

# Historical Geography of Vaᅅga-Samatata and Harikela

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## ABSTRACT

The eastern part of Indian sub-continent is known as Bengal. It carried different names in different times indicating the whole of Bengal. On the other hand, since ancient times to pre-Mughal period Bengal was divided into different geographical divisions. These are called as Puᅅdravardhana, Vārendra, Gauᅅa, Rāᅅha, Suhma, Tāmralipta, Vaᅅga, Vāᅅgalā, Samtata, Harikela. These divisions overlapped with each other in different times. In 1947, the eastern part of Bengal was merged with Pakistan and the western part included in Indian union. The division of Vaᅅga-Samatata and Harikela formed a separate entity in eastern side of Bengal, which is situated now in Bangladesh. It played an important role in the social, economic and cultural life of Bengal. Located on the seashore it easily maintained a trade relation with the outside world through the overseas route in the period of feudal system in Bengal.

**Key words:** Vaᅅga-Samatata-Harikela, Aitareya Āraᅅyaka, Gaᅅge, Janapada, Nāvya,

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## Introduction

The land of Bengal has historically had a distinct 'regional entity'. The land is considered as a definite 'geographical region' in the entire sub-continent with distinct geo-features.<sup>1</sup> Bengal is the name given to the eastern part of the Indian sub-continent, which formed a single province of British India. It extended up to the Himālayas in the north and the Bay of Bengal in the south. Its eastern and western limits were Brahmaputra, the Kaṅgsā, the Surmā, the Sajjuk rivers and the Nāgar, the Barākar and lower reaches of Suvarṇarekhā respectively.<sup>2</sup> The above area was located roughly between 27°9<sup>1</sup> and 20°50<sup>1</sup> north latitude and 86°35<sup>1</sup> and 92°30<sup>1</sup> east longitude.<sup>3</sup> There were deep forests, highlands and mountains in the east, west and north, and the Bay of Bengal in the South. This way these natural girdles surrounded Bengal. As Niharranjan Roy rightly puts, "At one extreme are the very high mountains, at the other the sea, and on both sides the hard hilly country, within, all the land is a plain. Such is the geographical fortune of the Bengali people."<sup>4</sup>

In the early period of Indian history, the region of Bengal covered a large territorial area including the modern state of West Bengal and some parts of the adjoining districts of Assam and Bihar and included the parts of present day of Bangladesh. In Assam the area included under the provinces of Bengal were Goalpara, Sylhet and Cachar. The districts of Mānbhūm, Sāntāl Parganas and Pūrṇea of Bihār, also formed the part of the territory of Bengal. The Sarkārs of Sylhet and Purnea, the Pargana of Akmahal (now Rājmahal) and the famous pass of Teliagarhi, now in Santal Parganas, formed the integral parts of the *subah* of Bengal in the days of Akbar.<sup>5</sup>

The internal area of Bengal mostly depended on its river system, which formed the most characteristic physical feature of the land. Satish Chandra precisely states that as we have veins and arteries in our body, Bengal is also vivified by its numerous

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<sup>1</sup> Spate, O.H.K, & A. T. A.Learmonth & B.H. Farmer., *India, Pakistan & Ceylon: 'The Bengal Delta'(Region-XII)*, London, Methuen & Co. Ltd., 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition Revised & completely reset, 1967, pp-571-599; Morgan, J.P & W.G. McIntire., 'Quaternary Geology of the Bengal Basin, East Pakistan & India', *Bulletin of the Geographical Society of America*, Vol.LXX, 1959, pp-319-342; Rashid, Haroun. Er., *East Pakistan, A Systematic Regional Geography & its Development Planning Aspects*, Sh. Ghulam Ali & Sons, 1965; Abdul Momin Chowdhury, 'Bāṅglār Bhaugolik Porichay' in *Bāṅgia Sāhityer Itihās*, edited by Anisuzzaman, in Bangla, Dhaka: Bangia Academy, 1987, pp. 1-48

<sup>2</sup> Majumdar, R. C, (ed.), *The History of Bengal*, Vol. I, Hindu Period, University of Dacca, Dacca, 1943, p-1; Mukherjee, R., and Maity, S.K., 'Introduction', *Corpus of Bengal Inscriptions*, Calcutta, Jadavpur University, 1967, p-1

<sup>3</sup> Majumdar, R. C, (ed.), *opcit*, p-1

<sup>4</sup> Hood, John W., (tr.) *History of the Bengali People (From Earliest Times to the Fall of the Sena Dynasty)*, Translated from original Bengali Bāṅgāli Itihās of N.R.Roy, Kolkata, Orient Blackswan, 1994, p-53

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, p-52

ivers.<sup>6</sup> N.R. Roy also mentions that the course of history of Bengal has largely been dictated by its numerous and diverse rivers and streams. These waterways have developed as the life force of the country through the ages. They have determined its appearance and nature, as they continue to do still.<sup>7</sup> These waterways, however, have sometimes been a boon to Bengal and sometimes a curse. Since time immemorial, they played a very important role in the formation of deltaic land, which, in turn, molded the nature and character of human inhabitants. Amongst all the rivers that drenched the region, Brahmaputra was the greatest stream, stretching approximately 1800 miles.<sup>8</sup> The second largest river was the Ganges, over 1200 miles long in the delta. Other rivers included Bhagirathi, Padmā, Meghnā, Surmā, Ichhāmati, the Mathābhāṅga and the Garai, the Betnā, the Rupsā, the Kumār, the Bhairab, Ajay, Damodar, Kansāi or Kapisa, Dvārakeśhvar, Rupnārāyan, Tistā, Torṣā, Karatoyā, Ātrāi, Punarbhara, Koushikī (the modern Kośhī) and more. These all rivers repeatedly have changed their courses over the centuries. The process of destruction and reconstruction is still active.<sup>9</sup> M.H. Rashid comments that it was indeed the tangled network of these rivers and their countless branches that formulated this geographical entity.<sup>10</sup> Unfortunately, most of above mentioned rivers have disappeared in modern Bengal. Apart from rivers, canals, streams, *bils*, *haors* also formed significant elements of the historical geography of Bengal.<sup>11</sup> The total area of the region of Bengal is approximately 80,000 sq. miles (2, 07,000 sq km).<sup>12</sup> Nafis Ahmed and M. Harunur Rashid are of the opinion that the area should be extended to 84,832 sq. miles (30,691 sq. miles in West Bengal and 54,141 sq. miles of present Bangladesh).<sup>13</sup> Two other prominent researchers like B.M. Morrison and Abdul Momin Chowdhury have indicated the extension of territory as 80,000 sq. miles on the basis of Spate, Bagchi and Strickland. Therefore, it is too tough to verify the exact geographical area of Bengal.

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<sup>6</sup> Mitra Satish Chandra, *Yashohar- Khulnār Itihās* (in Bengali), Calcutta, Chakravarti, Chatterji & Co, 1922, p-12

<sup>7</sup> Hood, John, W., (tr.), *opcit*, P-53

<sup>8</sup> Morrison, B.M., *Political Centres and Cultural Regions of Early Bengal*, Tucson, University of Arizona Press, 1970, Reprint: Jaipur-Delhi, Rawat Publications, 1980, P-10

<sup>9</sup> Hood, John, W., (tr.), *opcit*, P-56

<sup>10</sup> Rashid, M. Harunur, 'The Geographical Background to the History and Archaeology of South East Bengal', *Journal Asiatic Society Bengal*, Vol. XXIV-VI, 1979-81, p-164

<sup>11</sup> Chakrabarti, Dilip Kumar., *Ancient Bangladesh — A Study of the Archaeological Sources*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1992, p-20; Rashid, M. Harunur., *opcit*, p-170

<sup>12</sup> Spate, O.H.K., A.T.A. Learmonth., and B.H. Farmer., *India, Pakistan and Ceylon: The Regions*, pp-571-72; Bagchi, K., *The Ganges Delta*, Chapters-1-3, Calcutta, University of Calcutta, 1944; Strickland, C., *Deltaic Formation with special reference to the Hydrographic Processes of the Ganges and the Brahmaputra*, Calcutta, Langsmans, Green, 1940, p-8

<sup>13</sup> Ahmed, Nafis, *An Economic Geography of East Pakistan*, London, Oxford University Press, 1958, P-2; Rashid M. Harunur, *opcit*, P-160

The different areas of what was known as Bengal in pre-partition days carried different geographical designations in ancient times. It is, therefore, very difficult to ascertain anything definite about the geography and local areas of ancient Bengal. It can be said that in ancient Bengal and present day, the natural boundary of an area was usually the river, whose beds changed constantly<sup>14</sup> and the area adjoining the river changed its geographical boundaries accordingly. The difficulty is further enhanced by the rise and fall of the political circumstances also. It can be clarified from an example that Tāmralipti (modern Tamluk) was included in Vaṅga and Kotivarṣha (Modern Dinājpur) is mentioned as the chief city of Rāḍha since early period of the zenith of Vaṅga and Rāḍha. However, in the era of the Pālas and the Senas, there were two general and broad geographical divisions: Gauḍa and Vaṅga. These were the two broad politico-geographical divisions of the ancient and medieval era, and can be roughly identified with West and Eastern Bengal respectively. From the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, onwards Gauḍa and Vaṅga gradually became interchangeable terms owing to their political unification under the same sovereign, styled both Vaṅgapati and Gauḍeśvara, and the process was completed in the Mughal and British periods. Thus, the other geographical names of Bengal in olden days included Puṇḍravardhana and Varendrī (North Bengal), Suhma (Hooghly district), Rāḍha (the Birbhum-Bankura-Hooghly-Howrah and portions of Medinipur districts, thus including at times the ancient Suhma region), Tāmralipti or Tāmralipta (modern Tamluk in the Medinipur district) and Daṇḍabhūkti (Danton and its adjoining regions in the Medinipur district, sometimes including northern portions of Orissa), Vaṅga (traditionally located in the central deltaic Bengal, i.e. Dhaka, Vikrampur, Faridpur areas of present Bangladesh), Samatāṭa (comprising Chittagong, Comilla and Noakhali districts of present day of Bangladesh), Harikela (Comilla, Śrihaṭṭa and Chittagong districts of Bangladesh), Chandradvīpa (Barisal district of present Bangladesh) and Vāṅgalā (Chittagong, Noakhali and Barisal districts of present Bangladesh). These names have come to us from ancient epigraphic and literary records. The detailed analysis of the relevant information shows that they were geographically associated with Gauḍa or Vaṅga, that is, Western and Eastern Bengal. No two of them are mutually exclusive. In other words, some geographical boundaries are known to have overlapped and not remained restricted in the same region, and have assumed different names in different historical period. Thus, it is proven that the well-known area has shifted boundaries time to time, assuming a new shape and a new name each time.

The province of Bengal is given its present name by the British, and this name does not find in ancient and medieval literature. Therefore, the question that naturally comes to our mind is how Bengal received its present name. In Bengali, the term employed in modern times to denote the province is Bāṅglā, of which the English rendering is Bengal. The term 'Bāṅglā' or 'Bāṅgalā' is derived from 'Vaṅga' which is

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<sup>14</sup> Paul, P.L., *The Early History of Bengal*, Vol. I, Calcutta, The Indian Research Institute, 1939, p-1

so frequently used in early and medieval Indian epigraphy and literature. The English have adapted it into their own language as 'Bengal'. Before the partition of India in 1947, 'Bengal' or 'Bāṅglā' was, introduced as the name of the province of Bengal in British India. Due to the division, the area was divided between the provinces of West Bengal and East Pakistan. In 1971 CE, East Pakistan region became the Republic of Bangladesh. The word 'Bāṅglā' or Bengal is still in use in the areas of West Bengal (India) and Bangladesh. However, these conditions are largely at a private level aimed at strengthening the cultural unity between West Bengal and the people of Bangladesh. These names have been culturally consolidated and kept alive in West Bengal, Bengali speaking areas of Bangladesh and adjacent areas. Two terms, phonetically akin to Bengal or Bāṅgālā occur in epigraphic and literary documents of the ancient and medieval periods. They are Vaṅga and Vāṅgalā. The famous historian Abul Fazl in his *Āin-i-Akbarī* made the following remark, "The original name of Bengal was 'Baṅg'. Its former rulers raised mounds measuring ten yards in height and twenty in breadth throughout the province, which were called 'al'. From this suffix, the name Bengal took its rise and currency."<sup>15</sup> Under Akbar's rule, the entire area from Chittagong to Teliagarhi pass was known as 'Subāh Bāṅgalāh'. Sources of still earlier periods refer to a tract known as Vāṅgalā. Its existence as a geographical entity can be traced from the 8th century CE onwards. But epigraphic and literary references to Vāṅgalā amply bear testimony to its existence territorially distinct from a region called Vaṅga. Marco Polo describes Bāṅglā as a province in the south, its people speaking a strange language and being 'wretched idol worshipers'. It is further described as 'a favorable stop for India'.<sup>16</sup> According to Yule, Marco Polo's Bāṅgalā was the Pegu. However, this note may also apply to the Noākhāli-Chittagong-Tippara region of southeastern Bengal. It is corroborated by the account of Ovington. It runs, "Aracan is bounded by the kingdom of the Bay of Bengal, some authors making Chaṭigam its first border city".<sup>17</sup> It is thus clear that the *subāh* of *Bāṅgalāh* during Akbar's paramountcy time marks the entire area, which was equivalent to the undivided province of Bengal. Bengal is referred as the Bengal country by Ralph Fitch, and denotes the same region. However, the term Vāṅgalā is used in a restricted sense. If Abul Fazl is to be believed, the term Vāṅgalā is derived from the word Vaṅga. Thus from the above discussion we may conclude that Bāṅgalā came from the word 'Baṅga'. It includes the entire Bengali-speaking area of the eastern part of the Indian sub-continent. Though in early period of history 'Baṅga' denoted a part of Bengal, that is, south-eastern

<sup>15</sup> Jarett, H.S., (tr.) , *Āin-i-Ākbarī* of Ābul Fazl, Vol. II, Calcutta, Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1894, p-120

<sup>16</sup> Yule, Henry, (tr. & ed.), *The Book of Ser Mārco Polo*, Vol. II, London, John Murray, 1873, Chap. LV, pp-97,98 and p-80

<sup>17</sup> Ovington John, *A Voyage to Suratt*, In the Year 1689, London, Jacob Tonfan, 1696, pp-553-54

Chatgaon has been described as 'a big city in the sea and a wooden belt' in *Ain-i-Akbari*. Jarett, H.S., (tr.), Opcit, p-125

Bengal, after the assumption of power by the British the term 'Vaṅga' or 'Bāṅgalā' converted to 'Bengal' linguistically.

### **Vaṅga-Samataṭa-Harikela**

From the pre-historic time to the Medieval Age Bengal was divided into different *janapadas* like Gauḍa, Puṅdra, Varendra, Rāḍha, Sumha, Tāmralipta, Samataṭa, Vaṅga, Vāṅglā etc, as already mentioned before. These *janapadas* did not emerge as a power at the same time. In different courses of time, a certain portion of the entire area emerged as a supreme power and it extended its territory over a large area. Sometimes it included the other powerful states mentioned above within its territory. These *janapadas* had separate existence. It was during the time of *Gauḍadhīpa* Śaśāṅka in the eight-century CE and afterwards that the *janapadas* of Puṅdra, Gauḍa and Vaṅga became identical with the whole of Bengal. Apart from the existence of different *janapadas* new divisions of Bengal like Vāṅgalā, Harikela, Chandradwipa, and Samataṭa emerged and they had further sub-divisions.<sup>18</sup> Gradually, however, those sub-subdivisions ceased to exist. There was an endeavour to integrate the different areas in the name of Gauḍa from the period of Śaśāṅka to the rise of the Pālas, but it proved to have been a failure.<sup>19</sup> The whole of Bengal assuming the name of Vaṅga emerged in the Muslim period. The culmination was reached during the time of Akbar when the *Subāh* of Bengal came into prominence. Bengal came into existence with more complete form during the time of British. Although it was cut to size from, what it was during the time of Akbar. From the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE onwards, the chronological periods are satisfactorily datable based on epigraphically records. These help us to trace more clearly the chief political or geographical divisions and administrative units of Bengal. Therefore, at the present state of our knowledge, it would perhaps be appropriate to enumerate the more important divisions along with short explanatory notes on the various connotations of the names gleaned from epigraphic and literary sources.

Vaṅga was an ancient *janapada* or human settlement in the history of Eastern Bengal of history.<sup>20</sup> This unit was mainly restricted to Dhaka-Faridpur-Munshiganj and Barisal areas of present Bangladesh. B.N. Mukherjee suggests an area covering the modern districts of 24-Parganas (both north and south), Hoogli, Howrah and Medinipur and parts of Burdwan (and also of Birbhum, Bankura and Nadia). He also incorporates the coastal region of present Bangladesh up to the mouth of the Padma

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<sup>18</sup> Roy N.R., *Bāṅgāleer Itihās: Ādi Parba*, Kolkata, Dey Publishing, 1959(BS), pp-108

<sup>19</sup> *ibid*; Majumdar, R.C., (ed.). *opcit*, p-77

<sup>20</sup> Pargiter, F.E., "Ancient countries in Eastern India", *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. LXVI, Part-I, 1897, p-85; Saha, Radharaman, *Pābnā Zillār Itihāsa*, Vol-I, Pabna, 1330(BS), Dey's Publishing Edition, Kolkata, 2004(Reprinted), p-1

during the first three or four centuries CE.<sup>21</sup> Geographically, it is composed of the Ganges Delta. The rivers like Bhagirathi, Padma and Meghna surround the unit and its boundaries have changed from time to time.

The name Vaṅga, indicating a people and a state, is mentioned for the first time in *Aitareya Āraṇyaka*.<sup>22</sup> Here, they are represented as a group of people who were associated with Magadhas. Vaṅgas have been mentioned in the *Baudhāyana Dharmasūtra*<sup>23</sup> as a group of people who lived in areas outside the Aryan civilization. In *the Purāṇas*, along with Vaṅgas there are other people, such as Aṅga, Magadha, Mudgaraka, Puṇḍra, Videha, Tāmralipta and Prāgjyotisa. The earliest reference to Vaṅga as a territorial unit is found in the *Arthaśāstra*. Here we find an area famous for and enriched with white and soft cotton fabrics.<sup>24</sup> The references in *the Mahāniddeshā* (2<sup>nd</sup> century CE) and in the *Milindpanho* (c 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> Century CE) indicate that there was a coastal area approachable from the sea in the territory of Vaṅga. Some indication of its location and its political power can also be collected from Kālidāsa's *Raghuvamśa*, as Raghuvamśa came to Vaṅga after defeating Sumha. Then he set up a pillar to mark the victory in the islands situated between the channels of the Ganges where people fought in their boats.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, the story indicates that the location of Vaṅga is on the eastern side of the Hooghly branch of the Bhagirathi. Whereas the Sumha lived on the other side. Meherauli Inscription of Chandra indicates that the King Chandra extirpated his enemies from the Vaṅga country in battle.<sup>26</sup> According to Yasodhara, a commentator on the *Kāmasūtra* of Vātsyayana, Vaṅga lies to the east of the Lauhitya (the Brahmaputra).<sup>27</sup> Thus, it may be inferred that the location of Vaṅga is in the triangular deltaic land between the two main streams of the Ganges-the Bhagirathi

<sup>21</sup> Mukherjee, B.N., *Post-Gupta Coinages of Bengal*, Calcutta, Coins Study Circle, 1989, p-1; *Banga Bāṅgalā O Bharat* (in Bengali), Progressive Publishers, Kolkata, 2000, pp-3-8; 'Kharoṣṭi and Kharoṣṭi-Brāhmi Inscriptions in West Bengal (India)', *Indian Museum Bulletin*, Vol. XXV, Calcutta, Indian Museum, 1990, Appendix III (The earliest Limits of Vaṅga)

<sup>22</sup> Keith, A.B., (ed. & tr.), *The Aitareya Aranyaka*, Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1909, p-200

<sup>23</sup> Olivelle, Patrick., (ed. & tr.), *Dharmasūtras: The Law Codes of Apastamba Gautama, Baudhāyana & Vasiṣṭha*, Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 2000, p-198

<sup>24</sup> Shamasastri, R., (tr.), *opcit*, pp-83-84; Cf. Bhattacharyya, Amitabha, *opcit*, p-58. It is mentioned as Vangakam śvetam-snigdhan-dūkulam.

<sup>25</sup> Devadhar, C.R., (ed.), *Raghuvamśa* of Kālidāsa, Chapter-4, Verse-36, Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, 1985

<sup>26</sup> Sharma, G.R., 'Chandra of the Meherauli Pillar Inscription', *The Indian Historical Quarterly*, Vol. XXI, 1945, 202-212; Sircar, D.C., 'Meherauli Iron Pillar Inscription of Chandra', pp-275-277; Fleet, J.F., 'Meherauli Iron Pillar Inscription of Chandra', *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, Vol. III, Calcutta, 1888, p-141; Agarwal, Ashvini., *Rise and Fall of Imperial Guptas*, New Delhi, Vedic Book, 1989, pp-177-18

<sup>27</sup> Goswami Damodar Shastri, (ed.) *Kāmasūtra* of Vātsyayana, Benaras, Jaikrishnadas and Haridas Gupta, 1929, pp. 294-95

and the Padma. This was probably termed by the Classical Greek and Latin writers as Gangāriḍai or Gaṅge. The inhabitants of this area naturally were well known for their naval power.<sup>28</sup> The Chinese text *Wei-luch* (3<sup>rd</sup> Century CE) referred to Pan-Yech, i.e., Vaṅga, as the country of Han-yuch (*Xan-gywat*) or the Ganga.<sup>29</sup> *Periplus* and Ptolemy mention Chandraketugarh as a riverine port situated on the bank of the river Vidyādhari (once an important tributary of the Bhagirathi) resembles 'Gaṅge'. Ranabir Chakravarti designates Chandraketugarh as a riverine port having facilities of both coastal long distance high-sea voyages.<sup>30</sup> Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya suggested Chandraketugarh as one of the important early historical urban centres and ports of lower deltaic Bengal.<sup>31</sup>

According to the Great Epic,<sup>32</sup> the sage Dirghatamas and Sudeṣna, queen of Bali gave birth to five sons who were named Aṅga, Vaṅga, Kaliṅga, Puṇḍra, Suhma and the land conquered by them came to be known after their names. This story is imprecisely supported by the *Purāṇas*. Among them, Vaṅga, Puṇḍra and Sumha formed three important principalities over Bengal's territorial area in the early stage.<sup>33</sup> This story attests to the fact that the kingdom of Vaṅga as a *janapada* existed in the Epic period extending roughly from 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. to 4<sup>th</sup> century AD.<sup>34</sup> The story of *Dirghatamas* also indicates that in ancient India, Ṛishis and saints used to take an active role in spreading the Aryan civilization to remote areas.<sup>35</sup>

In the Meherauli Iron Pillar Inscription of King Chandra,<sup>36</sup> around the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE Vaṅga has been mentioned for the first time as a *janapada*. The name of Vaṅga used as *Vāṅgalādeśam* in the Tirumālāi Rock Inscription of Rājendra Chola, dated 1025 CE.<sup>37</sup> Like the other *janapadas*, with the change of power, the regional jurisdiction of

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<sup>28</sup> Majumdar, R.C., opcit, p-2

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Mukherjee, B.N., 'Coastal and Overseas Trade in Pre-Gupta Vaṅga and Kaliṅga', *Trade in Early India*, ed. By Ranabir Chakravarti, Oxford India Paperbacks, New Delhi, 2005, p-199-200

<sup>30</sup> Chakravarti, Ranabir, *Trade and Traders in Early Indian Society*, Manohar, Delhi, 2002, pp-129-130

<sup>31</sup> Chattopadhyaya, Brajadulal, *Studying Early India: Archaeology, Texts and Historical Issues*, Permanent Black, Delhi, 2003, pp-76-78

<sup>32</sup> Mahābhārata, Ādi Parva, Ch-CIV, 52-55; Harivaṁśa, Harivaṁśa-parva, Ch. XXXI, 33-42

<sup>33</sup> Sen, B.C., *Some Historical Aspects of the Inscriptions of Bengal*, (thesis), Calcutta, University of Calcutta, 1942, p-2; Sen, Sukumar, *Vāṅgalā Sāhityer Itihāsa*, Vol. I, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition, Calcutta, Ananda Publishers 1970, p-12

<sup>34</sup> Chakravarti Rajanikanta, *Gauḍer Itihāsa*, Vol. I, Calcutta, 1317 (BS), Reprint Dey's Publishers, Kolkata, 1999, p-2

<sup>35</sup> Pargiter, F.E., 'Ancient Countries in Eastern India', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. LXVI, Part-I, 1897, Calcutta, PP-29-36

<sup>36</sup> Sharma, G.R., 'Meherauli Iron Pillar Inscription of King Chandra', *The Indian Historical Quarterly*, Vol. XXI, 1945, pp- 202-212

<sup>37</sup> Hultsch E, 'Tirumālāi Rock Inscription of Rājendra Chola', p-231

Bengal expanded at times beyond its boundaries or contacted within its boundaries. Therefore, it is a very difficult task to demarcate the exact boundary of any *janapada* like Vaṅga in the ancient period. However, the available sources help us to hypothesize that at least in the 12<sup>th</sup> century CE, Vaṅga (in some accounts 'Bang' or Bāṅgālāh) generally related to the eastern and southern Bengal,<sup>38</sup> lying on the western side of the Bhagirahi including Chittagong and Dacca Division.<sup>39</sup>

The epigraphical sources reveal that there were two sub-divisions of Vaṅga named 'Vikramapura-*bhāga*' and 'Nāvya-*bhāga*'.<sup>40</sup> In the later Pala period, we find Vaṅga divided into two parts: northern and southern (Anuttara). The Kāmāuli Copper plate of Vaidyadeva distinctly refers to *Anuttara-Vaṅga* or southern Vaṅga.<sup>41</sup> It implies sharply the existence of *Uttara-vaṅga* (Northern Vaṅga). It has been suggested that Ganga served as the boundary between north and southern Vaṅga. The two divisions of Vaṅga implied in Vaidyadeva's Grant might have identical to the two *bhāgas* of the same territory mentioned in the later Sena inscriptions, namely the *Vikramapura-bhāga* and *Nāvya*.<sup>42</sup> King Vallalsena (c 1058-117 CE) divided his territory of Bengal into five principalities or divisions. The divisions are Rāḍha, Bāgdi, Vaṅga, Varendra and Mithila.<sup>43</sup> Thus, the fact that revealed is that during Sena period Vaṅga assimilated within the Sena Kingdom, but it existed as a separate administrative unit.

Vaṅga witnessed the rise of an independent kingdom with 6<sup>th</sup> century. Gopachandra (525-540 CE), Dharmāditya (540-560 CE) and Samāchārdeva (560 CE) were powerful rulers of this unit. They issued seven copper plates, which suggest the territory extended over an area from Baleswar in Orissa, through the southern part

<sup>38</sup> Raverty, H.G., (ed. & tr. ), *opcit*, p-557 ; Sen. B.C., *Some Historical Aspects of the Inscriptions of Bengal*, p-2; Majumdar, R.C., 'Lāmā Tārānāth's Accounts of Bengal', *The Indian Historical Quarterly*, Vol. XIV, No-2, 1940, p-227-235

<sup>39</sup> Rahim, Abdur, *Social and Cultural History of Bengal*, Vol. I, Karachi, 1963, p-2; Law, B.C., 'The 'Vaṅgas'', *Indian Culture*, Vol. I, 1934-35, p-57-63

<sup>40</sup> Sircar, D.C., 'Madanapāḍa Plate of Viśvarupasena', *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XXXIII, 1960, pp-315-326; 'Madanapāḍa Plate of Viśvarupasena', *Journal of the Asiatic Society Letters*, Vol. XX, 1954, p-209-219; Majumdar, N.G., 'Madanapāḍa Copper-plate of Viśvarupasena', pp-133-140; 'Calcutta Sāhitya-Parishat Copper-plate of Viśvarupasena', p-141; 'Translation of Calcutta Sāhitya-Parishat Copper-plate of Viśvarupasena', pp-177-78, 180

<sup>41</sup> Venis Arthur, 'Copper plate Grant of Vaidyadeva, King of Kāmarupa', *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. II, 1892, p-349; Maitreya Akshaya Kumar, *Gauḍa-Lekha-Mālā* (in Bengali), Rajshahi, Varendra Research Museum, 1319(BS), p-140

<sup>42</sup> Venis, Arthur, 'Copper-plate Grant of Vaidyadeva, King of Kāmrupa', *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. 2, No-28, pp-347-358

<sup>43</sup> Lethbridge. E, *An Easy Introduction to the History and Geography of Bengal*, London, Macmillan & Co, 1881, Calcutta, 1875 (Reprinted), p-13; Chakravarti, Rajanikanta, *opcit*, p-164; Blochman, H., *Contribution to the Geography and History of Bengal*, Calcutta, Asiatic Society, 1968, p-63

of West Bengal (Vardhanamāna *bhukti*) to the southern part of Bangladesh (Navyāvakāśikā and Varakamaṇḍala). These include three copper plates from Jayarāmapura, Mallasarul and Faridpur issued by Gopachandra, two Faridpur copper plates issued by Dharmāditya and two-named Kurpala and Ghugrahati copper plates issued by Samāchārdeva.<sup>44</sup> From the 10<sup>th</sup> to the middle of 13<sup>th</sup> century, Vaṅga was under the rule of the Chandras, the Varmans, and finally the Senas.

From the above discussion, it is very difficult to ascertain the exact location of Vaṅga in different periods of history because its territorial areas changed from time to time. However, it extended in a vast area, but in the Sena period, the territorial jurisdiction of Vaṅga had contracted, and on the eve of Muslim invasion, the name Vaṅga was in vogue denoting a small portion of Bengal. However, it gradually extended its territorial jurisdiction and ultimately assumed as a country with the name of Bengal.

Another territorial unit sometimes considered identical with Vaṅga, named Vāṅgalā, was a well-known division of ancient Bengal. The unit phonetically similar to Vaṅga, denotes South-Eastern Bengal in general. In tracing its location and relation with Vaṅga the term 'Vāṅgalā' may be discussed with special attention. It might have had a separate existence at a certain period of time. Vaṅga no doubt is older than Vāṅgalā and it can be traced back to the Epic Age.<sup>45</sup> Dr. H. C. Roychowdhury is of the opinion that 'Vaṅga' and 'Vāṅgalā' are two separate countries and he suggests that Vāṅgalā was probably identical with Chandradvīpa.<sup>46</sup> Several inscriptions of south India and the *Tārīkh-i-Firuzshāhi*<sup>47</sup> mention Vaṅga and Vāṅgalā separately.<sup>48</sup> On the other hand, P.L. Paul states that Vaṅga and Vāṅgalā cannot be counted as two separate countries.<sup>49</sup> Vāṅgalā is probably thought to be an etymological variation of Vaṅga, possibly made by southerners and foreigners.<sup>50</sup> We do not find any mention of Vāṅgalā before 10<sup>th</sup> century CE.

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<sup>44</sup> Pargiter, F.E., 'Three Copper-plate Grants from East Bengal', *Indian Antiquary*, Vol. XXXIX, 1910, pp-193-216; Bhattasali, N.K., 'The Ghugrahāti Copper-plate Inscription Samāchārdeva', *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XVIII, 1925-26, pp-74-86; Cf. Chakrabarti, Amita, *opcit*, pp-20-37; Cf. Jahan Shahnaj Husne, *Excavating Waves and Winds of Exchange-A study of Maritime Trade in Early Bengal*, Joha and Erica edges Ltd., Oxford, British Archaeological Reports, 2006, pp-31-34

<sup>45</sup> *Mahabharata, Ādi Parva*, pp-113-114

<sup>46</sup> Ray Chaudhury, Hemchandra, "Vaṅga Kon Deśa", in *Mānasi-O-Marmavani*, (1336 B.S), 1929, pp-566-587ff

<sup>47</sup> Elliot and Dowson, (eds.), *opcit*, Vol. III, 1871, London, Trubner & Co., p-295

<sup>48</sup> Fleet, J.F., 'Inscriptions at Āblur', *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. V, 1898-99, p-257

<sup>49</sup> Paul, P. L., 'Vaṅga and Vāṅgalā', *Indian Historical Quarterly*, Vol. XII, 1936, p-522-24

<sup>50</sup> Paul, P. L., *opcit*, Vol. I p-V

Originally, Vāṅgalā denoted the coastal areas of south-eastern Bengal.<sup>51</sup> Thus, the territory overlapped with the Nāvya sub-division of Vaṅga. This area may be co-extensive with Chandradvīpa (present Barishal division in Bangladesh). This was the stronghold of the Chandras before the expansion of their rule to the whole of Vaṅga. Thus, it gradually superseded Vaṅga in ordinary use and emerged as a country comprising all the previous *janapadas* or divisions in its jurisdiction in subsequent times. Thus Vaṅga proper was now included in the new kingdom of Vāṅgalā. As a result of this, the name Vāṅgalā could be optionally used in an expanded sense to indicate a large area in East Bengal that formed part of the kingdom of Śrīchandra (belongs to Chandra dynasty) and his successors. By this time, Vaṅga and Vāṅgalā apparently signified more or less the same territory.<sup>52</sup>

The earliest reference to Vāṅgalā is found in the Nesari plates (805 CE) of the Rāṣṭrakūta King Govinda III. It speaks of Dharmapāla as the king of Vāṅgalā<sup>53</sup>. The name is often used in records and works later than 10<sup>th</sup> century. The Tirumālāi Inscription (1025 CE) of Rājendra Chola speaks of King Govinda Chandra of Chandra dynasty as the Lord of Vāṅglādeśa<sup>54</sup>. In the Āblur Inscription, Vaṅga and Vāṅgalā have been mentioned as two separate countries.<sup>55</sup> Lama Tārānāth, a great Tibetan Buddhist monk used the term Bhāṅgalā instead of Vāṅgalā to differentiate from Rāḍha and Varendra.<sup>56</sup> After a vivid observation Ābul Fazl comments, Bāṅgāl's (Vāṅgalā) original name was Bang (Vaṅga). Its former rulers raised hillock. It was ten yards in height and twenty yards in breadth, throughout the province. These were called *al*. The name of Bāṅgāl might have come from this suffix.<sup>57</sup>

It is recorded in the *Raghuvamśa* that the Vaṅga people were defeated in the land watered by the lower streams of the Ganges.<sup>58</sup> From the epigraphic references, it is revealed that Vaṅga comprised the Vikramapura region of Dacca and Faridpur<sup>59</sup> and the Nāvya region most probably the Faridpur and Buckergunge districts.<sup>60</sup> Thus, it indicates that Vaṅga certainly includes at least the part of present Dacca, Faridpur

<sup>51</sup> Sircar, D.C., *opcit*, p-132; Bhattacharyya, A., *opcit*, pp-62-64

<sup>52</sup> Sircar, D.C., *opcit*, p-134

<sup>53</sup> 'Nesari Plate of Govinda III', *Journal of Asiatic Society* (Letters), Calcutta, Vol. XXII, P-133-134, 1956

<sup>54</sup> Hultzsch, E., 'Tirumālāi Rock Inscription of Rājendra Chola I', *opcit*, p-233; Chakrabarti, Amita, *opcit*, p-14-15

<sup>55</sup> Fleet, J.F., 'Inscriptions at Āblur', *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. V, 1898-99, p-213-265

<sup>56</sup> Majumdar, R.C., 'Lāmā Tārānāth's Account of Bengal', *Indian Historical Quarterly*, Vol. XVI, 1940-41, p-226; Chattopadhyaya, Annapurna, *The people and Culture of Bengal-A study in Origin*, Vol-1, Part-2, Kolkata, Firma KLM Pvt. Ltd. 2002, pp-389-395

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Sircar, D.C., *opcit*, p-132-140; Cf. Sircar, 'Origin of the name Bengal', *Indian Historical Quarterly*, Vol. XXIII, 1947, p-63

<sup>58</sup> *Raghuvamśa*, IV, 36

<sup>59</sup> Majumdar, N.G., 'Edilpur Copper-plate of Keśavasena', p-125

<sup>60</sup> *ibid*

and Buckergunge districts.<sup>61</sup> Thus, it is clear that the southern part of the Vaṅga region became, known for the first time as Vāṅgalā, as known from many references. In course of time, the region became a separate identity as Vāṅgalā.

European writers of the 16<sup>th</sup> and the 17<sup>th</sup> centuries mentioned a city of Bengala near the Meghna estuary i.e. the confluence of the Padma and the Meghna. This estuary extends over the wide area between the districts of Buckergunge and Chittagong in East Pakistan. Here Bengala is evidently a foreign corruption of Vāṅgalā. R.C. Majumdar, in this connection, has suggested that this late medieval city of *Bengala* which was situated near modern Chittagong was the capital of the ancient Vāṅgalā-*deśa*. The city of Bengala was also famous having for its seaport.<sup>62</sup>

Thus, the above discussion shows that the two words 'Vaṅga' and 'Vāṅgalā' are indiscriminately used in various sources. Sometimes both are mentioned together. Most probably, the term Vāṅgalā first became popular in South India. From the references of the South Indian inscription, it can be seen that the word 'Vāṅgalā' used to refer to a part of Vaṅga and does not refer to a separate unit of Vaṅga. In this connection, D.C. Sircar stated that the Chandras of South-East Bengal are sometimes represented as lords of Chandra-*dvīpa* and sometimes as lords of Vāṅgalā-*deśa*. The connotation of the name began to expand with the expansion of the Chandra Kingdom of Vāṅgalā over wide areas of South-east Bengal.

Samataṭa is another ancient regional unit of Southeast Bengal, whose name is not ethnic, but descriptive. Since Samudragupta's time the unit had a distinct identity and was well-known and well-recognised. It is located at mouth of the Brahmaputra River (near Comilla) in the south-east of Bengal. It includes the areas of Noakhali, Comilla, Chittagang and adjacent areas in present Bangladesh and some parts of present Tripura in India. Geographically it was a low-land constituted by delta and flood plains made by the activities of the rivers Surma and Meghna. It was on the surface of Trippera, with the low hill range of Lālmāi as its eastern end.<sup>63</sup> Cunningham is of the opinion of that Samataṭa is to be identified with the delta of the Ganges including the Sunderbans between the Huranghata river and Bukerganj<sup>64</sup>. He further added Samataṭa is a place covering 200 or 217 miles to the south of Kamrupa and 150 miles to the east of Tāmralipti<sup>65</sup>.

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<sup>61</sup> Sircar.D.C.,*opcit*,p-133

<sup>62</sup> Majumdar, R.C., 'Lāma Tārānātha's Accounts of Bengal', pp-227-235

<sup>63</sup> Rashid, M.Harunur, 'The Geographical Background to the History and Archaeology of South-East Bengal', *Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol.XXIV-VI,1979-81,p-169-177

<sup>64</sup> Cunningham, A., *Ancient Geography of India, the Buddhist period including the Campaigns of Alexander and the Travels of Hwan-Thsang*, London,1871(first published),Low Price Publications,Reprinted,2006,pp-501-503

<sup>65</sup> *ibid*,pp-423-424

In the Allahabad Pillar Inscription of Samudragupta Samataṭa is mention as a frontier state along with Dāvaka, Kāmarupa, Nepala and Karttrpora.<sup>66</sup> Varāhamihir who lived in the beginning of the 6<sup>th</sup> century CE also mentions Samataṭa as geographical unit.<sup>67</sup> The Chinese pilgrim named Hiuen-Tsang, who visited India in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, described it a low and moist sea-side as area with Buddhist monasteries. He mentions that he reached Samataṭa after a southward journey of 1200 or 1300 *li* from Kāmrupa and that the country was more than 3000 *li*(about 800kms) in circuit.<sup>68</sup> He indicates that the land was a Buddhist centre. Based on the statement of Hiuen-Tsang, it is said that Samataṭa was bounded on one side by the sea. It arrives at the conclusion that ‘the districts of 24Parganas, Khulna, Buckerganj etc, standing near the sea, were incorporated into Samataṭa’.<sup>69</sup>

Further information for the location of Samataṭa is provided by I-tsing, who mentions the king Rājbhata ruling over Samataṭa. This king is identified with Rājarājabhaṭṭa of the Khaḍga Dynasty, mentioned in Āśhrafpur Copper plate.<sup>70</sup> The king ruled from the capital of Karmānta-Vāsaka. Based on above sources M. Harunur Rashid suggested that Karmānta-Vāsaka was the second capital of Samataṭa.<sup>71</sup> The capital is identical with modern Baḍkamtā in the district of Tipperah (present Tripura), situated twelve miles west of Comilla.<sup>72</sup> The fact testifies that Samataṭa extended up to Tipperah<sup>73</sup> (present Tripura). Further information is corroborated by Baghaura and Nārāyanpur Image Inscriptions of the reign of Mahipāla I and the Mehar Copper-plate of Damodaradeva.<sup>74</sup> It indicates also Vilikandhaka in Samataṭa.

<sup>66</sup> Princep, James., ‘Interpretation of the most Ancient of the Inscriptions n the Columns of Allahabad’, *Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. VI, Part-II, 1837,p-973; Princep, James., ‘Note on Inscription on the Allahabad Column, *Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol.3, 1834,pp= 114-123;Cf. Chakrabarti, Dilip Kumar, *opcit*, pp. 24-25; Cf. Bhattacharyya, Amitabha, *opcit*, p- 65

<sup>67</sup> Kern, J.H.K., (ed.), *opcit*,XIV,6

<sup>68</sup> Watters, Thomas, *On Yuan Chwang’s Travels in India*, eds. Davids T. Rhys& Bushell,S, London, Royal Asiatic Society,1904 ,pp-187-188

<sup>69</sup> Sen,B.C.,*opcit*,p-92

<sup>70</sup> Laskar, G.M., ‘Āsrafpur Copper-plate Grants of Devakhaḍga’, *Memoirs of Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. I, No-6, 1904-07, pp-85-91; Zakariah, A.K.M, ‘Inscription’, *Maināmati-Devaparvata*, Dacca, Asiatic Society of Bangladesh,1997, pp-210-211

<sup>71</sup> Rashid, M. Harunur, ‘Site and Surroundings’, *Maināmati- Devaparvata*, ed. By A.B.M Hussain, Asiatic Society of Bangladesh,Dhaka,1997,p-8-12

<sup>72</sup> Bhattasali, N.K., ‘Some Image Inscriptions from East Bengal’, *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XVII,1923-24, P-351; Bhattasali,N.K., ‘A Forgotten Kingdom of East Bengal’, *Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal*, New Series, Vol.X.1914, p-87

<sup>73</sup> Bhattacharyya Amitabha, *opcit*, pp. 66-67; Majumdar, R.C.,(ed.), *opcit*,p-17 Chakrabarti, Amita, *opcit*, pp. 16-18.

<sup>74</sup> Sircar, D.C., ‘Nārāyanpur Vināyaka Image Inscription of King Mahipāla, Regnal Year 4’, *Indian Culture*, Vol. IX, 1942-43,pp- 121-25; Barua, B.M., and P.V. Chakravarti, ‘Mehar Plate of Dāmodaradeva’, *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XXVII,1947-48, pp-51-58; Sircar, D.C., ‘Mehar Plate of Dāmodaradeva’, *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XXX, 1987,pp-51-58

It has been identified with the present village of Bilakindhui in the Tippera district. The Kailan Copper plate of Śrīdharana Rāta also refers to Devaparvata as the headquarter of Samataṭa,<sup>75</sup> now styled *sārvatobhadra*(square or rectangle-shaped), encircled by the river Kṣīrodā like a moat. Elephants played in its water banks were adorned by cluster of boats.<sup>76</sup>

Samataṭa was founded after the fall of the Mauryan Empire, sometime after the death of Asoka in 232 BCE. Thereafter Samudragupta, around 335 C.E., incorporated it into the Gupta Empire. After the fall of the Gupta dynasty, political unrest arose in North India and in Bengal. Depending on scope of situation, some small dynasties ruled here, sometimes independently and sometimes under someone else's control. Not much is known about the kingdom's history. However, it is known that Buddhist kings ruled it in 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Thus we find here five capitals of Samataṭa in five different consecutive phases of history, namely Kripura<sup>77</sup>, Vikrampura<sup>78</sup>, Karmānta-Vāsaka<sup>79</sup>, Devaparvata<sup>80</sup>, Paṭṭikera<sup>81</sup>.

### **Harikela**

Another geographical unit in ancient Bengal that existed in the tracts of South-East Bengal is Harikela or Harikeli or Holikola. There is a controversy among the scholars on the issue of the exact location of the area. Some scholars locate the division as a neighbour of the Samataṭa and identify it with Śrīhaṭṭa or Śrīhaṭṭadeśa now known as Sylhet<sup>82</sup> After careful observation, Adhir Chakravarti identifies it with Noakhali, Comilla, parts of Tippera and Chittagong districts, but not extended up to Śrīhaṭṭa, at

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<sup>75</sup> Sircar, D.C., 'The Kailān Copper-plate of King Śrīdharana Rata of Samataṭa Regnal Year 4', *The Indian Historical Quarterly*, Vol. XXIII, 1947, pp-221-241; Sircar, D.C., *Shilālekha-Tāmraśāsonadir Prasaṅga*, (in Bangia), Kolkata, Sāhityalok, 1982, pp. 65-74.

<sup>76</sup> *ibid*; Chowdhury, Abdul Momin, *Dynastic History of Bengal*, Dacca, Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1967, p-146; Sircar, D.C., *Select Inscriptions Bearing on Indian History and Civilization*, Vol-2, Calcutta, University of Calcutta, 1965, pp-36-40;

<sup>77</sup> Alam, Aksadul, Deconstructing the 'Nationalist' construction of 'Indianisation' of South-east Asia: Issues in Connectivity and Culture (up to CE-1300), *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh (Hum.)*, Vol. 62(2), 2017, p-143

<sup>78</sup> Sircar, D. C., *opcit*, p-152-153

<sup>79</sup> Rashid, M. Harunur, 'Site and Surroundings', *Maināmati- Devaparvata*, ed. By A.B.M. Hussain, Dhaka, Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 1997, pp-8-12

<sup>80</sup> Zakariah, A.K.M., 'Inscriptions', *Maināmati-Devaparvata*, p-215

<sup>81</sup> Rashid, M. Harunur., 'The city and its Environs', *Mainamati-Devaparvata*, pp-271-272

<sup>82</sup> Sircar, D.C., 'Madanpur Plate of Śrīchandra, Year 46', *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XXVIII, 1950, p-338; Basak, R.G., 'Madanpur Plate of Śrīchandra', *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XXVIII, 1950, pp-51-58; Sircar, D.C., 'Inscription of Bhavadeva', *Journal of the Asiatic Society [Letters]*, Vol. XVII, 1951, pp. 89-90; Chowdhury, Abdul Momin, *opcit*, p-152.

least not before the reign of Śrīchandra.<sup>83</sup> I-tsing, the 7<sup>th</sup> century Chinese traveler, has defined its position as the eastern limit of the eastern India.<sup>84</sup> The evidence of this information is supported by that of the *Karpuramañjari* of Rājśekhara<sup>85</sup> written in 9<sup>th</sup> century AD. It includes girls from Harikela among women of eastern Bengal.<sup>86</sup> The most confusing statement appears in two late manuscripts now in the collection of Dhaka University Library named the Rudrakṣa Māhātya<sup>87</sup> and Rupachintāmanikośa.<sup>88</sup> They take 'Harikela' as a synonym for Sylhet, without mentioning any source or evidence. This has created a lot of confusion. Another confusion comes from Hemachandra, the 12<sup>th</sup> century lexicographer. He in his book, *Abhidhanachintāmani* equates Harikela with Vaṅga.<sup>89</sup> This, however, has been contradicted in the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*,<sup>90</sup> where Harikela, Vaṅga, and Samataṭa are cited as separate units.

The most reliable document is supplied by an incomplete copper plate of Kāntideva who lived around 9<sup>th</sup> century AD. It was discovered in an old temple in the Nāsirabad area of Chittagong. The source clearly points out that Kāntideva was the ruler of Harikela.<sup>91</sup> But unfortunately no further information has been found from this source. The epigraphic source like the Rāmpāl Copper plate Inscription describes Trailokya Chandra belonging to Chandra dynasty of Eastern Bengal as the mainstay of the royal family of Harikela,<sup>92</sup> who became the king of Chandradvīpa

<sup>83</sup> Chakravarti Adhir, 'Harikela's Contacts with Outside World', *Journal of Ancient Indian History*, Vol. XIX, Parts-1-2, 1989-90, pp-2-3

<sup>84</sup> Takakusu, J., (tr.), *A Record of the Buddhist Religion as Practiced in India and the Malay Archipelago (AD 671-695)*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1896, 2<sup>nd</sup> Indian Edition, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, New Delhi, 1982, introduction, p-XXXIII, XLVI

<sup>85</sup> Cf. Bhattacharya, D.C., 'Harikela and the Ruins at Maināmati', *Historical Geography of India* (Collection of Articles from the Indian Historical Quarterly) compiled by P. Mittal, & Geeta Dua, Vol. 2, Originals, Delhi, 2005, p-396; Cf. Majumdar, R.C., *opcit*, p-17

<sup>86</sup> Cf. Husain, Shahanara, *Everyday Life in the Pala Empire*, Dacca, Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1968, p. 15.

<sup>87</sup> *Dhaka University Library Manuscript No-21,415*

<sup>88</sup> *Dhaka University Library Manuscript No-1451*

<sup>89</sup> Cf. Mukherjee, B.N., 'The Original Territory of Harikela', *Bangladesh Lalitkala*, Vol. I, Part-2, 1975, pp. 118-19. Hemachandra clearly mentioned *Vngastu Harikeliyah* i.e. 'the Vanga people have been Harikelised'; Cf. Chakravarti, Adhir, 'Harikela's Contacts with Outside World', p. 3

<sup>90</sup> Ganapati, T., (ed.), *Ārya-Mañjuśrī-Mūlakalpa*, Sanskrit Series, No. LXX, Trivandrum, Bhaskara Press, 1920; Jayaswal, K.P., *An Imperial History of India in a Sanskrit Text, With a special commentary on Later Gupta Period*, Lahore: Motilal Banarsidass, 1934, pp. 68, 232-33

<sup>91</sup> Majumdar, R.C., 'Chittagong Copper-plate of Kāntideva', *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XXVI, No-45, 1941-42, pp. 313-318.

<sup>92</sup> Basak, R.G., 'Rampal Copper Plate Grant of Śrīchandradeva', *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XII, No-18, 1913-14, pp-136-142

(Bakarganj district). Two other copper plate inscriptions of the Chandra ruler Śrīchandra (930-975 AD), namely Dhulla and Madanpur Copperplate inscriptions, also furnish the fact that the Chandras belonged to the landowners of Rohitagiri under the Kings of Harikela.<sup>93</sup> The above facts indicate that firstly Trailokyachandra inherited his feudatory position, gained more power and became the mainstay of the Harikela king.<sup>94</sup> However, unfortunately the Chandra inscription does not provide any information needed for the location and identification of this kingdom. However, after careful analysis of the Chandra inscription and the conquests of the Chandras in Bengal, it can be clearly mentioned that this region was located in the Chittagong region of the Ārakān border. The discovery of Kāntideva's copper plate inscription supports this view. However, the view is also supported by reliable evidence furnished by Harikela coins discovered at Maināmati. It is strongly indicated by the discoveries that this Harikela was situated in the neighbourhood of Samataṭa and towards the direction of Ārakān. It includes about 400 coins, including 3 hoards consisting of 227 coins.<sup>95</sup> A number of silver coins at Maināmati, which are palaeographically to be placed in the 7th-8th century AD,<sup>96</sup> prove the existence of Harikela in the 7th century AD. Further evidence has been provided by the discovery of the Jobra coin hoard in the very heart of Chittagong. These were 36 'Bull and Triglyph' type thin silver coins, 35 of them with 'Harikela' legend and one with the ancient Ārakān king 'Pritichandra' legend.

Though confusion prevails, it may be stated with sufficient information that Harikela was an important kingdom of Ancient Bengal. Of all such kingdoms in this area, Harikela has been the best for her contribution, but least documented. Possibly its situation in an obscure corner of the country is responsible for this neglect. It is a complicated matter that in Noakhali, Comilla used to be a part of both Samataṭa and Harikela. As a solution to the problem, it can be said that when a powerful dynasty emerged in these two regions, they were overlapped under that dynasty. Therefore, it may be concluded on the basis of these observations that Vaṅga, Samataṭa and Harikela were separate entities in ancient Bengal. However, in some places their identity presumably used to overlap due to their close proximity.

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<sup>93</sup> Sircar, D.C., 'Dhulla Plate of Śrīchandra', *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol.XXXIII, No-25, 1959-60, pp-134-140; Basak, R.G., 'Madanpur Plate Śrīchandra, Year 44', *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol.XXVIII, 1949-50, pp-51-58; Sircar, D.C., 'Madanur Plate of Śrīchandra, Year-46', *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol-XXVIII, p-337-339

<sup>94</sup> Chowdhury, Abdul, Momin., *opcit*, pp-158-62

<sup>95</sup> Hossain, Md. Mosharraf, *Maināmati-Lālmāi*, Dibya Prakash, Dhaka, 2006, pp-56-58

<sup>96</sup> Mukherjee, B. N., *Coins and Currency Systems in Gupta Bengal (AD 320-550)*, Harman Publishing House, Delhi, 1992, pp-39-41

## **Conclusion**

Thus, from the above discussion, it is clear that the different areas of what was known as Bengal in pre-partition days carried different geographical designations in ancient times. The boundaries of these territorial divisions varied in different epochs of history owing to the rise and the fall of the political powers under which they were subjected. Gauḍa and Vaṅga were the principal among these and roughly denoted Western and Eastern Bengal. All these have come down to us from different epigraphical and literary records and a careful analysis of the relevant data would show that they were geographically connected with either Gauḍa or Vaṅga i.e. Western Bengal and Eastern Bengal. In other words, there was some geographical overlapping and not same region was sometimes denoted by different names in different historical epochs

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