. His son Vapyata was a warrior who was well-known as the destroyer of the enemies. Gopala, son of Vapyata, ended the *Matsyanyayam* and established peace in the kingdom. The meaning of *Matsyanyayam* is lawlessness like the law of fishes. The Pala copperplates describe that Gopala put an end to the century-long *Matsyanyayam*. The first two lines of fourth verse of the Khalimpur copperplate of Dharmapala are famous⁴³: '*Matsya-nyayamapohitum*

prakritibhirlaksya: karam grahita:/ Srigopala iti ksitisa-sirasam cudamanistatsuta'. The meaning of this verse is that the *Prakritis* enthroned Gopala in order to end the lawlessness. *Prakritis* means people, royal employees, and feudal chiefs. It is assumed that Gopala became the king with the help of some feudal chiefs and ended the *Matsyanyayam*. According to the statement of the Pala copperplates, Gopala subdued the powers responsible for chaos and established permanent peace in the country, though the Pala kings were continuously involved in warfare in other cases.

The Pala copperplates are full of eulogistic verses of Dharmapala who was the son of Gopala. Of the many stories of his gallantry and extending the empire, the coronation ceremony in Kanuj is especially important.⁴⁴ Dharmapala dethroned Indrayudh to enthrone Chakrayudh and arranged the coronation ceremony in Kanauj where many kings from Northern and Western India attended. No copperplate of Devapala, the son of Dharmapala, have been found in Bengal. The recently discovered Jagjivanpur copperplate of Mahendrapala, the son of Devapala, focuses a new light on the history of the Pala dynasty.⁴⁵ The Jagjivanpur copperplate informs that Devapala's elder son Mahendrapala succeeded his father after his demise, and his younger son Surapala was appointed in important state affairs. Surapala, the younger brother of Mahendrapala, was the Dutaka of the Jagjivanpur copperplate. Mahendrapala ruled at least 15 years and. Surapala succeeded his brother. According to Los Angeles copperplates, Gopala, the son of Surapala, ruled at least for four years.⁴⁶ Gopala, the son of Surapala, is to be known as Gopala II. As a result, the previous tradition of referring to Rajyapala's son Gopala and Kumarapala's son Gopala respectively as Gopala II and Gopala III had to be changed; and now they are to be known as Gopala III and Gopala IV respectively. This amendment in the Pala genealogy had to be done due to the discovery of the Jagjivanpur and the Los Angeles copperplates. According to these copperplates, Devapala's direct descendents ruled at least for 24 years. Vighrahapala I, the founder of the second line of the Pala dynasty, ascended the throne during or after the reign of the successors of Devapala. Vighrahapala I's father Jayapala and grandfather Vakpala were the Generals of Devapala and Dharmapala respectively. Vakpala's father Gopala I was the founder of the Pala dynasty. So, Gopal's genealogy became divided into two distinct lines: the first line with Dharmapala and second line with Vakpala. Vighrahapala I, grandson of Vakpala, was the great grandson of Gopala I. The copperplates of the kings of this second line did not record the names of the direct successors of Devapala. They gave information about Gopala I, his son General Vakpala and his grandson General Jayapala together with the later kings in the eulogy section in their copperplates. The founder of the second line of the Pala dynasty was Vighrahapala I who was the son of General Jayapala. But no copperplate of Vighrahapala I has been found, though two image inscriptions of his time have been obtained.⁴⁷ Vighrahapala I has been described in his successors' inscriptions as a peace-loving king who abdicated the throne in favour of his son Narayanapala and adopted *Vanaprastha*; that is, he went to the forest for living there. His son Rajyapala ascended the throne after him. The Pala copperplates claim that Rajyapala made tanks as deep as the ocean

and built temples as high as the mountains. Rajyapala's son Gopala was previously described as Gopala II. But, after the discovery of the Los Angeles copperplates of Gopala, the son of Surapala I, we call him Gopala III who was succeeded by his son Vighrahapala II. Vighrahapala II was succeeded by his son Mahipala I. According to his Bangarh and Belwa copperplates, Mahipala I recaptured his lost paternal land from the intruders. The Kamboja Gaudapatis were the intruders who annexed North and West Bengal from the father or grandfather of Mahipala I. The inscriptions of the Gaudapati Kambojas have also been discovered. These inscriptions also inform that Mahipala I recaptured his paternal lands in North and West Bengal from these intruders. Mahipala I was succeeded by his son Nayapala whose inscriptions have been found in Bengal and Bihar; however, none of his copperplates have been found till now. The copperplates and stone inscriptions of Vighrahapala III, the son of Nayapala have been found in Bengal and Bihar. His Belwa and Amgachhi copperplates have been found in Bangladesh. Vighrahapala III has been described as the patron of four castes. According to Madanapala's Manhali copperplate, his three sons – Mahipala II, Surapala II and Ramapala – succeeded Vighrahapala III one after another. His son Kumarapala and grandson Gopala IV again succeeded Ramapala. His uncle Madanapala, the son of Ramapala, succeeded Gopala IV. Thus, the Pala copperplates provide a genealogy of the kings. In addition, these sources also helped to unfold the matrimonial relationships of the Pala kings. The Pala royal family established matrimonial relations with different dynasties. The information of the parents of the Pala kings is found to be recorded in their copperplates. The 5th verse of Khalimpur copperplate describes Deddadevi, the queen consort of Gopala, as the source of pleasure for the king. Deddadevi has also been compared to Rohini (wife of the moon), Svaha (wife of Agni), Sarvani (wife of Sarva), Shaci (wife of Indra), Laksmi (wife of *Vishnu*) and Bhadra (daughter of Guhyakapati). Rannadevi, the queen consort of Dharmapala, was the daughter of Rastrakuta king Paravala. She was very much devoted to her husband and surpassed all the ladies in the seraglio with her excellent qualities. The subjects would think Rannadevi as the real Lakshmi, as the earth goddess in anthropomorphic form, as the figural achievements of king or as his household goddess. Dharmapala's wife has been described as Niti in the 6th verse of Jagjivanpur copperplate of Mahendrapala. Mahtadevi, the daughter of Chahman king Durlabharaja, was the queen consort of Devapala. The 12th verse of Jagjivanpur copperplate of Mahendrapala describes her as pure, religious minded and well qualified. The eulogy of Mahtadevi has been illustrated in the 14th, 15th, and 16th verses of the Mirzapur copperplate of Surapala I. Lajjyadevi, the queen consort of Vighrahapala I, has been compared with Jahnavi, the wife of Samudra, or to the ornaments of Haihaya dynasty. She purified the families of both her husband and father with her chaste character. Bhagyadevi was the queen consort of Rajyapala who was the son of Narayanapala. She was the daughter of Tungaraja of the Rastrakuta dynasty (the 8th verse of Mahipala's Bangarh, Vighrahapal III's Amgachhi and Madanapala's Manhali copperplates). Madanadevi and Citramatikadevi were the queen consorts of Ramapala

and Madanapala respectively. Other noble women figures have also been reflected in the Pala epigraphic evidences. The painful condition of war-torn women has been reflected in the 5th and the 15th verses of the Jagjivanpur copperplate. The 5th verse records the condition of the wives of the enemy kings; their long sigh would contain their cosmetic particles which would reach even the palace premise of Dharmapala. The 15th verse records that as Mahendrapala beheaded the enemies and their elephants, the blood of the animals and the tears of the enemies' wives would make the water level higher. According to the 5th verse of the Amgachhi and Manhali copperplates, the swords of Vighrapala III destroyed the cosmetics of the women of his enemy side. According to the 17th verse of the Manhali copperplate, Kumarapala's two hands became red by erasing the vermilion from the heads of the wives of his enemies. Thus, it is evident that war was a common phenomenon during the Pala period, and as a result, innumerable warriors died and the miserable condition of the wives of the demised knew no bounds.

The Pala copperplates were issued from *Jayaskandhavaras*, such as Pataliputra, Mudgagiri, Kuddalakhatak, Vilasapura, and Ramavatanagara, etc. All of the *Jayaskandhavaras* of the Palas were situated on the Bhagirathi. The Pala inscriptions did not record the permanent *Jayaskandhavara* or the capital of the Palas.

The Pala copperplates and the other inscriptions record their dates according to the regnal year of the reigning kings. In some cases, the names of the engravers have also been recorded in these inscriptions. Tatata was a skilled artist who engraved on Dharmapala's Khalimpur copperplate. Subhata was his father, and Bhogata was his grandfather. *Samanta* Mahata was the engraver of the Jagjivanpur copperplate of Mahendrapala. *Samanta* Dakkadasa and Vairocanadasa were the artists of the Mirzapur copperplate of Surapala I. *Sutradhara* Vishnubhadra and artist Mahidhara were the engravers of the Badal pillar inscription. Artists Mamkhadasa, Mahidhara and Tathagatasara engraved Narayanapala's Bhagalpur copperplate, Mahipala I's Bangarh copperplate and Madanapala's Manhali copperplate respectively. The artisans of the Pala period undoubtedly enjoyed high social status. Some artisans became *Samantas* (feudal chiefs) as evident in the inscriptions.

The Pala kings were the followers of Buddhism. Sarnath seal was attached to the top of each copperplate of the Palas. It is worth noticing that the Deva kings of Vanga-Samatata started attaching this Sarnath seal on the top of copperplates in Bengal.⁴⁸ The Palas followed the tradition of attaching Sarnath seal to their copperplates probably being influenced by the Devas. The seals of the Pala copperplates were decorated with some concentric circles. The upper register of these seals had the Sarnath symbol while the lower contained the name of the reigning king. The Sarnath seal was in fact a symbolized form of Buddhism. The inscriptions of the Pala copperplates would start with paying reverence to the Buddha. The Pala kings used to grant lands to some person or religious institution, willingly or at the request of other person. Dharmapala, with his Khalimpur copperplate, donated four villages namely Krausnasvabhra, Marasalmali, Palitaka and Gopipali to the temple of god Nanna-Narayana in Subhasthali. The first

three villages were located at Mahantaprakash *Visaya* in Vyagratati Mandala, and the last one was located at Sthalikatta *Visaya* in Amrasandika Mandala- all located in Pundravardhana Bhukti. Mahendrapala, with his Jagjivanpur copperplate, donated land to Nandadirghika Mahavihara at the boundary of an Udranga in Kuddalakhata *Visaya* within Pundravardhana Bhukti. It is to be noted that Nandirghika Mahavihara was also built by him. With his Bangarh copperplate, Mahipala I donated Kuratapallika village at Kotivarsa *Visaya* of Pundravardhana Bhukti to *Bhattaputra* Krisnadityasman of Cavati village. Madanapala, with his Manhali copperplate, donated 20 lands at Kosthagiri village in Halavarta Mandala in Kotivarsa *Visaya* within Pundravardhana Bhukti to *Pandit Bhattaputra* Sri Vatesvarasvmin of Campahitti as the honorarium of his reading out the *Mahabharata*.

The royal persons whose presence and approval would legitimize the Pala copperplates include *Rajarajanyaka* (kings and chiefs), *Rajamatya* (king's ministers and secretaries), *Mahasandhivigrahika* (minister for war and peace affairs), *Mahaksapatalika* (Head of finance and audit and accounts), *Mahasamanta* (higher feudal chief), *Mahasenapati* (Chief of army), *Mahapratihara* (Chief of palace guard regiment), *Daushsahasadhanika* (person involved in difficult works), *Rajasthaniyoparika* (Uparika or the Governor of Bhukti with the status of king or chief), *Chauroddharanika* (Officer in charge of thief prevention or tax collector for it), *Dandika* (an officer who punishes law breakers), *Dandapasika* (an officer who punishes criminals with hanging by rope), *Ksetrapa* (land surveyor), *Prantapala* (chief of border security force), *Angaraksa* (body guard), *Tadayuktaka*, *Viniyuktaka*, *Hastyasvostra-Nauvala Vyapritaka* (Supervisor of elephants, horses, camels and naval forces), *Gomahisajavikadhyaksa* (Chief of cow, buffalo, goat and ram), *Dutapresanika* (Deputed messenger or ambassador), *Gamagamika* (bearer of letters or files, a man who comes and go), *Abhitvaramana* (Head of mail bearers), *Visayapati* (Head of a *Visaya* or district), *Gramapati* (village headman), *Tarika* (officer in charge of boats and ferries), *Saulkika* (Tax officer), *Gaulmika* (forest officer or chief of artillery division), *Gauda-Malava-Choda-Huna-Kulika-Karnata-Lata-Chata-Bhatta Sevakadin* (regular and irregular mercenary soldiers and servants of Gauda, Malava, Choda, Huna, Kulika, Karnata and Lata countries), *Rajapadopajivin Prativasino* (nearer royal servants), *Brahmanottaran* (chief Brahmans), *Mahattamottama* (head of the headmen), *Kutumbi* (relatives or peasants) and *Puroga-Chandala Prayantan* (people from the priests to the *Chandalas*).⁴⁹

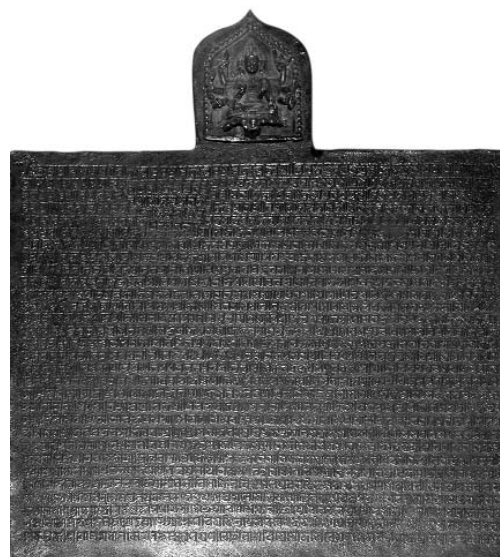
The Pala clay seal found at Paharpur Mahavihara has the Sarnath symbol in it. Information engraved on the seal contends that the original name of the Paharpur monastery was Dharmapala Mahavihara which is located in Somapura. It also informs that the *vihara* was named after king Dharmapala who built it. Kamboja king Nayapala's Bangarh stone pillar inscription (South Dinajpur district) and his Irda copperplate (Urisa) and *Mahamandalika* Isvaraghosha's Ramganj copperplate (Thakurgaon district) together with those of the Chandra and Varman kings are worth

mentioning. The Bangarh stone pillar inscription gives information about a Shiva temple built by Gaudapati Kunjaraghatavarsa (888 Shaka Era = 966 AD) of the Kamboja dynasty. With his Irda copperplate, Nayapala donated Brihatchhattivanna village of Dandabhukti Mandala belonging to Vardhamana Bhukti to Brahman *Pandita* Asvathasarman.⁵⁰ The Irda copperplate was issued from Priyangu. According to this copperplate, Rajyapala and Bhagyadevi were the parents of Nayapala of the Kamboja dynasty, and Narayanapala was his elder brother. On the other hand, verses of Ramganj copperplate of Isvaraghosha record the names of his father Dhavalaghosha, mother Sadbhava, grandfather Valaghosha, and his great grandfather Dhurtaghosha.⁵¹ With his Ramganj copperplate issued from Dhekkari, Isvaraghosha donated the Digghasodika village belonging to the Gallitipaka *Visaya* of the Piyolla Mandala. The exclusivity of this plate lies in the fact that though a Mahamandalika issued this plate, it contains information of his subordinate Rajans and Rajanyas, queens and princes just like the emperors.

The Sena Inscriptions (12th-13th century AD)

In spite of being outsiders, the Senas settled in this country permanently and ruled almost the whole of Bengal. A substantial number of Sena inscriptions have been found. They include the Deopara stone slab-inscription (Rajshahi district), Barrackpur copperplate (RY 62; 24 Parganas district), and Paikar image inscription (Birbhum district), Vallasena's Sanokhar image inscription (RY 9; Bihar), Naihati copperplate (RY 11; Burdwan district); Laksmanasena's Govindapur copperplate (RY 2; 24 Parganas district), Bakultala/Sundarban copperplate (RY 2; 24 Parganas district), Tarpandighi copperplate (RY 2; South Dinajpur district), Anulia copperplate (RY 3; Nadia district), Rampal/Dhaka Candi image inscription (RY 3; Munshiganj district), Saktipur copperplate (RY 6; Murshidabad district), Bagbari stone slab inscription (RY 6; Chapai Nawabganj district), Madhainagar copperplate (Sirajganj district), Rajabari/Bhowal copperplate (RY 27; Gazipur district); Visvarupasena/ Kesavasena's Idilpur copperplate (RY 3; Shariyatpur district), Visvarupasena's Madhyapara/Kolkata Sahitya Parisat copperplate (RY 13; Munshiganj district), and Madanpara copperplate (RY 14; Gopalganj district). The image inscriptions of the Sena period are small in size with very little historical information. But, the copperplates and eulogies contain huge historical information. The remarkable Sena inscriptions give information of their dynastic and caste identity, their settling at Radha in Bengal after coming from Karnata in the Deccan and the subsequent establishment of kingdom by Vijayasena. The inscriptions also inform that though the Senas were actually Brahmans in caste, they took up the role of Ksatriya. The Sena kings were the orthodox Hindus. They patronized the preaching of the Vedic Yajna in a wide scale. It is now impossible to know whether they patronized any

Plate- 11: copper-plate inscription (1206-1220 AD), Viswarup Sena, Bangladesh National Museum



religious community except the Brahmans and the poor or not since there is no inscriptional evidence to reveal it. The Sena inscriptions mention Buddhism and the Buddhist *viharas* though they did not enjoy any patronization by the Sena kings.

The Sena genealogy can easily be reconstructed on the basis of the information given by the inscriptions. Vijayasena was the founder of the Sena dynasty; his father Samantasena and grandfather Hemantasena were feudal kings of Radha. Vijayasena increased his strength by marrying Vilasadevi, the Sura royal princess, and conquered almost the whole of Bengal. According to the 2nd and 3rd verses of Deopara *Prasasti*, he was a devout worshipper of god *Shiva*. But, by building the temple of Pradyumnesvara, he proved that he was also the worshipper of *Vishnu* since Pradyumna is also a form of *Vishnu*. Vallasena, the son of Vijayasena, was also the worshiper of *Shiva*. Vallasena's son Laksmanasena and Laksmanasena's son Visvarupasena were the worshippers of *Vishnu* and *Surya* respectively. But, all of the copperplates of the Senas contain seal with Sadasiva image. The information of queen consorts of the Senas is also found in the copperplates and eulogies. Vilasadevi was the chief queen consort of Vijayasena. The queen consort of Vallasena was Ramadevi, the princess of the Chaluky dynasty. The information of Ramadevi is recorded in verse 9 of Laksmanasena's Madhainagar copperplate. Ahvanadevi, the chief queen consort of Laksmanasena, was the mother of Visvarupasena. The information of Visvarupasena's two sons, prince Suryasena and Purusottamasena, have been obtained from his Madhyapara copperplate.

The absolute dominance of the Brahmans and priests in the state affairs or administration are revealed by the Sena inscriptions. The Senas would celebrate different occasions like benevolence, birthdays, solar and lunar eclipses, etc. which are available in their inscriptions.

Dommanapala, a feudal chief of Sundarban region, declared independence at the end of the rule of Laksmanasena and donated land with a grant which is known as Raksasakhali/Sundarban copperplate.⁵² By this time, another ruler named Ranavankamalla Harikaladeva became independent in South-East Bengal and issued Kotbari copperplate in 1141 Shaka Era (1220 AD) and in the 17th regnal year.⁵³ The king's minister Dhadieva and his father Hediaeva have been eulogized in this copperplate which also records the minister's donation of 20 *dronas* of land in Vejukhanda village to Durgottara Vihara located in Pattikera city. This indicates that the Senas had lost control of the Sundarbans and the Samatata regions in the last phase of Laksmanasena's rule, even before the invasion of Bakhtiyar Khalji. Therefore, the empire of Laksmanasena was limited to the Mid-southern Bengal due to the annexation of Nadia and Gauda by Bakhtiyar Khalji. Laksmanasena's son Visvarupasena is the last known ruler of the Sena dynasty.

Inscriptions of the Hindu Deva Dynasty

The Hindu Deva dynasty came into power in the second quarter of the 13th century AD after the collapse of the Sena kingdom. They ruled up to the last quarter in the

Vanga-Samatata and Harikela regions. Inscriptions of this dynasty include Damodaradeva's Mehar copperplate (1234 AD; Chandpur district), Sobharampur copperplate (1236 AD; Comilla district), and Nasirabad copperplate (Chittagong); Viradharadeva's Charpatramura copperplate (Comilla); Dasarathadeva's Adabari (Munshiganj) and Pakamura (Comilla) copperplates.

Damodaradeva, with his Mehar copperplate, donated many agricultural lands having the income of 100 Puranas per annum to 20 Brahmans of Mehar village.⁵⁴ Mehar village was located in Vaisagrama Khandala belonging to the Paralayi *Visaya* of Samatata Mandala. It is to be mentioned that earlier Mehar was located in the estates of Mahasandhivigrahika Munidasa and Mahaksapatalika Dalaeva. They also made some lands rent free with the permission of the king. The system of abbreviations of many words used in Mehar copperplates is an interesting and significant feature. For example, *Brahman*, *Nala Bhumi*, *Vastu Tikara*, and *Chira Khila* are cited as *Bra*, *Na Bhu*, *Va Ti* and *Chi Khi* respectively. Another feature of Damodaradeva's copperplates is their dating, which would mention both the regnal year and Shaka Era. As a result, the date of the Devas is very easy to determine.

King Damodaradeva, at the request of his *Mudradhikari Sachiva Sri* Gautamadatta, donated 15 *dronas* of land along with the homesteads at Sundaraya, Disyaga and Bandura villages with his Sobharampur copperplate.⁵⁵ These villages were located in Chhatihara Khandala belonging to the Vidilli *Visaya* in Samatata Mandala. According to Dani, Sundaraya village near the present Sobharampur is identical to the Sundaram of the inscription.⁵⁶

Damodaradeva issued his Nasirabad copperplate through his *Mahamahattaka* (Prime minister). With this copperplate, he donated 5 *dronas* of land at Dambaradam to Brahman Prithividharasarman who was an expert in *Yajurveda*. The donated lands comprised the homestead and cultivable fields.

Dasarathadeva donated some land having the income of 500 Puranas to some Brahmans with his Adabari copperplate.⁵⁷ This plate was issued from Vikramapura Jayaskandhavara, and the king has been depicted here with the titles like *Paramesvara-Paramabhattaraka-Maharajadhiraja-Ariraja-Danuja Madhava Sri Dasarathadeva, Asvapati-Gajapati-Narapati Rajatrayadhipati, Somavamsapradipa, Pratipannakaranna, Satyavratagangeya, Saranagatavajrapanjara, Devanvaya-Kamala-Vikasa-Bhaskara*, etc. The chief queen consort Kandarpadevi donated many plots of land at Kamta village in Asalpa *Visaya* to a Brahman with her Pakamura copperplate of Dasarathadeva.⁵⁸ The *Ariraja Danuja Madhava* Dasarathadeva and King Danuja Ray of Sonargaon described in *Tarikh-i-Firojshahi* by Jiauddin Barani is actually the same person. He became an ally of Giyasuddin Balban (1266-1287 AD), the Sultan of Delhi, and defeated the rebellion of Tughril Tughan Khan of Gauda-Lakhnauti. No other king of this dynasty has been recorded in the inscriptions. The name of another king called Viradharadeva has been found in his Charpatramura copperplate; however, it has not so far been possible to decipher his dynastic identity.

With the Charpatramura copperplate, Viradharadeva donated 12 *patakas* of land in Mahesvaravarta and Adhavasa villages and 5 *patakas* of land at Naroraka village with markets, Ghats and trees to Ladahamadhava Temple. Mahesvaravarta and Adhavasa villages in Vataganga *Visaya* and Naroraka Village at Gangamandala *Visaya* all were located in Samatata Mandala.⁵⁹ This copperplate contains no royal eulogy⁶⁰ and this is why, the dynastic identity of Viradharadeva is still uncertain.

Inscriptions of the Deva Dynasty of Srihatta

The Srihatta kings Govindakesavadeva and Isanadeva's Bhatara copperplates (Maulvibazar district) were issued in the 11th or the 13th/14th century AD.⁶¹ Govindakesavadeva and Isanadeva's copperplates started with paying reverence to *Shiva* and Narayana respectively. These two plates provide the genealogy of the Deva dynasty of Srihatta. The successive rulers of this dynasty were Naragirvan, Gokul or Gungundeva, Narayanadeva, Kesavadeva and Isanadeva. Govindakesavadeva, with his Bhatara copperplate, donated 296 homesteads to the servants/votaries of Vatesvara Shiva Temple situated at Bhattapataka and 376 *halas* of land more for the maintenance of the temple.⁶² The people of different classes like milkmen, barbers, washer-men, ivory carvers, etc. were the donees. Isanadeva's Bhatara copperplate also record the achievements of Govindakesavadeva and inform that he built the Kanmsanisudhana Temple and arranged the *Tulapurasadana Yajna*.⁶³ Isanadeva himself built a high *Madhukaitabhari* or *Vishnu* Temple. Isanadeva's Bhatara copperplate is specially significant as it records a non-religious land grant. Two *halas* of land with residential quarters and a waterfall were donated to *Aksapatalika* Vanamalikara for the maintenance of his expenditures.⁶⁴

Bangla Inscriptions

About a hundred terracotta plaques containing Bangla inscriptions have been discovered at Midnapore and 24 Parganas in West Bengal. Most of the inscriptions are of the 15th-17th centuries AD, some are of the 7th-8th century AD and a few are of the 13th-14th centuries AD. These inscriptions were offered to some temples.⁶⁵ Two brick inscriptions of the 12th-13th century AD have been found at Savar in Bangladesh. One of them has 'Harishchandrapaladeva' while the other 'Samvata 1254' engraved on them.⁶⁶ In conclusion, we could say that the inscriptions of the ancient and the Early-Medieval periods found in Bengal are multifarious in their media, script and language as well as in their aims and objectives. Inscriptions were engraved on stones, copperplates, clays or terracottas and brick surfaces. *Brahmi* and its derivatives and *Bangla* scripts have been used in the inscriptions of Bengal. *Brahmi* inscriptions have undergone some process of evolution and gave rise to the newer forms of scripts, such as Mauryan Brahmi, Gupta *Brahmi* or *Kutila* and *Gaudiya* scripts. In addition, *Kharoshti-Brahmi* mixed scripts are remarkable. Regarding languages, the noticeable ones are Eastern *Prakrit*, *Sanskrit*, and *Bangla*. Nevertheless, *Sanskrit* was an absolutely dominant language in the ancient and the Pre-Medieval period. These inscriptions are in fact the invaluable coffers of the information of political, social, cultural and economic history.

Medieval and Colonial Period

A K M Shahnawaz

Epigraphic evidences of Medieval and Colonial Bengal, in fact, refer mainly to inscriptions. During the Sultanate period many inscriptions were put up mainly on the walls of religious structures such as mosques, *madrasahs*, tombs and so on. Besides these inscriptions of the religious structures, several inscriptions were found inside the secular buildings during the Mughal period. The inscriptions, found in the Colonial period, though few in number, are significant.

Inscriptions of the Sultanate Era (1204-1338 AD)

Most of the inscriptions of the Sultanate Bengal, so far discovered, were engraved in Arabic. Persian was also used for some inscriptions. Generally, inscriptions were engraved with the verses of the Quran, *Hadith*, the identity of the Sultan, name of the engraver and its date. Almost all the inscriptions were made when mosques, *madrasahs*, *khanquahs*, palaces, bridges, *Eidgahs*, gates, etc., were constructed or when ponds and wells were dug. So it is possible to have an opportunity from the inscriptions to be enlightened about the contemporary Muslim society.

A.H. Dani first published a comprehensive list of inscriptions in Bengal in the second volume of *The Journal of Asiatic Society of Pakistan* in 1957. From the book, *Inscription of Bengal* (Vol. iv) by Shamsuddin Ahmad, published by Varendra Research Museum, Rajshahi in 1960, we get acquainted elaborately with the texts of the inscriptions and know well about the nature of inscriptions of Bengal. A few more inscriptions were discovered separately and we can learn about the new texts of some inscriptions. Abdul Karim's *Corpus of the Arabic and Persian Inscriptions of Bengal*, published by Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, is a valuable addition to this field. If we closely look into the inscriptions of the Sultanate period, it is possible to have an idea about its characteristics, the method of its engraving, its statement, its role of reconstructing socio-cultural history, etc.

Characteristics of Inscriptions and the Method of Engraving

The method of engraving during the Medieval period was new. Islamic calligraphy has characterized this method. As it is forbidden in Islam to sketch any living body, the artists paid attention to styling scripts and making artistic designs.

The trend of gradual development of Arabic calligraphy has also been found in the Medieval inscriptions of Bengal. Scripts called *Kufiq*, *Nasakh*, *Talik* and *Nastalik* have also developed here gradually. Besides these, attractive and artistically designed inscriptions of the Early Muslim period in Bengal have been discovered. These designed scripts are known as *Toghra*. *Toghra* is not a different method of writing. It

is only a rich and artistic expression of the prevailing method. The Arabic letters were sometimes placed vertically, sometimes horizontally, sometimes in an oblique way, sometimes extending and contracting their positions with a view to giving them an abstract shape. Different sizes of designed *Toghra* are found on the inscriptions discovered from various structures of the Sultanate Bengal. This attractive and unique writing style certainly belongs to Bengal alone.⁶⁷

But it is well known that Ataman Sultans practised and developed the *Toghra* method of writing.⁶⁸ Some of these scripts are curved like a bow. Some of the Sultanganj Inscriptions of Rajshahi, made by Shamsuddin Yusuf Shah (1474-1481 AD) look like a flock of ducks playing on water; the upper part of an inscription made in a *jam-e-mosque* at Maldaha during the reign of Sultan Shamsuddin Muzaffar Shah (1490-1493 AD) seems to be ducks moving in a line (figure no. 2). The same style of *Toghra* scripts in the inscriptions discovered in Murshidabad made by Alauddin Husain Shah (1493-1519 AD) has also been found; one of them is depicted like a thatched house of a village; the style of design of this inscription, made in 1501 and found into a one-domed mosque at Arsha Nagar in the district of Khulna, is such as will seem like a thatch of a hut.⁶⁹ Many designs of this kind can be imagined in the *Toghra* epigraphs. Skill in designing epigraphs also started to increase with the passage of time. So when stones were engraved with epigraphs during the fifteenth century, they were depicted much more artistically.⁷⁰

Types of Epigraphs

Several types of epigraphs of Bengal during the Sultanate period can be identified in the following ways:

Firstly— (a) The names of the Sultans with their titles were often inscribed on the epigraphs of the Sultanate era. (b) The Sultans designated by Delhi also engraved their names with their titles to specify them. (c) Names and titles of the officers appointed by the Sultans of Lakhnauti have been found in some of the inscriptions.

Secondly—besides these certain names and titles, many qualitative titles have been found: (a) Official Titles: *Shahjada*, *Wajir*, *Sher-i-Lskar*, *Munsif*, *Deuyan*, *Kotwali*, *Bakali*, *Mahlian*, *Naobad Ali*, *Zamadar*, *Bayir Mahli*, *Sharabdar*, *Ghairamahli*, *Mirbak (Baharbak)*, *Shikdar*, *Alkhajan*, *Jangdar*, *Mir-i-Bahar*, *Sher-i- Khel*, *Kara-i-Farman*, *Mimar*, *Kazidastar*, *Sher-i-Gumastah*, etc. Praising Titles: *Gaus-ul-Islam wal Muslimin*, *Mugis-al-Mulk wal Salatin*, *Muin-al-Mulk wal Salatin*, *Naseh-al-Mulk wal Salatin*, *Sahib-al-A'dl wal Bafat*, *Sahib-al-Sayif wal Kalam*, *Zahlavi-al-Asar*, *Bahlavi-al-Asar wal Zaman*, *Baqi-al-Asar wal Zaman*, etc.

Thirdly—though some epigraphs are depicted in *Toghra* method, they have been decorated with artistic designs in the middle and around the inscriptions. Inscriptions made by Sultan Shamsuddin Firoz Shah (1301-1322 AD) can be mentioned in this regard. Designs of creepers and palmyra leaves have been depicted on them. The clarity and brilliance of these designs as if signify the inspirations and vitality of life.⁷¹ Fourthly—mention of names of the saints on some inscriptions has ascertained their

position and activities. For example, there are three inscriptions about Shahjalal of Sylhet, the inscription of Shaikh Jalaluddin Tabriji in Pandua, the inscription engraved with the name of Makhdum Sheikh Ankhil Siraj Uddin by Alaaddin Husain Shah, the name of Shaikh Al Muntam-Al-Mukarram Ala-Al-Huq engraved on an inscription stuck on the wall of a mosque during the reign of Shamsuddin Ilias Shah, the inscription made with the name of a great saint Hazrat Nur Kutub Alam and the inscription engraved with the name of Makhdum Shaikh Wahid Uddin Maulana A'ta.⁷²

Fifthly—a tendency to write *Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim* on the inscription set up in Muslim Institutes has been found. It was so inscribed as Arabic language and Islamic *Shariah* were taught in those institutes probably because it is a practice to utter *Bismillah* at the beginning of everything according to Islamic scriptures.

Sixth—by analyzing the inscriptions of the Sultanate Bengal we can know about several areas, such as Arsa Sazla Mankahbad, Laobla town or thana, Simlabad town, Arsa and Mahal or Haidgarh town, Mashur Husainabad town, Iqlim Mubarakabad, Iqlim Muazzamabad, Arsa Shrihatta, Mahmudabad, etc.

Inscriptions of Sultanate Bengal

The Nadia conquest of Bakhtiyar Khalji in 1204 paved the way for Muslim rule in Bengal. During this period, an undivided Muslim rule was not founded throughout Bengal. No political stability was established. Many of the governors sent from Delhi revolted during this time and wanted to be independent from the remote centre. As a result, the Delhi army had to come to Bengal again and again to bring the insurgents under control. So it was not possible for the rulers or the insurgent Sultans of Bengal to restore stability. And for the same reason, remarkable structures were not built. As a result, epigraphic evidences of the time were limited.

The inscription, generated during the reign of Sultan Giasuddin Ewaj Khalji (1213-1227 AD), was the earliest in respect of time. This inscription was found at an area called Sian at Birbhumi in West Bengal. The inscription, which was engraved in 1221 AD, was installed in the *Dargah* of the saint, Makhdum Shah. The name of Izzuddin Tughral Tugan Khan (1233-1245 AD) was engraved on the second inscription. This inscription was engraved in 1242 and was found at *Bari Dargah* in Bihar Sharif.

The third inscription, with the name of Jalaluddin Masud Zani (1247-1250 AD) engraved on, was found at Gangarampur of West Dinajpur in West Bengal. An inscription, engraved with the name of Mugisuddin Iusbak (1250-1257), was found at Shitalmath in Nawgaon. From the epidemic evidences of this inscription, made in 1254-55 AD, it is known that it was stuck on any holy structure.

Some of the inscriptions made by the rulers of earlier period of Bengal have been discovered in Bihar also. The most important epidemic evidences of the rulers or Sultans of Bengal in earlier period were found during the reign of the dynasties of Balbani and Firoz Shahah. Five inscriptions of the period of Sultan Ruknuddin Kaikaus (1291-1301 AD) were discovered respectively at Laksmisarai (1292-93 AD) in Munger of Bihar, at the *Dargah* (1297 AD) of Maulana Ata in Devcourt of Dinajpur,

in the mosque of Zafarkhan Gazi (1298 AD) at Tribeni in the district of Hoogly of West Bengal and at Mahasthangarh (1300 AD) in Bogra.

Three inscriptions made during the period of Sultan Shamsuddin Firoz Shah (1301-1322 AD) have been found respectively at *Chota Dargah* (1309 AD) in Bihar, at the tomb of Zafarkhan Gazi (1313 AD) in Tribeni and at the palace of Hatimkhan (1315 AD) in Bihar. An inscription engraved with the name of Sultan Giasuddin Bahadur Shah, son of Sultan Shamsuddin Firoz Shah has been discovered at Uzirbeledanga in Rajshahi.

Inscriptions of later period belonged to the Sultanate era. But no inscription, engraved with the name of Fakhruddin Mubarak Shah (1338-1349 AD) or his son, Ikhtiyar Uddin Gazi Shah (1349-1352 AD), who introduced independent Sultanate in Bengal for the period of two hundred years, was not discovered. Probably it was not possible to achieve political stability during the reign of these sultans after they had declared independence in a limited area of Bengal by the onslaught of Delhi. For this reason, they perhaps did not have time to erect structures; consequently there were no inscriptions.

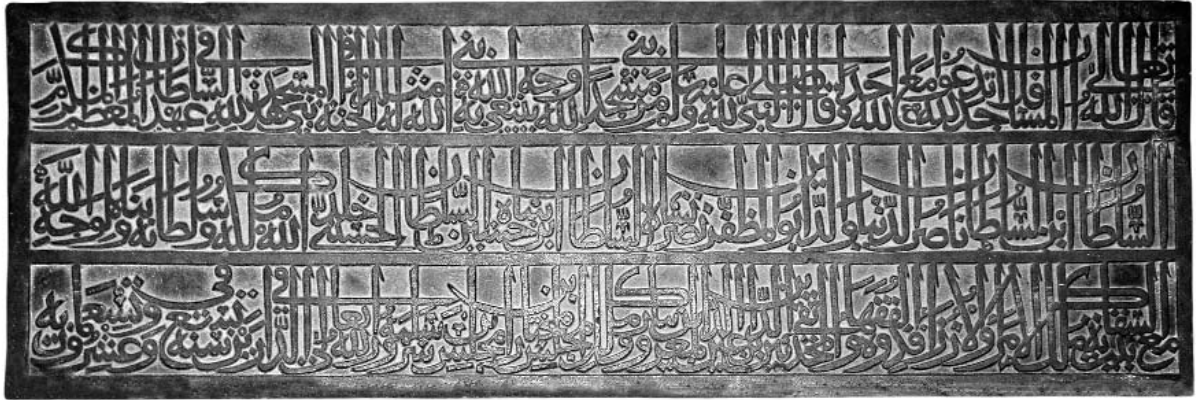
Plate- 12: Stone-inscription
(1493-1519 AD), Alauddin
Husain Shah



Inscriptions of first Ilias Shahi Sultans during the independent Sultanate period have been found. The only inscription engraved with the name of Sultan Shamsuddin Ilias Shah (1342-1358 AD) has been found stuck on the wall of a modern mosque at Baniapukur in Kolkata in West Bengal. It is thought that it was engraved in 1342 AD in Pandua. Four inscriptions of the time of Sultan Sikandar Shah (1358-1389 AD) have been discovered respectively at the *Dargah* of Moulana Ata at Devcoat in West Dinajpur (1363-1364 AD), at Bhagalpur in Bihar (1367 AD), at Pandua in Maldaha of West Bengal (1369 AD) and at Mola Simla in Hoogly in West Bengal (1375-1376 AD). The only inscription engraved with the name of Sultan Giasuddin Azam Shah (1389-1410 AD) is kept at the Assam Provincial Museum in Gohati.

After the reign of Sultan Giasuddin Azam Shah, the Muslim rule in Bengal temporarily became weak. Ganesh, a royal courtier, availed of this opportunity and established Hindu rule in Bengal for a certain period. No inscription with the name of Ganesh was discovered. Ganesh's son Jadu accepted Islam. He was named Jalaluddin Muhammad Shah and was well-established as a Sultan (1415-1433 AD). Two inscriptions of his time have been found. Dates of their inscription are 1432 AD and 1433 AD, and they have been found respectively at Sultanganj in Rajshahi and at Mandra in Dhaka. The only inscription without any date inscribed on has been discovered at Muazzamabad in Sonargaon.

Several inscriptions made by the successive Ilias Shahi Sultans have been discovered. Seventeen inscriptions made during the reign of Sultan Nasiruddin Mahmud Shah (1436-1459 AD) were discovered in all. They were found, with the date of their inscription mentioned in bracket, respectively at Hazrat Pandua in Maldaha (1443 AD), two of them at



Balighata in Jangipur of Murshidabad (1443 AD), at Bhagalpur in Bihar (1446 AD, 1450 AD), at Birbhum in West Bengal (1450 AD), in Kishoreganj (1452 AD), at Baigram in Pabna (1454 AD), at Mogaltuli in Old Maldaha in West Bengal (1455 AD), at Narind in Dhaka (1457 AD), at Kotwali Gate in Maldaha (1457 AD), at Naswalagali in Dhaka (1459), at Itna in Kishoreganj (1459 AD), three of them in Bagerhat (1459 AD), and at the *Dargah* of Shaikh Nur Kutub Alam (1459 AD).

Plate- 13: Stone-inscription (1519-1531/32 AD), Sultan Nasiruddin Nusrat Shah, Discovered from Sonargaon

Eighteen inscriptions, made during the reign of Sultan Ruknuddin Barbak Shah (1459-1474 AD), have been discovered. Dates of those inscriptions being inscribed and the places where they were found are respectively Tribeni in Hoogly (1455 AD), Atia in Tangail (date illegible), Birbhum in West Bengal (1460 AD), the tomb of Chehel Gazi in Dinajpur (1460 AD), Mahisantosh in Nawgaon (1461 AD, 1471-72 AD), Maldaha in West Bengal (1461 AD), Hatkhola in Sylhet (1464 AD), Peril in Manikganj (1465 AD), Deotala in Maldaha (date unknown), Firozpur in Chanpainawabganj (1466 AD), Garai in Kishoreganj (1467 AD), Gaur in Maldaha (1466-67 AD), Bashirhat at Chabbish Pargana in West Bengal (1466-67 AD), Mirjaganj in Patuakhali (1471-72 AD), Hathazari in Chittagong (1474 AD), and Kalna, at Burdwan in West Bengal (without date).

Eleven inscriptions made during the reign of Sultan Shamsuddin Usuf Shah (1474-1481 AD) have been discovered. The places where they were found and the dates of their inscription assigned to them are respectively Sultanganj in Rajshahi (1474-1475 AD), Gaura in West Bengal (1478 AD), Hazrat Pandua in Maldaha (1479 AD), Firozpur in Chapainawabganj (1479 AD), Mirpur in Dhaka (1480-81 AD), the British Museum (a broken inscription kept in it) (1480 AD), Old Maldaha (date illegible, 876 AD or 879 Hegira), Hathajari in Chittagong (date not known).

Ten inscriptions belonging to the reign of Sultan Jalaluddin Fateh Shah (1481-1488 AD) have been found. The places where they were found and the dates of their inscription as mentioned on them are Bandar in Narayanganj (1481 AD), the *Dargah* of Maulana Ata at Devcoat in West Dinajpur (1482-83 AD), Dhamrai in Dhaka (1482 AD), the *Dargah* of Baba Adam Shahid in Vikramapura (Munshiganj) (1483 AD),

Sonargaon in Narayanganj (1484 AD), Mahadipur in Gaura (three inscriptions, 889 Hegira/1489 AD, ? Hegira/1484 AD, 891 Hegira/1486 AD and the date of the third one illegible), the Varendra Research Museum in Rajshahi (1486 AD), Satgaon in West Bengal (1487 AD) and the British Museum (1487-88 AD).

Several inscriptions of the reign of *Habshi* Sultans have also been discovered. Five inscriptions made during the reign of Sultan Saifuddin Firoz Shah (1487-90 AD) have been found respectively at Biral in Dinajpur (1482 AD), at Katra in Old Maldaha (1481-82 AD), at Garjaripa in Sherpur (1487 AD), at Goamalati in Gaura (1489 AD), at Chunakhali in Murshidabad (1490 AD), at Gaura in Maldaha (date illegible). Five inscriptions, which belonged to the reign of Sultan Shamsuddin Mozaffar Shah, (1490-1493 AD) the *Dargah* of Maulana Ata at Devcoat in West Dinajpur (1490-91 AD), Champanagar at Bhagalpur in Bihar (1491 AD), Kalna at Burdwan in West Bengal (1491-92 AD), *Chota Dargah* at Hazrat Pandua in Maldaha (1493 AD) and Chanpai Nawabganj (1493 AD).

Many structures were built during the reign of Husain Shahi sultans. So the number of inscriptions of this time found were also many. Seventy seven inscriptions made during the time of Sultan Alauddin Husain Shah (1493-1519 AD) have been discovered. The places from where they have been discovered and the dates of their inscription as mentioned on them are respectively Depara in Hoogly (1494 AD), Chalishpara in Old Maldaha (1494 AD), Futi Mosque in Old Maldaha (1495 AD), Kherul in Murshidabad (1494-95 AD, two inscriptions were found), Suata in Burdwan (1497-98 AD, two inscriptions were found), Munger in Bihar (1497-98 AD), Kusumba in Naogaon (1498 AD), Margram in West Bengal (1499 AD), Babargram in Murshidabad (1500 AD), Mahalbabari in Dinajpur (1500 AD), London (1500 AD, privately preserved), Islampur at the district of Saran in India (1501 AD), a place not identified (1501 AD), Machain in Manikganj (1501 AD), the *Madrasah* of Gaur (1502 AD), Banhara Mosque in Bihar (1503 AD), Suatra in Burdwan (1502-03 AD), Suti in Murshidabad (1503-04 AD), Kadamrasul in Gaur (1503 AD), Saran in Bihar (1503-04 AD), museums in India (1503-04 AD), Firozpur in Gaur (1503-04 AD), Nahran at the district of Saran in Bihar (1503-04 AD), Gilabari in Maldaha (1504-05 AD), the tomb of Shaikh Akhi Sirajuddin in Gaur (1504-05 AD), Haidarpur Mosque in Maldaha (1504-05 AD), Azimnagar in Dhaka (1505 AD), Champatali in Dinajpur (1504-05 AD), the tomb of Sahagda in Old Maldaha (1505-06 AD), Sylhet (1505-06 AD), Bandar in Narayanganj (1506 AD), Jhili in Murshidabad (1505-06 AD), the tomb of Baba Sahali at Bandar in Narayanganj (910-911 Hegira), Tribeni in Hoogly (1506 AD), Ulipur in Rangpur (1506-07 AD), Mahisantosh in Nawgaon (1507 AD), English Bazaar in Maldaha (1507-08 AD), Atia Mosque in Tangail (1507 AD), Old Maldaha (1508-09 AD), Nur Kutub Alam's *Chilkhana* in Pandua (1509-10 AD), Ankhi Sirajuddin's *Dargah* at Sadulapur in Gaur (1510-11 AD), Kolkata Museum in India (1510-11 AD, three inscriptions preserved), Patna in Bihar (1510-11 AD), Machalhata in Patna (1510-11 AD), Kaitahar in Jaipurhat (1510-11 AD), Sukulipur in Birbhum (1510-11 AD), Bhagalpur in Bihar (1511-12 AD), Sylhet (1512-13 AD),

Firozpur in Chapainawabganj (1512-13 AD), Molnatali in Maldaha (1512-13 AD), Maulana Ata's *Dargah* at Devcoat in West Dinajpur (1512-13 AD), Kalna in Burdwan (918 Hegira), Sonargaon in Narayanganj (1513 AD), Shekher Dighi in Murshidabad (1515 AD), Balighata at Jangipur in Murshidabad (1515 AD), Dhamrai in Dhaka (1516-17 AD), Suri in Birbhum (1516-17 AD), Bholahar in Chanpai Nawabganj (1517 AD), Gaur in Maldaha (1519 AD), Goaldi Mosque at Sonargaon in Narayanganj (1519 AD), Chota Sona Mosque in Chanpai Nawabganj (date illegible, two inscriptions were found), Kantanagar in Rangpur (date illegible), Nadia in West Bengal (date illegible), Mahadipur in Gaur (date illegible), Jahanabad in Godagari (date illegible), Chittagong Town (1515-16 AD), Sadipur in Maldaha (date illegible), Katoa in Burdwan (date illegible), Sheikhpur at Azamgar in India (date illegible).

After the reign of Sultan Alauddin Husain Shah, his son Sultan Nasiruddin Nasrat Shah was the second renowned Sultan. Twenty three inscriptions of his time (1519-1531-32 AD) have been found. (A list of inscriptions found both in Bengal and in other parts of India has been given here because it is certain that Nusrat Shah was concerned with these inscriptions). The places where they were found and the dates of their inscription as mentioned on them are respectively Dakhil Darwaza in Gaur (1519-20 AD), Sonargaon in Narayanganj (1522-23 AD), Ashrafpur in Narshingdi (1523-24 AD), Monlatali in Old Maldaha (1523-24 AD), Mangalcoat in Burdwan (1523-24 AD), Bagha in Rajshahi (1523-24 AD), Bandel in Hoogly (1524 AD), Sadulahpur in Gaur (1524-25 AD), Maldaha Piranpur (1524-25 AD), Barasona Mosque in Gaur (1525-26 AD), Nabagram in Pabna (1526 AD), Gaur (1526-27 AD), Sikandarpur at Azamgar in Uttar Pradesh in India (1527 AD), Old Maldaha (1528-29 AD), Satgaon in Hoogly (1530 AD, two inscriptions were found), Murshidabad Town (1529-30 AD), Kadamrasul in Gaur (1530-31 AD), Santoshpur in Hoogly (1531-32 AD, two inscriptions were found), Chalishpara in Old Maldaha (1531-32 AD), Nur Kutub Alam's *Chilkhana* in Pandua (date illegible), Begusarai in Munger (date illegible).

The only inscription of Sultan Alauddin Firoz Shah (1532-33 AD) was found at Kalna in Burdwan (1533 AD). Eight inscriptions of Giasuddin Mahmud Shah (1538 AD), the last Sultan of the Sultanate period have been found. The places where they were found and the dates of their inscription as mentioned on them are respectively Dhorail in Nawgaon, (1533 AD), Jhanjhania Mosque at Sadulahpur in Gaur (1534-35 AD), Jawar in Kishoreganj (1534 AD), Shapur in Maldaha (1536-37 AD), the museum of Kolkata in India (1536-37 AD, an inscription engraved on a brick), Purnia in Bihar (1537 AD), Medinipur (1536-37 AD, Hijli Inscription), Kumira in Chittagong (date illegible). Of them, the inscription which was found at Dhirail in Nawgaon is written in Bengali. This is the only evidence of inscription engraved in Bengali.

After the Sultanate rule Emperor Humayun established Mughal rule in part of Bengal for some time. From this point of view, it can be said that after the reign of the independent Sultans, Bengal was brought under the influence of Afghan Sultans. Several inscriptions of Afghan Sultans made during the period from 1541 AD to 1572 AD have been discovered.

Four inscriptions engraved with the name of Sher Shah, an Afghan Sultan (1438-1554 AD) have been found. The places where they were found and the dates of their inscription as mentioned on them are respectively Maldaha (948 Hegira/1541-42 AD, two inscriptions erected on cannon), Dewanbag in Narayanganj (949 Hegira/1542-43 AD, two inscriptions erected on cannon), Gauripur in Assam (949 Hegira/1542-43 AD, two inscriptions erected on cannon).

The only inscription with the name of Sultan Shamsuddin Muhammad Shah Gazi engraved on it was found at Bihar Sharif in India (1554-55 AD).

The places where five inscriptions of Sultan Giasuddin Bahadur Shah Sur (1556-1560 AD) were found and the dates of their inscription as mentioned on them are respectively Jami Mosque in Rajmahal (1557 AD), Kusumba Mosque in Rajshahi (1558-59 AD), Kumarpur in Rajshahi (1558-59 AD), museums at Kolkata in India (1559-60 AD) and Kalna in Burdwan (1560 AD).

Three inscriptions have been discovered that have the name of Sultan Giasuddin Jalal Shah (1560-1563 AD) engraved on them. The places where they were found and the dates of their inscription as mentioned on them are respectively Sherpur in Bogra (1562-63 AD) and the tomb of the saint Bahram in Burdwan (1562 AD, two inscriptions found).

Five inscriptions made during the reign of Sultan Suleiman Karrani, a descendant of Karrani Afghan, have been found. The places where they were found and the dates of their inscription as mentioned on them are respectively Bankkhali in Chittagong (1568 AD), Rikabibazar in Munshiganj (1569 AD), Bihar Sharif (1569-70 AD) and the tomb of Sheikh Alaul Haque (1572 AD).

The places where the inscriptions, made during the time of Baro Bhuiyans in Bengal, were found and the dates of their inscription as mentioned on them are as follows:

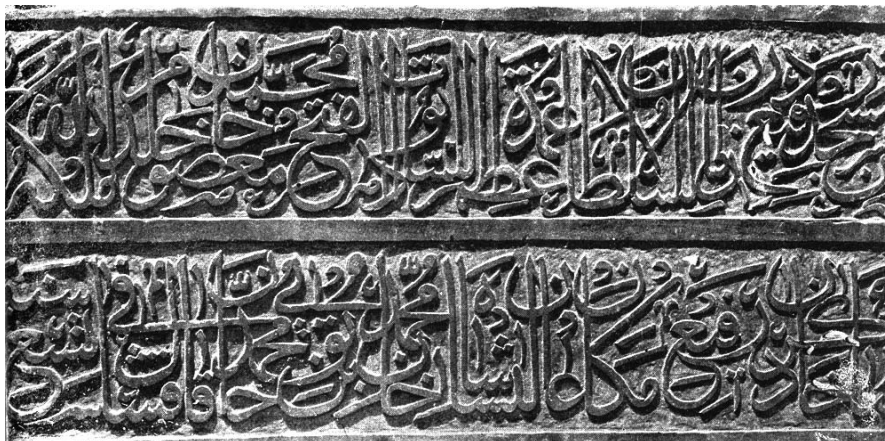


Plate- 14: Stone-inscription (1581-82 AD), Masum Khan Kabuli, Charmohor, Pabna

inscriptions on which the name of Masum Khan Kabuli was inscribed have been discovered at Chatmohar in Pabna (1581-82 AD), two inscriptions have been found at Sherpur in Bogra. On one of them has been found to have the name of Mirza Murad Khan engraved on it (1582 AD) while the other possesses the names of Masum Khan Kabuli and Mirza Murad Khan (1582 AD). Three inscriptions have been found at Kutubshahi Mosque in Pandua. The name of Sher Kutub Alam has been inscribed on the first one (1582-83 AD), the name of Fakir Makhdum Sheikh both on the second (1585 AD) and on the third one (1585 AD). Another inscription engraved with the name of Masum Khan Kabuli has been found at Jam-i-Mosque in Old Maldaha (1595-96 AD). The last inscription of this period was inscribed on the cannon of Isha Khan Masnad-e-Ala at Dewan in Narayanganj. This Cannon-inscription was inscribed in Bengali in 1593-94 AD

The places where the inscriptions were made during the reign of Mughal emperors were found with the dates of their inscription. They are listed below chronologically:

Inscriptions made during the reign of Emperor Jahangir (1605-1623 AD):

1. Mahla Pir Bahram in Burdwan (1606-07 AD)
2. The tomb of Enaetullah at Pandua in Maldaha (1608 AD)
3. Karatia Mosque in Tangail (1610-11 AD)
4. Mednipur in West Bengal (1622 AD)
5. The cannon-inscription, now kept in Kolkata Museum (around 1626 AD)

Inscriptions made during the reign of Emperor Shahjahan (1628-1658 AD):

1. Sherpur in Birbhum (1628-29 AD)
2. Khandakartola Badshahi Mosque at Sherpur in Bogra (1632-33 AD)
3. Mednipur in West Bengal (1633-34 AD)
4. The *Dargah* of Shah Makhdum in Rajshahi (1635-36 AD)
5. Baliaghata at Jangipur in Murshidabad (1636-37 AD)
6. Dhanmandi Eidgah in Dhaka (1640 AD)
7. Hosni Dalan in Dhaka (1642-43 AD)
8. Nawada in Murshida (1642-43 AD)
9. Bara Katra in Dhaka (1643-44 AD)
10. Bara Katra in Dhaka (the second inscription, 1645-46 AD)
11. The Hijli Mosque Inscription in Mednipur (1648-49 AD)
12. The Mosque Inscription at Churihatta in Dhaka (1650 AD)
13. Egarasindur in Kishoreganj (1652 AD)
14. Mangalcoat in Burdwan (1654-55 AD)
15. Narayanganj in Mednipur (1654-55 AD)
16. The Cannon Inscription in Chittagong (1666 AD)

Plate- 15: Stone-inscription (1674-75 AD), Emperor Aurangzeb, Bangladesh National Museum



17. Hajo in Assam (1657 AD)
18. Keshiari in Mednipur (date illegible)

Inscriptions made during the reign of Emperor Aorangazeb:

1. Found on the Wall of Satgaon Mosque in Birbhum (1653-54A.D.)
2. Found at Kadamrasul Building in Gaur (1659-60 AD)
3. Found at Makhdum Shahi Mosque in Mednipur (1660-61 AD)
4. Found at Pandua in Maldaha (1664-65 AD)
5. Found at Babubazar Mosque in Dhaka (around 1666 AD)
6. Found at Jam-i- Mosque in Chittagong Town (1667-68 AD)
7. The Narayangar Inscription (1668-69 AD)
8. Found at Chilkhana of Sheikh Jalaluddin Tabreji in Pandua of Maldaha (1673-74 AD)
9. Found at Chak Mosque in Dhaka (1675-76 AD)
10. Found at Mosque of Khawaja Shahbaj in Dhaka Town (1678-79 AD)
11. Found at Karwan Bazar Mosque in Dhaka Town (1677-78 AD)
12. Found at the Kitchen of Chilkhana of Sheikh Jalaluddin Tabreji in Pandua (1682 AD)
13. Found at Hamjabag in Chittagong (1682-83 AD)
14. Found at the Tomb of Paribibi in Lalbag Fort of Dhaka (1683-84 AD)
15. Found at Dewanbag in Narayanganj (1690-91)
16. Found at Shahpur in Maldaha (1690-91)
17. Found at Koshiari in Mednipur (1690-91)
18. Found in Chittagong Town (1692-93)
19. Found at Mograpara in Sonargaon (1700-1701)
20. Found at Insala Bazar in Burdwan (1703-04)
21. Found at the mosque of Khan Mohammad Mirdha in Dhaka two inscriptions—
 - a. (1704-05 AD)
 - b. (1704-05 AD)

Inscriptions of post-Aurangzeb Mughal Emperors

An inscription made during the reign of Shah Alam Bahadur Shah (1707-12 AD) has been found at Naya Paltan Mosque in Dhaka (1708-09 AD).

An inscription of the reign of Emperor Farrukh Shiar has been found at Mahasthanagar in Bogra (1717-18 AD).

Inscriptions made during the reign of Emperor Muhammad Shah:

1. Lakan Seni Dhalan Inscription of Pandua (1722 AD)
2. Found at Kadamrasul Mubarak Mosque in Chittagong Town (1723-24 AD)
3. Found in Murshidabad (1723-24 AD)
4. Found at Chota Pandua in Hoogly (1727-28 AD)
5. Found at Chackbazar in Dhaka (1728-29 AD)
6. Found two inscriptions in Hoogly—
 - a. (1723-24 AD)
 - b. (1723-24 AD)

7. Found at Sutarari in Barisal (1738-39 AD)
8. Found at Bajra Mosque in Noakhali (1741-42 AD)
9. Found at Baliaghata of Jangipur in Murshidabad (1742-43 AD)
10. Preserved at an Indian museum in Kolkata (1749-50 AD)

Inscriptions Found during the reign of Emperor Alamgir II (1754-59 AD)

The only inscription of the time has been found at Pandua in Maldaha (1756-57 AD).

Epigraphic Evidences of the Colonial Period

Epigraphic evidences of the Medieval period have been discovered mainly on the walls of the structures. Most of these structures are religious structures of which many of them are mosques. Inscriptions have been found in some tombs and educational institutions as well, which matter has been presented in the aforesaid discussion. Most of the structures mentioned above were erected under the supervision of the government or administration. So, the epigraphic evidences had special characteristics and writing styles. Inscriptions were engraved mainly in Arabic and some of them in Persian. Inscriptions in Bangla were very few in number. Analysis of these epigraphic evidences is very important for reconstruction of medieval history of Bengal as there is no contemporary book on history. But the case of the colonial period is quite different. With the arrival of the Europeans, language, education and culture underwent many forms of changes. In this respect no epigraphic evidence was important in pursuit of contemporary history. Apart from Arabic and Persian inscriptions made during the colonial period, there were inscriptions engraved in English and Greek in Churches, houses of the Europeans, and in Greek and English tombs, most of which have lost their original form and appearance in course of time. Some Bangla epigraphs are sometimes found on the Zamindar-houses and the mosques all over the country mentioning the names of those who built them and the dates of their production. They could not be included the present discussion due to the lack of an authentic list of them.

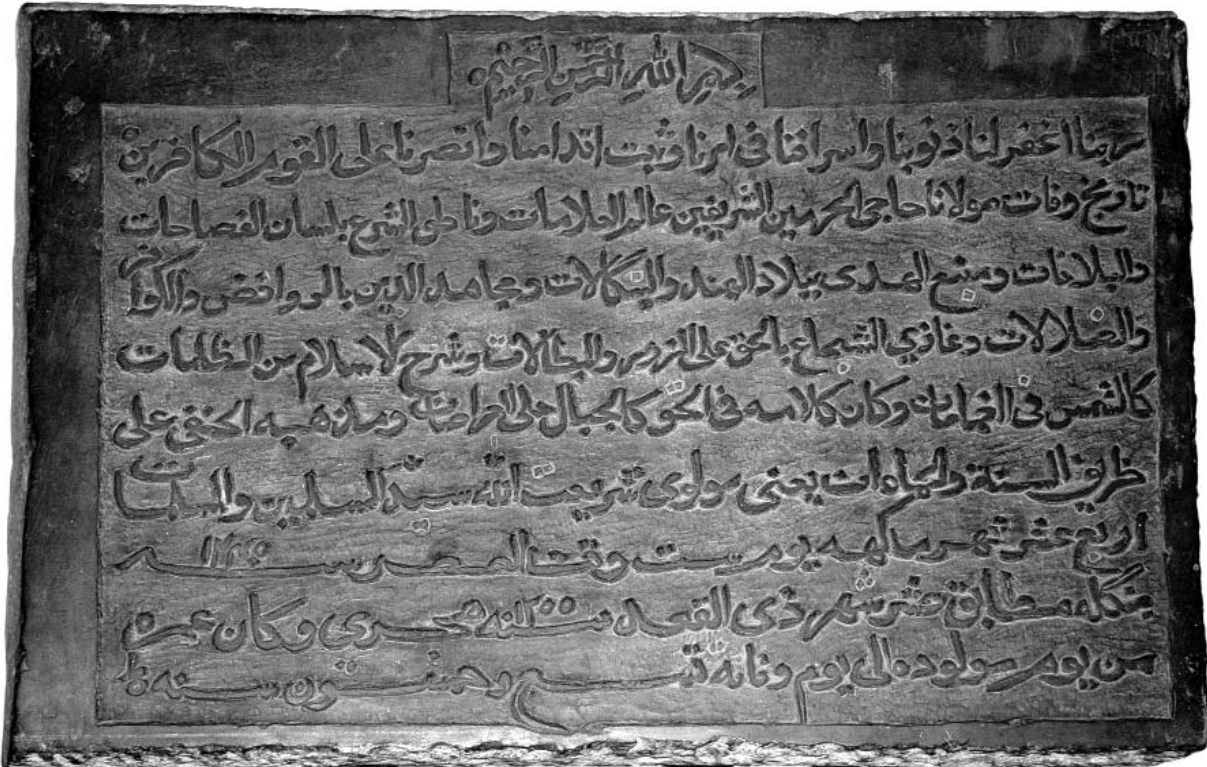
Though there were mementos on the monumental columns erected by the foreigners, they were not historically as important as the inscriptions of the Medieval period. The number of such monumental columns and inscriptions is also poor. The Greek monumental column in Dhaka can be mentioned here as an example. At the end of the nineteenth century, a monumental column was built at Ramna in remembrance of the Greek traders living in Dhaka. Ten epitaphs erected in memory of the Greek traders, their wives and a Greek priest, who died during the years between 1800 AD and 1860 AD have been discovered. Then these monumental columns were removed from their respective places and reinstalled in the north-east corner of the field inside the compound of the Teachers and Students Centre of Dhaka University. According to the experts, most of the inscriptions of these monumental columns were inscribed in the classical Greek style. Along with them, there are some English inscriptions as well.

Under these circumstances, epigraphic evidences could not occupy a separate position in historical studies. Rather, the inevitability did not arise. Contemporary history was written during the colonial period. Public and private documents were written and preserved. With the rise and development of prose literature, importance of literary sources increased. As a result, the epigraphists of Europe or of this country did not feel the urge to prepare a list or to explain and analyze the inscriptions engraved in different languages and found in different places as they were not used as essential and basic sources for historical researches.

Inscriptions of the Colonial Period

1. Found at Aukara in Dinajpur (1758-59 AD)
2. Found at Mahinnagar Mosque in Murshidabad (1759-60 AD)
3. Found at Chota Pandua in Hoogly (1763-64 AD)
4. Found at Phulchauki in Mithapukur in Rangpur (1772-73 AD)
5. Found at Nabiganj in Narayanganj (1777-78 AD)
6. Found at Gargram in Nilphamari (1788 AD)
7. Found at Phuldan Mosque in Englishbazar of Maldaha (1784 AD)
8. Found at a stone column in Maldaha (1794 AD)
9. Found at Berahampur in Murshidabad (1797-98 AD)
10. Found at Kadamrasul Building in Nabinagar of Narayanganj (1805-06 AD)
11. Found at the *Mazar* of Shah Ali Bogdadi at Mirpur in Dhaka (1806-07 AD)

Plate- 16: Tomb-inscription,
Hazi Shariatullah, Language:
Arabic, Discovered from:
Faridpur



12. Found two inscriptions at Matubi Mosque in Noakhali
 - a. 1814-15 AD
 - b. 1901-02 AD
13. Found at Kuttitola Mosque at English Bazar Maldaha (1841-42 AD)
14. Found at Shahi Jam-i- Mosque in Chittagong Town (1855-56 AD)
15. Found at Shaikh Khair Alhar Mosque at English Bazar in Maldaha (1882-83 AD).

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9

TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATION

Sufi Mostafizur Rahman

Ancient people migrated from one place to another to meet their basic needs. Naturally, they used to carry their essential commodities with them while migrating from place to place. This migration was essentially for survival and this event of carrying loads provides an indication to the earliest thoroughfares. The human carrying their loads can be considered to be the earliest transporters (Plate-1 & 2). Later, those primitive, wild, cave-dwelling gypsies living in hills gradually developed civilizations in plain lands. The continuous development of the transport and communication system is one of the most significant factors in this process. The technology and techniques (vehicles, lifts, etc.) used in transporting and placing the huge pieces of stones that were used to build the magnificent edifices (pyramid, sphinx, man of colossal size, animal statues etc.) of the ancient Mesopotamia-Egyptian civilization equally evoke amazement. The Harappan civilization is not an exception to it. The roads found in the city centres of this civilization have puzzled even the modern engineers. In the geographic sense, Bangladesh is a plain country with criss-cross of rivers. To its north side, there stand the Himalayas; the eastern and western sides are enclosed by hilly regions; there lies the Bay of Bengal in the south. For these geographical features, both the land routes and the water ways have played the principal role in the inland communication since the ancient period. On the other hand, the land and the maritime ways were in use for the communication with the other parts of the India and the outer world. The migration in the primitive period is the evidence of the earliest communication system. But, with the gradual development of civilization, a miscellaneous and complex compilation of the commercialization and urbanization related demands came up as basic needs. In case of urbanization, Bengal had a well-established communication system with the other parts of India even during the second urbanization period (approximately from 600 BC to 300 AD). The urbanization pattern that is observed in the above

Plate- 1: Carrying loads on the head, terracotta plaque, Paharpur (left), Mahasthangarh (right)

