

CHAPTER I

GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUNDS

Geographically, ancient Bengal comprised not only the Indian State of West Bengal and the whole of Bangladesh but also some Bengali-speaking tracts of the Indian states of Assam and Bihar and the Indian union territory of Tripura. This region in the past was divided into different territorial units and known under different designations, such as Gauḍa, Vaṅga, Samataṭa and Rāḍha. The denotations of these geographical nomenclatures are discussed below.

GAUḌA

The name Gauḍa appears for the first time in Pāṇini's Aṣṭādhyāyī (c.fifth century B.C.), but the place or the region it stood for is uncertain. The two other early sources alluding to Gauḍa are Kauṭilya's Arthaśāstra (c.fourth century B.C.) and Bharata's Nāṭyaśāstra (c.first century B.C. - first century A.D.). Gauḍa was originally the name of a district.¹ The Bṛihatsaṁhitā (first quarter of the sixth century A.D.) places the Gauḍaka tribe in the eastern division with Puṇḍras and Tāmraliptakas.² The statement in the Haraha inscription³ (611 Vikrama era, 554 A.D.) that the Maukharī King

1. Chakravarti, Manomohan, 'Notes on the Geography of Old Bengal', JASOB, IV, 5, 1908, p.274.

2. Das Gupta, K.K. (ed.), J.F.Fleet's The Topographical List of the Bṛihatsaṁhitā, Calcutta, 1973, p.39.

3. Ṁkṛitvā chāyatimichitasthalabhubi Gauḍān samudrāsrayaḥ nadhyāsishta nataksḥītisācharanaḥ simhāsanam yo jitiḥ'.

see, EI, XIV, p.117.

Īśānavarman forced the Gauḍas to seek refuge in the sea-shore seems to indicate the probable extension of Gauḍa upto the sea-coast. If the Gauḍa King of Bāṇa's Harshacharita (early seventh century) be identical with the She-Sang-Kia (Śāsāṅka), lord of Kie-lo-na-su-fa-la-na (Karṇasuvarṇa) of the works of contemporary Chinese traveller Yuan Chwang, then the viśhaya of Gauḍa mentioned in the former work may be identified with old Karṇasuvarṇa, the present Rājbaḍīdāṅgā, near modern Chiruti Railway Station in the Murshidabad district. In the Bhavishya Purāṇa Gauḍa is defined as a territory lying to the north of Burdwan and south of Padma.⁴ The Kathāsaritsāgara refers to the city of Bardhamana in Gauḍa.⁵ Thus Gauḍa was not only a viśhaya or a city, but also the name of the kingdom or an empire. The Gauḍādhipa of Bāṇa or Śāsāṅka of Yuan Chwang besides Karṇasuvarṇa ruled over a powerful empire including Magadha and Kuśīnagara.

Like other old geographical terms Gauḍa had both wide and narrow senses. In its wide sense Gauḍa stretches southward as far as Kaliṅga as indicated by the Kāmasūtra of Vātsyāyana, a work of the Gupta times and the sixteenth-century treatise, the Śaktisangama Tantra which likewise extends the country from Vaṅga (central and eastern Bengal) to Bhuvaneśa (Orissa).⁶ The Rājatarāṅginī uses the term in a still wider sense and, the expression Pañcha-Gauḍa occurring in it besides Gauḍa proper includes the countries of Sarasvatī (East Punjab),

4. Majumdar, R.C., History of Ancient Bengal, June, 1971, Calcutta, p.7.

5. See Tawney's translation, p.204.

6. Skanda Purāṇa quoted in the Śabdakalpadruma (under Gauḍa).

Kānyakubja (Gangetic doab), Mithilā (North Bihar) and Utkala (North Orissa). This is reminiscent of the Gauḍa empire of Dharmapāla.

Sometimes Gauḍa and Vaṅga were used synonymously. In the eighth-ninth century expressions like Vaṅgapati (Lord of Vaṅga) and Gauḍeśvara (Lord of Gauḍa) came into use and they invariably referred to the Pāla Kings. This tradition continued in later times. The Senas with their seat at Rāḍha (West Bengal) also styled themselves Gauḍeśvara. In other words in the Pāla-Sena period, extending from the eighth to the twelfth century, Gauḍa and Vaṅga were virtually interchangeable names for Bengal as a whole.

VAṄGA

The word occurs for the first time in the Aitareya Āraṇyaka (c. eighth-seventh century B.C.) both as a territorial and ethnic designation, and in respect of antiquity it thus precedes by Gauḍa. There it occurs with Magadha (South Bihar). Next the Dharma-Sūtras (c. fourth-second century B.C.) place Vaṅga, beyond the zone of Aryan culture and make its inhabitants as allies of Aṅgas (north-eastern Bihar), Suhma (mainly southern tracts of Burdwan district), Puṇḍra (North Bengal) and Kaliṅga (Orissa). Other old and important references to Vaṅga and its people are found in the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata, the Mahābhāṣya of Patañjali (second century B.C.), the Prakrit Milinda Pañha (first century B.C. - first century A.D.) and Raghuvamśa (fifth century A.D.) of Kālidāsa.⁷ The last named work

7. 'Vanganutkhāya tarasā netā nausādhanodytān/

Nichakhān jayastambhān gaṅgāsrotahantaresu// IV.36.

places the Vaṅgas amidst the stream of the Ganges and thus it points to Southern Bengal as the habitat of these people. The same work also indicates that at time the western boundary of the Vaṅga country extended beyond the Kapiśā or Kasāi in the district of Midnapore. The Jaina Upāṅga, Prajñāpanā⁸ included within Vaṅga an area beyond Hooghly. The Nāgārjunikoṇḍā inscription (third century A.D.), the Meheraulī pillar inscription (fourth century A.D.) and, the Mahākuṭa (Karnataka) inscription of the Chālukya King Pulakeśin II (seventh-century A.D.) some of the Bengal epigraphs of the Pāla-Sena (mid-eighth to early thirteenth century) refers Vaṅga.

The territorial nomenclature of Vaṅga changed in different epoch. But many of them are vague and imprecise. As a geo-political unit Vaṅga at its widest stretch denoted parts of the trans-Bhāgīrathī region. The Pannavaṅā includes Tāmrālipti within Vaṅga and the Milinda-Pañha mentions Vaṅga as a maritime port on the sea. In one of the Sena records Vikramapura in the Dhaka district is described as a part of Vaṅga which was included in Puṇḍravardhana bhukti.⁹

VAṅGĀLA

Vaṅgāla have come into popular use during the reign of the Chandra Kings in the tenth and eleventh centuries, although the Nesarika Grant of the Rāṣṭrakūṭa king Govinda III, dated 727 Śaka (805 A.D.) alluded to Vaṅgāla as ruled by the great Pāla King Dharmapāla.¹⁰

8. IA, 1891, p.376.

9. See K.K.Dasgupta's article in The Telegraph, Calcutta, 3 July, 1987 and also 'Itihāsa O Saṃskṛiti', Calcutta, January, 1977, p.170.

10. JRASBL, XXII, p.134; EI., pp.123-140.

And thus it seems that at least from the beginning of the ninth century if not earlier still, Vaṅgāla emerged as a geographical nomenclature.

The available evidences indicate that the country of Vaṅgāla comprised the low-lying flats of the Gangetic delta bordering the estuaries. The seventeenth century Tibetan writer Lāmā Tāranātha places Bhaṅgāla in eastern India along with Kāmarūpa, Tripura and Assam but distinguishes it from Varendra and Rāḍha. He further refers to Govindachandra of Bhaṅgāla, and in another work mentions Chātigrāma, i.e. Chittangong as the capital of Gopīchandra. Therefore, Bhaṅgāla, same as Vaṅgāla, may be justifiably located in the southern part of East Bengal including the tract lying to the east of Meghnā river.

SAMATAṬA

The earliest reference to Samataṭa is found in the Allāhābād Praśasti of Samudra Gupta.¹¹ The Brihatsaṁhitā of Varāhamihira refers to it as an eastern country¹² separate from Vaṅga. While Yuan Chwang describes Samataṭa as a country bordering on the Bay of Bengal lying south of Kāmrūpa (Assam), I-tsing alludes to it in the context of its king, and if this king is taken identical with the Rājarājabhaṭa of Āshrāpur copper plates, the capital of Samataṭa was then Karmanta or modern Badkamla, 19.3 km. to the west of Comilla.¹³ The Nārāyaṇa image inscription¹⁴ of Mahīpāla (981 A.D.) connects Samataṭa with the modern Comilla district of Bangladesh. Broadly speaking Samataṭa represents the Chittagong, Comilla and Noakhali districts of Bangladesh.

11. Corpus Incriptionum Indicarum, III, p.8.

12. J.F.Fleet, op.cit., p.86.

13. Majumdar, R.C., op.cit., pp.86-87.

14. EL, XVII, pp.353-355.

HARIKELA

First mentioned by I-tsing¹⁵ as the eastern limit of Eastern India in the seventh century A.D., Harikela figures in later works such as the Karpūra - mañjarī of Rājasēkhara (late ninth-early tenth century). It refers to the Harikeli girls from the east.¹⁵ Hemchandra and the Yādava Prakāśa use Vaṅga and Harikeli synonymously. Still later, the Dākārṇava mentions Harikela, along with Khāḍi, Rāḍha and Vaṅgāla (all in Bengal). If Harikela taken identical with Śrīhaṭṭa in two manuscripts (Rūpachintāmaṇi completed in 1515 Śaka and Kālpadruksha)¹⁷ then Harikela corresponded with Śrīhaṭṭa in those days. The Rudrākṣhamāhātya section of the Smṛiti work named Kṛityasāra mentions a verse from the Liṅga Purāṇa which bears the name Harikola and in a note author states that Harikola is Śrīhaṭṭadeśa. In an epigraphical record of the tenth century of the Chandra dynasty Harikela is described as the mainstay of the king of Chandradvīpa of the Bakharganj district, Bangladesh and thus Harikela comprised this region as well. Numismatic testimony indicates the Chittagong and Comilla district as a part of Harikela. In short, therefore, Harikela at its broadest stretch included the Noakhali, Chittagong, Comilla and Bakharganj districts.

CHANDRADVĪPA

Probably owing its name to the Chandra family, Chandradvīpa seems to have corresponded to the entire coastal region including the

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15. I-tsing, XLVI.
 16. Konow and Lannan's edition and J.Takakasu's translation, pp.226-277.
 17. Cf. Pal Promadlal, Early History of Bengal, I, Calcutta, 1939, pp.3-4.

island of Sandwip, a part of the Noakhali district. Besides Baṅgālabāḍa, there is a geographical name which fragmentarily occurs as - ndradvīpa in the Madhyapāḍā (Bakharganj district, Bangladesh) inscription of Viśvarūpasena. Scholars have variously read this fragmentary name as Kandradvīpa, Indradvīpa, and Chandradvīpa. If the last reading is accepted, the modern Bakharganj district was once included in Chandradvīpa.

PUNḌRA

The tract of Puṇḍra or Puṇḍravardhana or Puṇḍravardhanabhukti was probably bounded by the river Karatoyā (Sadānirā of the Amarakosha) figuring in the Mahābhārata on the east,¹⁸ a large stream, probably Mahānandā, lying to the east of Kauśīkī on the west and the south eastern branch of the Gaṅgā (modern Padmā) on the south. That Puṇḍravardhana comprised portions of North Bengal has been established by the discovery of a fragmentary stone plaque at Mahāsthān in the Bogra district, Bangladesh; it refers to Puṇḍranagara (= Puṇḍranagara), the metropolis of Puṇḍravardhana, and thus proves the present Mahāsthān region as the nuclear areas of the territory, Puṇḍra (the people from whom the name of the tract is derived) or Puṇḍravardhana. Among the early reference to this region are those occurring in the Mahābhārata, the Kalpasūtra¹⁹, the Aśokāvadāna and the Life and the Records of the seventh century Chinese traveller Yuan Chwang. The last named writer visited Puṇḍravardhana and mentions it under the

18. Bhīshma-P., IX, 35; Vana-P., LXXXV.

19. Jacobi, Kalpasūtra, SBE., XII, p.288.

name Pun-na-fa-tan-na²⁰. The name Puṇḍravardhana as a bhukti (or administrative division) figures for the first time in an epigraphical record of the Gupta monarch, Kumāragupta I, dated 124 (= 443-44 A.D.) and then in other such records, of Kumāragupta I and his successors, the Pālas (Khālimpur plate of Dharampāla), the Śeṇas, the Chandras and the Devas.

As a bhukti it originally denoted the Rajshahi division of pre-partition days, but in the early mediaeval period (eleventh-thirteenth century) it embraced practically the whole of undivided Bengal except the Burdwan division.²¹

VARENDRA

With Puṇḍravardhana was inextricably connected Varendra or Varendrī. It was a part, maṇḍala (smaller administrative units) as it was called, of Puṇḍravardhana. The Deopārā inscription of Vijayasena (middle of the twelfth century), the Tarpaṇḍīghi and Mādihānagar grants of Lakshmaṇasena (twelfth century) and the Silimpur inscription of the Kāmarūpa king Jayapāla prove the inclusion of Varendra in Puṇḍravardhana. The Kāmauli plate of Vaidyadeva (? 1142 A.D.). The Tālcher Grant of Jayadatuṅgadeva all allude to Varendra. The Kavi-prasasti of the Rāmacharita of Sandhyākaranandī refers to Varendrī, which was then located between the Gaṅgā and the Karatoyā.

20. Beal, Records of the Western World, II, and Watters, On Travels of Yuan-Chwang, II, pp.184-185.

21. J.F. Fleet, op.cit., p.80

SUHMA

It is mentioned in the Mahābhāṣya (IV 2.52) and although appears several times in the Mahābhārata and Harivaṁśa its exact position is nowhere given. In the Raghuvāṁśa Suhma's placement after the sea-coasts, and before the Vaṅgas and within the streams of the Gaṅgā²² tends to show that the territory comprised some areas on the Bhāgīrathī lying to the west of Vaṅga and north of Tāmralipti including the modern districts of Burdwan, Hooghly, Nadia and a portion of 24-Parganas(N.). Some earlier literary reference indicate Tāmralipta as distinguished from Suhma, while a sixth-century work the Daśakumāracharita seems to show that both formed a single kingdom. Ywan-Chwang does not mention Suhma in his Records and Life and hence it appears that Suhma was probably included in Tāmralipta (Tan-mo-li-ti) or he did not visit that country. The Pavanadūta of Dhoyī (twelfth century) points to the Hooghly-Triveni-Saptagram sector of the Burdwan district as the heartland of Suhma in those days. Later Suhma lost its importance as a territorial designation and seemingly it merged in the term Rāḍha. This is indicated by Nīlakanṭha who equates Suhma with Rāḍha (Suhmaḥ - Rāḍhaḥ).

RĀḌHA

The name Rāḍha can be traced to a pretty old time. In the Āyārāṅgasutta²³, the oldest Jaina scripture, the land of Lāḍhas (Rāḍha) was a pathless country inhabited by rude folk whence

22. 'Anāmrānām samuddhaturstasmāt Sindhurayadiva/
Atmasamrakshita Suhmaivrittimaśritya vaitasin//' IX.35

23. I.8.3

Mahāvīra travelled. In the Dipavaṃśa (Chapter IX) and the Mahāvāṃśa, the Ceylonese Buddhist Chronicles of the fourth and fifth centuries, Ceylon (modern Sri-Lanka) is said to have been colonised by a certain Vijaya coming from Siṃhapura in Lāla, most probably Rāḍha. Thus these references reveal the existence of a country called Rāḍha at least in the fifth century B.C., if not earlier. Rāḍha finds mention in several records, literary as well as epigraphical and in later times it was divided into two sectors—Uttara and Dakshīna. The Tirumalai inscription of Rājendra Chōla, for instance, refers to Uttiralāḍham (Uttara Rāḍhā) and the Gāonri plates of Vākpati Muñja (c.981 A.D.) mentions Dakshīna-Rāḍha. The river Dāmodar most probably served as the boundary of these two divisions. Roughly, the region lying to the west of the Bhāgīrathī, corresponding to the present day Burdwan division, represents Rāḍha of history and tradition.

TĀMRALIPTA (LIPTI) OR DĀMALIPTA

The territory of Tāmralipta, appearing under several nomenclatures in old records²⁴ seems to have initially formed a part Suhma or Vaṅga, as indicated by the Jaina Pannavanā. In the digvijaya section of the Sabhāparvan of the Mahābhārata, however, Tāmralipta appears as a separate ethno-geographical entity. Ptolemy

24. (i) Tāmralipta - Mbh., Adi-P.c. LXXXVI, 13 ; Sabha-P, 24, L11, 18 Atharva-pariśiṣṭā LVI, 4. cf. Parāśara, I.C., Utpala's Commentary on Bṛihat-Saṃhitā and Samāsa-Saṃhitā under XIV, 29-31.
- (ii) Tāmraliptaka - Mbh., Bhīṣma-P, IX, 57, Droṇa-P, XXII, 2, 21. HV, Bhaviṣya-P, XLVI, 55, cf. Bharata's Nāṭyaśāstra XIII, 34, Vāyu - P. (Anandsrama series), XLV, 123, p. 139, Mārkaṇḍeya-P. (Bib. Ind. trans), pp. 329, 330, BS, XIV, 7.
- (iii) Tāmralipti, BS, XIV.

alluded to a people called Tamalities, presumably the people of Tāmralipta. The Records and the Life of Ywan Chwang indicates Tan-mo-lih-ti (Tāmralipti) not as a large territory, where it has been described as 'the southern district of Eastern India'. The core of the territory lay in the modern Midnapore district which is modern Tamluk.

RIVER SYSTEM

Intersected by a tangled network of rivers and channels Bengal has always been a well-defined linguistic and cultural unit. With their numerous branches and tributaries, the Gaṅgā and the Brahmaputra have always been a great factor in shaping the destiny of Bengal. They are also held responsible for the development of flourishing cities and the booming trade centres.

The Gaṅgā, the most important of the rivers, enters Bengal at Rajmahal hills and flowing further north and east shifts towards the south and west. About 41 km. to the south of ancient Gauḍa the Gaṅgā branches off in two streams - Bhāgīrathī (the western most channel with the lower portion known as Hooghly, running almost due south) and Padmā (the present principal channel flowing in a south-easterly direction). In ancient times the course of the lower Gaṅgā was different. At Triveṇī (near Hooghly) it branched off into three streams - (i) Sarasvatī flowing south-west part (ii) the Yamunā flowing south-east and (iii) a middle branch or the Bhāgīrathī proper flowing south. Above Goalundo after the confluence with Yamunā, the Gaṅgā is invariably called the Padmā.

The Brahmaputra rolls down the Yamunā and meets the Padmā near Goalundo. But its old course was very different: The two rivers, Surmā and the Kuśiyarā of Assam, unite together and the chief part of the Meghnā is formed.

The plain of North Bengal is watered by numerous rivers of which a few deserve special mention. The river Tistā or Trisrotā with its three channels viz. the Karatoyā to the east, the Purnarbhavā to the west, and the Ātreī in the centre is very important. Of these the Karatoyā was a large and sacred river of the past. The Karatoyāmāhātmya no doubt testifies to its sanctity. On its bank stood the city of Puṇḍravardhana. This sacred river still flows by the rivers of the ancient city of Mahāsthāngarh in the Bogra district.

Thus these rivers helped the land of Bengal to form perhaps the most complete and easy system of navigation and provided remarkable facilities for communication. But the quick and frequent change in these river courses ruined many old places like Tāmraliptī and Saptagrāma, washed these booming trade centres and to a large extent made them unhygienic and inaccessible. The shifting of the beds of the river Kosī destroyed the city of Gauḍa. Not only that, the physical aspect of Bengal to a great extent was changed by the frequent shiftings of silt in the deltaic region between the Bhāgīrathī and the Padmā.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Inadequate data make the early history of Bengal comparatively obscure. Notable among them are the materials revealed by the archaeological discoveries during the sixties in certain parts of Bengal as early as the first millennium B.C.

The discoveries at Pāṇḍu Rājār Ḍhibi (B.C. 1012 ± 120) in the river valley of Ajay (Burdwan district) and in several other sites on the Ajay, Kunur and Kopāi rivers show that Bengal had commercial relations with Crete and other countries of the Mediterranean world. This excavation revealed the existence of a Copper Age Civilisation in Eastern India bearing close relation with chalcolithic culture of Central India and Rajasthan.²⁵

In the fourth century B.C. Bengal witnessed a gradual expansion of Aryan culture and the fragmentary stone plaque inscription from Mahāsthāngarh, Bogra district, Bangladesh shows that Puṇḍravardhana or North Bengal, either wholly or partially was included in the empire of the Mauryas. Whether it was brought under Maurya sway during the reign of Chandragupta Maurya is not definitely known.

The available information regarding the period from the fall of the Mauryas to the rise of the Guptas is not elaborate. But the

25. Dasgupta, P.C., The Excavations at Pāṇḍu-Rājār Ḍhibi, Calcutta, 1964, p.22.

accounts of the Graeco-Roman writers indicate that Bengal belonged to the political and socio-economic mainstream of Northern India. Though many Kushāṇa coins have been unearthed both from north and south Bengal evidence is not enough and positive to suggest any Kushāṇa supremacy over these areas. The combined evidence of the Allāhābād pillar inscription of Samudra Gupta and the Meherāulī pillar inscription of certain Chandra (generally identified with Chandra Gupta II), indicate that in the beginning of the fourth century A.D. Bengal was parcelled out into a number of states like Samataṭa, Dāvaka and Vaṅga. However, under the Imperial Guptas the whole of Bengal ultimately came under one sceptre.

The early home of the Imperial Guptas has been sought to be located in Bengal, somewhere in the Murshidabad²⁶ or in the Maldah²⁷ districts on the strength of a relatively late Chinese tradition. But either of these presumptions does not merit final acceptance for want of positive and corroborative evidences. Records and evidences show that with the exception of Samataṭa, the rest of Bengal was incorporated in the Gupta empire by the time of Samudra Gupta. But it is difficult to decide whether Bengal, wholly or partially was subjugated by Samudra Gupta or his father Chandra Gupta II. Some epigraphical records of Kumāra Gupta I indicate that Puṅḍravardhanabhukti²⁸ roughly corresponding the Rājshahi division of

26. Ganguly, D.C. in IHQ, XIV, pp.532-535.

27. Chattopadhyay, S. in Early History of Northern India, Calcutta, 1958, p. 139.

28. Majumdar, R.C., op.cit., p.40.

pre-partition days formed an important administrative division of the Gupta empire. The Dāmodarpur copper-plate of Budha Gupta (c.477-500 A.D.) also points at the same conclusion. Samatāṭa, the semi-independent feudatory state²⁹ under Samudra Gupta, was incorporated in the Gupta empire in the year 507-8 A.D. as the Gunaighar Copper plate (dated GE 186) reveals Vainya Gupta as a member of the Imperial Gupta family and a ruler of independent status.

During the period of decline of the Imperial Guptas emerged a notable personality of prowess and dynamism named Yaśodharman whose Mandāsor inscription of A.D. 530-31 claims his extension of conquests as far as the Lauhitya or modern Brahmaputra, presumably including many parts of Bengal.

The political disintegration of Northern India following the down fall of the Imperial Guptas around 550 A.D. gave birth to a number of independent states like Vaṅga and Gauḍa. The first of them comprised Samatāṭa as well and it saw its heydays during the reigns of three powerful rulers viz. Gopachandra, Dharmāditya and Samāchāradeva. All of them assumed the title of Mahārājādhirāja which spanned the years from 525 to 575 A.D. The exact political status of Gauḍa is not yet known, but in the early seventh century witnessed its first great king in Śaśāṅka, who brought both the northern and western sectors of Bengal under its sway. It was Śaśāṅka who not only gave Bengal a political unity and an era of peace and

29. Ibid.

prosperity, but also put his kingdom on the political map of Northern India by defeating the Maukharī rulers of Kanauj and extending his authority as far as Chilka lake in Orissa and adding areas of Magadha to his dominions. But after his death Gauḍa sometime in the fourth decade of seventh century passed in the hands of Bhāskaravarman, the hostile king of Kanauj. A certain Mānavadeva (probably Śaśāṅka's son) tried to re-establish his hold but Jayanāga who ruled over Birbhum and Murshidabad districts³⁰ seems to have taken the reins of power.

The period 650-750 A.D., was one of political anarchy and confusion and peace was restored with the establishment of Pāla rule by a certain Gopāla. Around 750 A.D. under Gopāla's son and successor here for the first time the fortune of a single dynasty was noticed. Dharmapāla(c. 755-810A.D.) was the greatest ruler of the dynasty and although as an able militarist he spread his sway over many territories, he did not annex them to his dominions, and left them undisturbed as long as they acknowledged his supremacy and paid homage. Bengal and Bihar only remained the nucleus of his empire. Before his death he left for his son, Devapāla (c.810-850 A.D.) a strongly built and an extensive empire. His long reign witnessed a series of military conquests against Prāgjyotisha Utkala, Hūṇa, Gurjara and Drāviḍa. But unfortunately this glory failed to last long and the period extending from his death (c.850) to the beginning A.D. of the reign of Rāmapāla marked a decline in political power and prestige. With his strenuous efforts Mahīpāla I(c.988-1038) restored the A.D.

30. Vappaghoshavata. inscription : see EL, XVIII, pp.60 ff; and Basak, R.G., History of Northern India, Sambodhi edition, May 1967, Calcutta, pp.164-165

fallen fortunes of his family, first by recovering the paternal dominions (pitrya rājya) and then by extending his sway over the neighbouring territories. His death was again followed by an era of militaristic inactivity and comparative decline in political power. The last great ruler of the house was Rāmapāla (1077-1120 A.D.), indeed, the last flicker of the lamp before its final extinction. Before his accession to the throne he had to face enormous troubles, but his patience, tenacity and political wisdom helped him to surmount them shortly. With the help of his allies he quelled the refractory Kaivarta chieftain, Bhīma, set his house in order and thereafter brought some conquests.

After the death of Rāmapāla the distinguished dynasty of ancient Bengal petered out. Along with internal disruption the severest blow to the Pāla power came from two Karnatic dynasties, the Senas and the house of Nānyadeva, and Bengal ultimately came under the grip of the Senas. Founded by a Sāmantasena, from Karnataka, the ruling dynasty of the Senas had its first footing in the Rāḍha region. But it came into the limelight as a royal power during the reign of his grandson Vijayasena, (c.1096-1157 A.D.) son of Hemantasena. He inaugurated a period of military activity which transformed a small territory into an empire of considerable dimension comprising Bihar in the west and Vikramapura in the east. It restored peace and prosperity in Bengal which impressed the whole populace.

Vallālasena (c. 1159-1179 A.D.) the successor of Vijayasena had some positive military conquests. Tradition has it, that he conquered Magadha and Mithilā and his reign was chiefly marked by peaceful pursuits. He was succeeded by his son, Lakshmaṇasena (1179-1206) who was no less distinguished in military than in peaceful pursuits. His claims to military conquests in different directions are found in his epigraphical records. About 1202 A.D. Bengal under Lakshmaṇasena was invaded by Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khilji, a Turkish soldier of fortune, who came in the encourage of Muhammad Ghori. He captured Nadiyā in desolation and removed his capital to Lakhnawati. No reference is made to any further struggle with the Senas. The Sena power seems to have been weakened by Muslim invaders and the rebellious feudal chiefs, like Ḍommaṇapāla in the Khāḍī district (near Diamond Harbour) rose to power sometime before 1196 A.D. Henceforth, the successors of Lakshmaṇasena restricted themselves to East Bengal with Vikramapura as their seat of power and the last Sena king of note is Viśvarūpasena.³¹

31. Generally Viśvarūpasena and Keśavasena are taken to be the successors of Lakshmanasena. D.C.Sircar, however, doubts in the existence of Keśavasena of the Edilpur copper-plate. See his 'Pāla-sena yuger Vamsānucharita', 1982, p.135.

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