The protagonists of the theory of the Asiatic mode of production emphasize upon the fact that the society in India was mainly rural in character, being based upon a self-sufficient agrarian economy backed by small industries and handicrafts. The self-sufficient character of the village economy, according to them, reduced the necessity of the system of exchange and circulation of money. The rural society was, therefore, disconnected with the outer world, not to speak of the urban settlements that were mainly based upon manufacturing industries. It has been further added that the villages, being inhabited by tax-paying peasants, had no direct relation with the State-authority and that the position of the cultivators was reduced to that of bonded labourers tied down to the soil under the obligation of providing levies of compulsory labour and produces to the State. It appears, therefore, that the entire society was divided into two classes, namely, the ruling authority and the vast mass of peasantry.

The generalisations made by the theorists with regard to the societies in pre-colonial India, needless to say, require a fresh scrutiny in the light of the data furnished by the contemporary records, the epigraphs. Whereas the above theory has been made applicable to whole India over a long period of time, we may attempt to examine it in the context of Eastern India, covering mainly Bengal and Bihar during the period from the 4th century B.C. to the 13th century A.D.

The available epigraphic records indicate that there were two types of society, simultaneously existent, namely, the rural society and the urban society. Our study would show that the total character of the society in ancient Bengal can be comprehended by taking an integrated view of the rural and urban societies.

Rural Society:

The rural society was not of the same character in all villages. Villages might be broadly divided into two categories, viz., rent-free donated villages and undonated rent-paying villages. Copperplate grants show that from the Gupta period onwards, plots of land or even a cluster
of villages were granted to the priestly class, either to the Brahmins or to the Buddhist monks, to the temples or monasteries. These were all perpetual endowments accorded by the State.

Epigraphic data:

The Dāmodarpur Copper-plates² of the Gupta period record purchase of one or two kulyavāpas of land by the Brahmins for their own religious purposes, or, by some individuals who donated the purchased land to the members of the priestly class and to the religious institutions like temples. The Baigrām C.P.³ records land-donation to the temple of Govindasvāmin by private donors in Baigrām. The Pāhārpur C.P. Inscr.⁴ (159 G.E.) records donation of one kulyavāpa and four Droṇavāpas of land in the villages of Vaṭagohāli, Prṣṭhamapottaka, Gosātapūnja and Nitvagohāli for the worship of Jaina monk Acārya Guhanand in the Vihāra. Although these are all sale-deeds, the transaction

2. CBI., PP. 45,47.
3. Ibid., P. 50.
4. Ibid., P. 54, EI. XX, P. 61ff.
is made, according to the rule of Akṣayanīvī, by which the donees were entitled to enjoy the revenue of the gift-land in perpetuity without the right of destroying or alienating it. In some land-grants the exemption from revenue is expressly mentioned by the term samudayavāhy-ādyastambakhila-kṣetraṇāmākicīcitrīkarānām. The Guṇaighar C.P. Inscr. of Vainyagupta (G.E. 188) records eleven pāṭakas of land donated as an agrahāra to the Buddhist monasteries in honour of Māhāyānīka preceptor Śāntideva in Udakagrāma.

The Post-Gupta land-grants refer to Akṣayanīvī, but not in all cases. For example, the Vappaghosavātā C.P. Grant of Jayanāga records the donation as per established rule of Akṣayanīvī. It records the grant of village Vappaghosavātā to a Brahmin of Kāśyapa gotra by Sāmanta Nārāyaṇabhadra. Three Copper-plate grants found at Faridpur, two of the time of king Dharmaditya and one belonging to that of king Gopacandra, record land-donations

7. EI. XVIII, P. 60ff.
to the Brahmins in the village of Dhruvilāti and nearer villages. These plots of land are said to have been sold to the donor by the government according to the rule of granting Copper-plate charters (Tāmrapatṭadharmanā, Faridpur C.P.) which entitle the donee to the perpetual enjoyment of the rent-free holding. The Ghugrāathi C.P. of Samācāradeva records endowment of the whole of the village Vyāghracoraka minus three kulyavāpas, which had already been donated to someone else, to Brāhmaṇa Suprati-kasvāmin for the performance of bali, caṇu and satra rites. The Mallasārul C.P. Grant of King Vijayasena (6th century A.D.) donates 8 kulyavāpas of land in the village of Vetragartā in the Vakkatakavīthī of Vardhamānabhukti to Brāhmaṇa Vatsasvāmin on behalf of king Vijayasena for the daily performance of five sacrifices (Pañcamahāyaj-ñapravartanāyā). A vast tract of forest land lying in Suvvuṅgaviśaya in the easternmost region in Eastern Bengal had been donated to more than two hundred Brahmins for the worship of the god Anantanārāyaṇa by the land-šharer of Lokanātha (c. 7th-9th century A.D.) found in Tippera district. Separate portions of land have been allotted to

9. EI. XVII, P. 74ff.
these learned Brahmins (Caturvidyā-Brahmanānām). The Kailān C.P. Insr.\textsuperscript{12} of Śrīdhāraṇārāta (6th century A.D.) of Samatāṭa records gift of several pāṭakas of land to a number of learned Brāhmaṇas for the performance of their pañcamahāyajña in the viṣaya of Guptināṭana and Paṭalāyikā, under the jurisdiction of the Kumārāmātya of Devaparvata. The grant was made by the king Śrīdhāraṇārāta at the request of Mahāsāndhivigrahika (Minister of Peace and War) Jayanātha.

Villages were donated to the Vedic Brahmins by the feudatories of Śaśāṅka in Daṇḍabhukti region. The Midnāpore C.P. inscriptions\textsuperscript{13} of the time of Śaśāṅka record the donation of the village Mahākumbhārapadraka and forty dronās of land in the village Ketakapadrika respectively to the Brahmins of different Vedic branches. The Nidhānpur C.P.\textsuperscript{14} of Bhāskaravarman records the renewal of the endowment of Mayūrasālmala agrahāra in Candrapurī viṣaya by king Bhāskaravarman. The grant was already made by the king's great great-grandfather Bhutiavarman to more than two hundred Brahmins by a charter which was later destroyed.

\textsuperscript{12} SI. Vol. II, PP. 36-40.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., PP. 24-27.
\textsuperscript{14} CPS. P. 15.
by fire. The Ashrafpur C.P.s\textsuperscript{15} of Devakhaḍga record grant of nine pāṭakas and ten dronavāpas and six pāṭakas exceeded by ten dronavāpas of land to the Buddhist monasteries.

A large number of land-grant charters of the Pāla period record land-donations to the priestly class and religious institutions in different parts of Bengal. The Khalimpur C.P.\textsuperscript{16} of Dharmapāla (8th century A.D.) records grant of four villages namely, Krauṇcaśvabhra, Mādhāśālmalī, Pālitaka and Gopippalī in Vyāgraratatīmaṇḍala of Pundravardhanabhukti to the temple of Nannanārayana for the deity’s worship and maintenance by a Lāta Brāhmana and other attendants. The Bhāturiya Grant\textsuperscript{17} of Rājyapāla (10th century A.D.) donates the village Madhusrava in favour of god Vṛṣabhadvaja and some Brahmans on behalf of king Rājyapāla. The Jājilpāḍā C.P.\textsuperscript{18} of the reign of Gopāla II (10th century A.D.) records the gift of two villages namely Kosthagrha and Mahārājapallika in Anandapura agrahāra in Pundravardhanabhukti to Brāhmaṇa Śrīdharasārman who used to perform Vedic rites. The Belwā C.P. of Mahīpāla I

\textsuperscript{15} MASB. I, P. 85ff.
\textsuperscript{16} CBI., PP. 99-100.
\textsuperscript{17} EI. XXXIII; P. 150ff.
\textsuperscript{18} JAS. XVII, P. 137ff.
(10th century A.D.) records land-donations in three localities namely, Osinna Kaivarta-vṛtti, Nandisvāmin and Gaṇesvara, the lands costing two hundred and ten, four hundred and ninety and one hundred and fifty one purāṇas respectively in favour of a Brahmin named Jīvadhara-devaśārman. The Bāngāḍa C.P. Grant of Mahīpāla I records the gift of village Kurāṭa pallikā in Kāṭivarsa visāya with the exception of the part known as Cūta-pallikā to Brāhmaṇa Kṛṣṇāditya Śārman.

The Maināmati plates of Ladahacandra and Govindacandra (11th century A.D.) record grant of a few villages in Samatā-ṁandala of Puṇḍravardhanabhukti to the Brahmīns. The plate no. 1 records gift of the villages Campāvani, Bappasimhavoraka and Mahādeva in Paṭṭikera-visāya within Samatā-ṁandala. Plate no. 2 records the gift of the village Suravoraka in Peranāṭana visāya in Samatā-ṁandala. Plate no. 3 of Govindacandra records endowment of the village Sahara-talāka in the same maṇḍala as stated above.

20. EDEP., PP. 73, 76, 80.
The Irdā C.P.21 of Nayapāla (11th century A.D.) grants the village of Brhaccāttimā in Daṇḍabhuktimandāla of Vardhamānabhuñkti. A few villages were granted in Varendra region of Paundravardhanabhuñkti to the Brāhmaṇa donees during this period by the Pālas and their feudatories. The Belwā C.P. and Āmgāchi C.P.22 of Vīghrahapāla III (11th century A.D.) grant the villages of Lovanikāma in Phānita viṣaya and Viṣamapura and Daṇḍatrahesvāra in Brāhmaṇigrāmamandāla of Pundravardhanabhuñkti respectively. The Ramganj C.P.23 of Īśvaraghoṣa (11th century A.D.) records the grant of village Digaghāsodikā in Piyollamandāla. The Māhāhali Grant24 of Madanapāla (12th century) records the gift of the village Kośthaṅgiri attached to Halāvarttamandāla in the same viṣaya of Paundravardhanabhukti.

The land-grant charters of the Varman rulers record grant of villages in Eastern Bengal. The Sāmantasāra plate25 of Harivarman (12th century A.D.) refers to the gift of the village of Varaparvata attached to Paṇcaśāsamaṇḍala of Paundravardhanabhukti. The Belāva C.P.26 of

21. EI. XXII, P. 150ff.
23. CBI., P. 362.
24. Ibid., P. 215.
25. EI. XXX, P. 255ff.
26. Ibid., P. 14ff, EI. XII, P. 37ff.
Bhojavarmadeva records the grant of the village of Upyalika attached to Kauśāmbī Astagacchakhandala in Adhapattamamandala of Paundravardhanabhukti. The villages seem to have been donated in that part of Paundravardhanabhukti that lay within the territorial jurisdiction of the Varmans ruling in East Bengal.

The practice of land-donation followed in the time of the Pālas, Candras and Varmans went on a much wider scale during the Sena period throughout Bengal. The Barrackpore Grant of Vijayasena (12th century A.D.) records the grant of village Bhaṭṭavaḍā attached to Khāḍiśaya of Paundravardhanabhukti. Khāḍiśaya is located in Diamond Harbour subdivision in the District 24 Parganas, that is, in the southern part of Bengal and must have been included in the Samataṭa region, because the granted land is said to have been measured according to the standard prevalent in Samataṭa. The Naihaṭi C.P. of Vallālasena mentions the village Vālaḥiṭṭā as gifted village attached to Svalpadaksināvīthī in Uttara-Rādhamandala of Vardhamānabhukti. The

27. IB., P. 57ff.; EI. XV, P. 278ff.
28. Ibid., PP. 68, 80.
Govindapur C.P.\(^{29}\) and Śaktipur C.P.\(^{30}\) of Laksmanaśena (12th century A.D.) record land-grants to the Brāhmaṇa in the Rādha-region. The first one records the gift of the village Viddāraśasana attached to Vetaddacaturaka in Paścima-Khaṭıkā in Vardhamanabhukti. The Tarpandighi\(^{31}\) and Mādhainagar\(^{32}\) copper plate grants of Laksmanaśena record land-donation in Varendri. The first one mentions the village of Velahisti in Varendri of Paundravardhanabhukti as an endowment to a Brāhmaṇa donee. The second land-charter records the gift of Dāpaniyāpāṭaka in Varendri to another Brahmana donee. The Sunderban C.P.\(^{33}\) of Laksmanaśena records grant of a plot of land to Śāntyāgārika in the village of Maṇḍalagrāma along with a homestead, measuring three Bhūdronas, one Khāḍika, twenty-three Unmānas and two and a half Kākinīs yielding an annual income of fifty Purāṇas, lying within the jurisdiction of Kāntallapura-Caturaka, belonging to Khāḍī-māndala of Paundravardhama-bhukti. The Ānuliś C.P.\(^{34}\) of the same king records the donation of the village of Matharāndiya yielding one hundred Kapardakapurāṇas and being attached to Vyāghratati-mandala of Paundravardhanabhukti. The Rājabādi C.P.\(^{35}\) of

\(^{29}\) CBI., P. 274.
\(^{30}\) EI. XXI, P. 211ff.
\(^{31}\) CBI., P. 293; EI. XII, P. 6ff.
\(^{32}\) Ibid., P. 281; JASB. (1909), P. 467ff.
\(^{33}\) IB., P. 169ff.
\(^{34}\) Ibid., 81ff.
\(^{35}\) Ibid., 181ff.
Lakṣmaṇasena refers to the villages of Mādisāhāna and Vasumandana in Pundravardhanabhukti. According to N.K. Bhattashali, the donated lands lie in the locality on the southern bank of the Bānār River. The Calcutta Sāhitya Parishat C.P. of Viśvarūpasena (12th century A.D.) records grant of eleven plots of land in six villages to a Brāhmaṇa named ĀvallikamŚrīhalāyūdhā. These villages are (1) Rāmasiddhipāṭaka in the Nāvyya region of Vaṅga lying in Paundravardhanabhukti, (2) Vinayatilaka in the same region, (3) Ajikulāpāṭaka in Nāvasamgraha-caturaka in Madhukṣīrakavṛttī, (4) Deulahastī attached to Lāsuhandacaturaka in the Vikramapura division, (5) Ghāgharakāṭṭi-pāṭaka attached to Urācaturaka in K (?) Andradvīpa and (6) Paṭilādivika in the same place. The Madanapādā C.P. of the same king records the grant of the village Piṅjokāsthi by the king in the Vikramapura division of Vaṅga in Paundravardhanabhukti to Brāhmaṇa Śrī Viśvarūpa-devaśarman. The Edilpur C.P. of Keśavasena informs us

36. JRASBL. VIII (1942), PP. 7-17.
37. I.B., P. 140ff; IHQ. II, P. 77ff.;
38. EI. XXXIII, P. 315ff.; IB., P. 132ff.
of the gift of the village Tālapaḍāpāṭaka by king Kesavasena in the same area as immediately stated before to Brāhmaṇa Śrī Isvaradevaśarman.

The policy of the Sena rulers was followed by the rulers of other independent kingdoms. The Maināmati C.P. 40 of Rāṇavaṅkamalla of Harikāladeva (13th century A.D.) records land-donation of twenty dronas in the village of Vejakhaṇḍa in the city of Paṭṭikera in Tippera district. The Mehār C.P. 41 of Dāmodaradeva records the grant of homestead land yielding twenty-five Purāṇas in the village of Mehār in Vāyisagrāma-khaṇḍalā attached to Paraḷāyi viṣaya of Samatā-ta-maṇḍala in Pundravardhanabhukti to a number of Brāhmaṇas of different gotras. The Sobhārāmpur C.P. 42 of the same king notifies the grant of three villages in Chātiha-rakhaṇḍala attached to Miḍilliviṣaya in Samatā-ta-maṇḍala of Paundravardhanabhukti.

40. IHQ. IX, P. 286ff.
41. EI. XXVII, P. 187ff.
42. EI. XXX, P. 188.
Rent-free holdings:

A survey of the records would thus show that about thirty eight villages were donated to the priestly class and to those in charge of religious institutions during the Post-Gupta period and afterwards. Besides, numerous plots of land, lying in different villages, were also donated. The plots of donated land gradually increased in size with the expansion of the Brāhmaṇical settlement in Bengal. Donations were made as perpetual endowment ।Acandrārka-kṣiti-samakālām yāvat। 43 and, sometimes, without the right of alienation ।Aṃśayānśivīdharmena। 44 These were rent-free holdings, according to the principle of bhūmicchidra ।bhūmicchidranyayena। 45 The donees were also exempted from a number of taxes which a village had to pay ordinarily to the State ।sadasāpacārāḥ aṁścitprābhayāḥ pariḥrtaśarvāpida। Khalimpur C.P. of Dharmapāla। 46 On the other hand, they were empowered with the right to collect fines from the villagers committing offences ।sadasāparādhaḥ, Bāṅgaṭa C.P. of Mahīpāla। 47

43. CBI., P. 168.
44. Ibid., P. 55.
45. Ibid., P. 119.
and were entitled to the enjoyment of revenue exacted from the villagers living in their jurisdiction. The grantees were the land-lords to whom the tillers of the soil (karṣaka) were asked to pay the rent they formerly used to pay to the king. \[ \text{prativāsibhiḥ kṣetra karaiścā-} \]
\[ \text{jñāravaṇavidheya bhūtvā samucita-kara-piṇḍakādisarva-} \]
\[ \text{pratyōya-nayaḥ kārya iti, Khalimpur C.P. of Dharmapāla}]\]

The rural society in agrahāras was thus divided into two main classes, namely, land-owners and cultivators. The village-population comprised, according to the Pāla epigraphs, Brahmins and non-Brahmins stratified as Mahattamas (big land-owners), Kūṭumbins (house holders) and the lower castes like Medas, Andhras and Cāndālas, who seem to have been included in the class known as Kṣetra karas (cultivators).

\[ \text{Prativāsino Brāhmaṇottaramśca mahottamottama-} \]
\[ \text{Kūṭumbi-puroga-medāndhra-cāndālaparyantān, Bāngada C.P. of Mahāpāla I}]\]

The people belonging to non-Brahmin castes used to belong to various occupational castes like Kāraṇa.

\[ \text{Sakaraṇān prativāsinah, Khalimpur C.P. of Dharmapāla}]\]

Although specific mention of other occupations is to be hardly found out in the epigraphs, the existence of blacksmiths (Karmakāras), potters (Kumbhakāras), oil men (Tailikas), weavers (Tantuvaśyas), cobblers (Carmakāras), washermen (Rajakas), barbers (Nāpitas) may be derived from their services, indirectly or incidentally referred to in the records.
The Brahmins enjoyed the most prestigious status in the village-society. They guided the people in observing sacraments and in performing various rites and rituals. Next to the Brahmins in social hierarchy were Mahattama (village-elders), Mahāmahottama and Kuṭumbin (householder) representing different grades of land-owning class. It appears from the Kalāikuri C.P. 46 and Jagdishpur C.P. 47 of the Gupta period and Faridpur copper-plates 48 of Dharmāditya and Gopacandra that Vīthī-mahattara and Viṣaya-mahattara discharged some administrative functions when called for by the State. It is reasonable to hold that the Mahattaras in a village also played an important part in village administration. The lowest stratum of the village-society was formed by cultivators and artisans who catered to the daily needs of the villagers. The Kṣetrakaras included sharecroppers and the hired labourers. The Medas, Andhras and Caṇḍālas who were regarded as outcastes (Antyajas), living on degraded occupation, generally discharged menial services to the village-society, living on the outskirts of the village. They seem to have had included the 'hired labourer'-group within the Kṣetrakara class. But these

47. EDEP., PP. 61-63.
cultivators were not tied down to the soil, as it has been pointed out by the theorists of the Asiatic mode of production. In spite of their remarkably reduced position in the society, they seem to have enjoyed a legal position equal to that of freemen in the society, as they were invited to witness the land-transactions. It is implied that in case of disputes over boundaries of lands, their witness at the law-court, if necessary, was attached with no less importance. The landed aristocracy comprising different grades in the social scale, based upon the quantum of landed property owned by each of them, the peasantry comprising land-owning cultivators, share-croppers and hired labourers, the artisan class consisting of different occupational castes and the outcastes discharging the menial services formed a homogeneous unit of the rural society. The analysis of the class-stratification of the rural society thus militates against the conception of the class-society comprising only the ruling class and the working class, as suggested by the upholders of the theory of the changeless village-society in pre-colonial India.

Village Administration:

The villages donated to the Brahmins seem to have been administered by them, as they are known to have enjoyed
administrative powers and privileges. Villages other than those granted were ruled by Grāmika or Grāmapati standing for an agency of the government. The revenue collected from the villages went to the State-treasury in the form of taxes both in cash and in kind. The kinds of taxes known from the records were bhāga - bhoga - kara (tax in grains and periodical offerings), hiraṅya (tax in cash) and sarvapāda (all forms of forced labour) from which the donated villages were exempted. The responsibility of the Grāmika was to assist the Revenue administration in the collection of taxes. The village-headman used to carry on the administration in a village with the assistance of Elders (Mahattaras) and householders (Kuṭumbins) who formed the Village-council (Aṣṭakulādhikaraṇa), later known as Grāmasabhā. Defence and revenue-collection were the two main functions for which the headman was usually entitled to enjoy a piece of land. In the Dāmodarpur C.P. of the time of Budhagupta, Patraḍāsa is mentioned as the Record-keeper (Pustapāla) in the village Palāśavṛṇdaka. This Record-keeper appears to have been the direct state-representative in a village.

49. Ibid. P. 325.
As regards agricultural production, forest-products and even arts and crafts, some villages developed specialisation on account of the ecology and resources available. Obviously, an interdependence of the villages cannot be ruled out. Further, the towns and cities could not grow up without the regular supply of the surplus production of commodities from the villages. It would be, therefore, unreasonable to hold that the village-society enjoyed self-sufficiency and remained cut off from the world outside.

The theory of Asiatic mode of production, however, lays emphasis upon the self-sufficient economy of the village and low level of exchange system. But what we can glean from the records at our disposal seem to suggest that exchange of commodities between the villages through common markets was quite known in those days. Epigraphic references to Hatta, Hattika\textsuperscript{50} (market places) and Naudan-da\textsuperscript{\textsuperscript{51}} (ports), no doubt, indicate trade and commercial activities implying a system of exchange through a medium, or, sometimes, by barter.

\textsuperscript{50} CBI., PP. 48, 100.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., PP. 80, 67.
Urban society:

From indigenous literary sources, foreign accounts and epigraphic records, we come to know that since early times, towns and cities had grown up in different parts of Bengal as administrative head-quarters, centres of trade and commerce, centres of education and culture and places of pilgrimage.

Both literary and epigraphic records of Bengal refer to different types of towns and cities, viz. pattana (a port or a town situated either on the bank or confluence of rivers), Nigama (a market-town), Vihāra (monastery or University-town), Jayaskandhāvāra (Military camp or head-quarters), Adhikaraṇa (administrative head-quarters) belonging to Viṭhī, Viṣaya, Maṇḍala and Bhukti (administrative units from the sub-divisional to the provincial level). Towns and cities like Pundranagara, Puṣkaraṇa, Koṭivarṣa, Pañcanagara, Vardhamāna, Navyāvakāśikā, Karṇasuvāra, Tāmralipti, Rohitagiri, Rāmāvati, Priyaṅgu, Paṭṭikera, Vijayapura, Simhapura and Suvarṇagrama figure as prominent centres of political importance. As it is known from the Periplus of the Erythraean Sea, in the early centuries of the Christian era, Gāṅge was the most flourishing port.
at the confluence of the Bhāgīrathī and the sea.  

The earliest city known from epigraphic records is Pundranagara which, according to the Mahāsthān Fragmentary Stone Inscr., was the administrative head-quarters under the Maurya rule in Northern Bengal. The city is located at Mahasthangarh, the findspot of the inscription. In the Karatoẏāmāhātmya, Mahāsthāna has been referred to as sacred Pundraksetra or Pundranagara. From the Gupta period onwards, Pundranagara was the administrative head-quarters in the province Pundravardhanabhukti. In the account of Hiuen Tsang and the Rāmacarita, mention has been made of this flourishing town having much commercial importance. The Rāmacarita refers to rows of selling-centres in the city.

The Susunīā Inscr. of Candravarman mentions Puṣkaraṇa as the administrative head-quarters of King Candravarman. It is located at Pokhrana, twenty-five miles

53. CBI., P. 39; EI. XXI, P. 85ff.
54. BI., P. 359.
55. Ibid., PP. 359-60.
56. CBI., PP. 40-41.
north east of Susuniā, on the south bank of the river Damodara. The Damodarpur copper-plates of the Gupta period refer to an important administrative unit named Koṭivarṣaṇiṣṭa in Paunḍravardhanabhukti, of which Koṭivarṣa was the administrative centre. According to Hemacandra’s Abhidhanacintāmaṇi and Puruṣottama’s Trikāṇḍaśeṣa, Devīkoṭa, Bānpur, Umāvana, Sonitapur etc, were various names of Koṭivarṣa. The town Koṭivarṣa which is said to have been situated on the bank of the river Punarbhava is identified with Bāngarh in the Dinajpur district. The vast ruins spreading over Bāngarh and adjoining villages yield relics of a prosperous urban settlement. The Rāmacarita gives a picturesque description of numerous temples at Koṭivarṣa which were attended upon by a number of worshippers, e.g. Varendri which was the birth place of Brāhmaṇa families, which flourished on account of its town of Skandanagara, and as such was held in high esteem and which contained in it the city of Sonitapura crowded by the images of gods, installed in temples, which looked quite gay with lotuses of very large sizes. \[\text{Brahmakulodbhavaṃ Skandana-gareṇa mūrcchitāmitā-pacitim | Tairatigurūtpalāvāsairasvapnair-bharita - Šonitapuraṇa} \] 59

57. HAB., P. 39.

58. Amitabha Bhattacharya, Historical Geography of Ancient and Early Mediaeval Bengal, Calcutta, 1977, P. 73.

59. RC. III. 9.
Pañcanagarī was, according to the Baigrām C.P. of the Gupta year 128 (=448 A.D.), an administrative head-quarters of the district of Pañcanagarī in Paundravardhanabhukti. The town flourished during the Gupta rule in Bengal and maintained its importance upto the Pāla period. It is identified by some with modern Pāncbibi in the Bogra district.

The Pāhārpur C.P. Insr. of G.E. 159 (=479 A.D.) refers to a Vihāra (monastery) at Vaṭagohālī founded by the Jaina preceptor Guhanandin. Vaṭagohālī might have gained some importance as a centre of education and culture. Vaṭagohālī has been identified with Goālbhitā at Pāhārpur. The monastery later developed into the great Buddhist Vihāra of Dharmapāla at Somapura, as it is indicated by the terracotta sealings with an inscription Śrī-Somapure Śrī-Dharmapaladeva-mahāvihāre. Kripura mentioned in the Guṇaighar C.P. of Maharājādhirāja Vainyagupta was the Jayaskandhāvāra of the said king. The same record also refers to a Vihāra (monastery) of

60. CBI., P. 50.
61. cf. Belwa C.P. of Mahīpāla I; EI. XXIX, P. 6ff.
62. Ibid., PP. 5-6.
63. EI. XX, P. 61ff.
64. Ibid., P. 59.
65. ARASI. 1927 - 28, PP. 105-6.
66. CBI., P. 65.
Avalokitesvara founded by Mahāyāna preceptor Śāntideva. It might have developed into a University town. The location of the monastery, near the port and waterways making its boundaries, leads us to suggest that it was not only a centre of Buddhist learning and culture but also that of trade and commerce.

Three Faridpur C.P. grants mention Navyāvakāśikā as provincial administrative head-quarters which in the 6th century A.D. was under the rule of Dharmaditya, Gopacandra and Samacāradeva. The derivative meaning of the term shows that "the town was founded on a recent occasion". It has been suggested by some scholars that Navyāvakāśikā could correspond to Sabhar in Dacca district. Navyāvakāśikā seems to have been a meeting place of traders, as it is indicated by the reference to Vyāparakārāndya (customs-officer) in the Faridpur C.P. of Gopacandra. We also find reference to customs-officer and chief-traders (pradhāna-vyāpārinah) at the district of Vārakamandala which lay within Navyāvakāśikā. Vārakamandala, referred to in four

67. SHAIB., P. 139.
68. Ibid.
69. CBI., PP. 83 - 84.
copper-plates discovered at Faridpur, was a district town and a centre of trade and commerce as pointed out above. References to port (naudāṇḍaka) or ship-building harbour (nāvāṭākṣeṇī) indicate that trade by water-routes went on briskly in the sixth century. In the Ghugrāhāti Grant of Samācaradeva is mentioned Suvarma-vīthī, the administrative head-quarters of the provincial governor Antaraṅga Uparika Jīvadatta. The town has not yet been identified satisfactorily. Candravarmakotā mentioned in the same record might have been a fortified town for military purpose.

Karnasuvāra finds mention in the Vappagoṣavāta Grant of Jayanāga and Nidhanpur grant (Plate no. I) of Bhāskaravarman as an administrative head-quarters. The city earned fame as the capital of the Gauda king Sāśānka. Hiuen Tsang (7th century A.D.) visited Karnasuvāra which he mentioned as Kia-lo-na-su-fa-la-na and visited the Lo-to-mi-chi monastery at the place.

70. Ibid., PP. 80,83.
71. Ibid., PP. 80,76.
72. EI. XVII, P. 74ff.
73. EI. XVIII, P. 60ff.
74. CPS., P. 11.
This Lo - to - mi - chi is identified with the Mahāvihāra at Raktamrtikā that has been traced in a legend occurring on a seal found by an excavation at Rājabāḍḍāṅgā near Murshidabad on the Bhāgīrathī.\textsuperscript{75}

The Vappagoṣavāta Grant of Jayanāga refer to an administrative unit called Audamvarika-viśaya which might have its head-quarters at Audumvara. The district of Audumbara seems to be identical with Sarkar Audumbar mentioned in the Āin - i - Ākbarī. Scholars on the basis of different sources have suggested that the Sarkar of Audumbara stretched over portion of Murshidabad and Birbhum.\textsuperscript{76}

Vardhamāna was probably the principal town in Vardhamāna bhukti as suggested by the Mallasarul C.P. of Vijayasena (6th century A.D.), Irdā C.P. of Kāmboja Nayapāla (10th century), Naihāti C.P. of Vallālasena and Govindapur C.P. of Laksmaṇasena (12th century). The antiquity of the town reaches back to the time of Jaina Kalpasūtra.\textsuperscript{77} It also finds mention in Somadeva's Kathāsaritsāgara and

\textsuperscript{75} Amitabha Bhattacharya, op. cit., P. 52; HAB., P. 7.
\textsuperscript{76} EI. XIX, P. 286ff.
\textsuperscript{77} B.I., P. 356.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid.
Varāhamihira's Brhatsāmhitā. In the Irdā C.P. of Nayapāla, Daṇḍabhukti-maṇḍala (extreme south of Midnapore district) is said to have been included in Vardhamāna-bhukti, while in the Naihāti C.P. of Vallālasena parts of Uttara - Rādha - maṇḍala is said to have been within Vardhamānahukti, suggesting that Vardhamāna embraced considerable parts of Western and Southern Bengal (ancient Rādha-janapada).

Suvvunga mentioned in the Tipperā C.P. of Lokanātha was probably a district-town. N.K. Bhattasali locates the district-town in the Cachar area, east of Sylhet.

The city of Devaparvata finds mention in the Kailāṇ C.P. of Śrīdhāraṇarāta (6th century A.D.), Tipperā C.P. of Bhavadeva (8th century A.D.) and the Paśchimbhag C.P. of Śrīcandra (10th century A.D.). It seems to be the capital of both the Rātas and Devas. The city is said to have been situated on the holy river Kṣīrodā in Samatāṭa. The topographical information points to the location of Devaparvata at the Maināmati hills near Comilla. The

78. Ibid.
80. IB., P. 68.
81. EI. XV, P. 306.
82. SI. Vol. II, P. 37.
83. EDEP., P. 75.
Nidhanpur C.P.\(^{84}\) of Bhāskaravarman (7th century A.D.) records grant of land to the Brahmins in the district of Candrapurī which might have its administrative centre at the town of Candrapurī. Candrapuraviṣaya also finds mention in the Paśchimāg C.P. of Śrīcandra, where it is said to have been incorporated in Śrīhattamandala in Paundravardhanabhakti.

Jayakarṇāntavāsaka was the capital of the Khaḍgas, as it is evident from the Āshrafpur C.P.\(^{85}\) of Devakhaḍga. According to N.K. Bhattasali,\(^{86}\) Kṛmānta was the capital of Samataṭa which, in his opinion, covered the Tippera and Noakhali Districts, together with the eastern half of the Mymensingh and Dacca Districts and the greater part of the Sylhet District and the city stood at the site of modern Baḍkamta. Karmāntavāsaka has been identified with Baḍkamta in the Tippera District.\(^{87}\) The Chittagong C.P. of Kāntideva (9th century A.D.) mentions Vardhamānapura as the capital of King Kāntideva. The location of the town in the area ruled by the king remains uncertain.\(^{88}\)

\(^{84}\) EI. XIX, P. 118.
\(^{85}\) MASTB. I, P. 85.
\(^{86}\) EI. XVII, P. 351.
\(^{87}\) Ibid. XVII, P. 351.
\(^{88}\) Ibid. XXVI, P. 317ff.
Tāmralipti finds mention in the Dudhpāni Rock Inscr. of Udayamāna (8th century A.D.) where it is learnt that merchants from distant places like Ayodhyā used to frequent the port of Tāmralipti for purposes of trade.

It has been identified with Tamlites of Ptolemy (2nd century A.D.), modern Tamluk in the Midnapore district. Ptolemy locates this sea-port on the bank of the Ganges. The sea-port finds mention in the account of the Chinese travellers Fa-hien (5th century A.D.), Hiuen-Tsang and It-sing (7th century A.D.).

In the Irdā C.P. of Kāmboja Nayapāla (11th century A.D.), Priyāṅgu is described as the capital (Rājadhānyāḥ Priyāṅgutaḥ) of the Fāla-Kāmboja rulers. The city can not be identified with any amount of certainty. The first five verses of the inscription give us a description of the city decorated with high-towering temples with banners at their tops and golden rampart-walls and crystal gateways

\[ \text{Dūravyomodgama - klāntairiva yatra surālayaiḥ | Calatpatāka-} \]
\[ \text{jihvāgrairvilihyante payomucaḥ v.1. Haimānāgniruco yasyāṁ} \]
\[ \text{prākārānadhiśeraėe Sphāṭikāni sphiṭabhāni gopurāṇivi-} \]
\[ \text{bhartiyyā v.4} \] The city was situated somewhere in the modern Hooghly or Midnapore district.

89. Ibid. II, P. 345.
90. Ibid. XXII, P. 150ff.
91. B.I., P. 356.
The royal camp situated at Vikramapura is mentioned in the land-grant charters of the Candras, the Varmans and the Senas. The ruins of Ramapala, now a village in the Vikrampur parganah of the Dacca District in Bangladesh, perhaps represents Vikramapura, the capital of the rulers of Vaïga (Eastern Bengal). That Vikramapura was the stronghold of the Candras is evident from the findspot of the Ramapāla C.P. of Śrīcandra and its mention in all the land-grants of the Candras. We find reference to the royal camp at the same place of the Varman records. Lastly, the city was brought under the occupation of the Senas who conquered at least parts of East Bengal by driving away the Varmans off their stronghold at Vikramapura.

The Mānāhali C.P. grant of Madanapāla refers to the royal camp at Rāmāvatī which seems to have been one of the Pāla capitals during the reign of Ramapāla and Madanapāla. The Rāmacaritāṇī gives a glowing description.

93. Amitabha Bhattacharyya, op. cit., P. 98.
94. CBI., PP. 211-17.
of the city which was founded by Rāmapāla. \_ cf. Akuruta -
mahādravīṇa - veṣṭita-pratisthā - dhiropita - harīsah |
Kanakamaya - dhāma - lekhā - dhikaraṇamapi - meru -
śikharamīva.\(^7\) The ruins of this capital has been
discovered in the Malda district. The city was situated
at the junction of the Karatoya and the Ganges.\(^6\) Its
advantageous geographical position added to its strategic
and commercial importance.

Śrīcandrapura, the city named after the king Śrī-
candra, finds mention in his Paśchimbhāg C.P. Inschr. The
city is said to have been located in the midst of three
districts namely, Garalā, Pogāra and Candrapura, together
with the half (or parts) of Veḍikā attached to Sātalavarga
within Śrīhāṭṭa-mandala. It was a place well-known for
religious establishments, monasteries and temples dedicated
to the Brahmānical gods. Some of the mathas are referred
to as Deśāntarīya and Vaṅgāla. It was, therefore, a noted
place of pilgrimage as well as a University town.

Śrīhāṭṭamandala mentioned in the Paśchimbhāg C.P. of
Śrīcandra might have its head-quarters at Śrīhāṭṭa, modern

\(^95\) RC. III.32. \_...

\(^96\) SHAIB., p. 134, f.n. 3; JASB. (1900) XIX, pt. I, p. 71.
Sylhet. The existence of Śrīhaṭṭamandala comprising several districts may be derived from the discovery of the Bhāṭerā copper-plates\textsuperscript{97} of Govinda Keśavadeva and Īśānadeva that record grant of land in the village Bhāṭapāḍā and its adjacent areas. Bhāṭapāḍā has been identified with the modern Bhāṭerā. The epithet Śrīhaṭṭanātha to the local deity Vaṭesvara Śiva also proves the inclusion of the donated land in the administrative unit of Śrīhaṭṭa. Further, large Brahmānical religious establishments in the districts of Śrīhaṭṭamandala should have attached a great deal of educational and religious importance to the town of Śrīhaṭṭa. Bhūrisreṣṭhika is referred to in Śrīdhara's (10th century A.D.) Nyāyakandali, not only, as a centre of Brahmānic learning, but also, as a seat of the Śreṣṭhins or merchants and bankers.\textsuperscript{98} It also finds mention in Kṛṣṇamīśra's Prabodhacandrodaya (11th century A.D.) and Bhārata Chandra Raya's (18th century A.D.) Satya Pirer Katha. Bhūrisreṣṭhika has been identified with the present village of Bhursut on the right bank of the Dāmodar in the Hooghly district.\textsuperscript{99}

\textsuperscript{97} CPS. PP. 159, 186.
\textsuperscript{98} IA. 1930, P. 50.
\textsuperscript{99} SHAIB., PP. 74-75.
In the Belāva C.P. of Bhojavarman, Simhapura is said to be the homeland of the Varmanas. Regarding the location of the town, the choice seems to lie between three known cities bearing the name: one to the north of the Salt Range in the Punjab, a second in Kaliṅga, perhaps identical with the modern Singhapuram between Chicacole and Narasannapeta, and the third in Raḍha generally identified with Singur in the Hooghly district. 100 If the identification is based upon the evidence deduced from the Ceylonese chronicle Mahāvamsa, it may be located in Raḍha-janapada.

Peranāṭana was probably the administrative headquarters of the district of Peranāṭana mentioned in the Maināmati C.P. of Govinda-candra. The town was situated in Samataṭa-mandala, as it is indicated by the copper-plate grant. The Maināmati C.P. of Raṇavaṇkamalla of Harikāladeva mentions the city of Pattikera that was famous for its Buddhist monastery. Paṭṭikera also seems to have been the administrative head-quarters of the territorial unit of this name in Samataṭa-mandala in the 11th century A.D., as it is evident from the Maināmati Plate (no.1) of

100. HAB. P. 207, also P. 214, f.n. 13, 14, 15.
Lađahavandra. It appears from the location of the present pargana of Pațikara that the vast ruins of an urban settlement on the bank of the river Gomati and in the vicinity of the Maināmati hills bear testimony to the existence of ancient town of Pațikera. A number of silver coins discovered along with the land-grant charter of Bhavadeva bear the legend 'Pațikera' suggesting, no doubt, its commercial importance in the early period.

Gauḍa in Malda district seems to be place where once existed the city of Lakṣmanavati, probably founded by the Sena king Laksmaṇasena. This royal seat stood on the Ganges near its junction with the Mahānandā and figured prominently till the days of Humayun and Akbar. The city was known as Lakhnauti in the Tabaqāt-i-Nāsiri. Vijayapura is stated to have been the Sena capital in Dhoi'y's Pavanadūtam (12th century A.D.) Skandhāvaram Vijayapuramityunnattāṁ rājadānīm. The modern village of Bijayanagar (near Godāgiri), seven miles to the south of Deopara and about ten miles to the west of Rāmpur-Boāliā, is considered by

102. Ibid., P. 45.
R.P. Chanda to be identical with Vijayapura. R.P. Chanda refers to the local tradition connecting Vijayanagara with king Vijayasena, while M. Chakravarti identifies Vijayapuri with Nudiah, the capital of Rae Lakhmaniah at the time of the Muhammadan conquest. The description, as given in the Pavanadūtam, suggests that the city flourished near the Ganges. The temple of Pradyumnesvara, mentioned in the Deopāḍa Prasasti, might be situated in some parts of Vijayapura, identified with Vijayanagara, which is not far from Deopāḍa.

Literary and epigraphic evidence leave no scope of doubt that the towns in ancient Bengal were centres of administrative, military, commercial, industrial and cultural activities. The predominant class in the administrative head-quarters was constituted by civil and military officials. Ports and market-towns were chiefly populated by the people of the mercantile community including traders, merchants and artisans. However, in all cases, there were artisans producing consumers' goods and traders maintaining the import-export linkage to

105. JASB., NS. I, P. 45.
cater to the needs of the sophisticated urban society. The urban social life, as depicted in Vātsyāyana's Kāmasūtram, gives us to understand the luxurious way of life led by a nāgaraka. Sandhyākaranandin's Rāmacaritām and Dhoyi's Pavanadūtam throw side-light upon the sophisticated nature of city-bred life. The priestly class, including Brāhmaṇas and Buddhist monks, presumably dominated the society in University-towns and places of pilgrimage.

Traders and Artisans:

It may be held that the key-position in the urban society belonged to the merchants, traders and artisans. The Dāmodarpur copper-plates of the Gupta period inform us that Nagaraśreṣṭhī (President of the guild of merchants or according to some a banker), Sarthavāna (Chief of the guild of caravan traders), Prathamakulika (Chief artisan) were included in the Council (Adhiṣṭhānādhikarana) that was constituted to advise the Officer-in-charge of a district in the matter of administration. This is, no doubt, a positive evidence of the State-recognition to the mercantile community. The merchants and traders were so well-organised through guilds (Nigama referred to in the Bāsāhī seals) that the State could not but recognise their position in the society. During the Post-Gupta
period, the State-recognition to the trading and artisan-community seems to have continued to be extended. The Faridpur C.P. of Gopacandra (6th century) refers to 'Prädhänavyāpārīnaḥ' (leading merchants) as witnesses to land-transactions. From the 8th century onwards, the references to traders and merchants in the epigraphic records are not found so often as before. But that does not necessarily indicate the decline of their position as suggested by Dr. Niharranjan Ray.\textsuperscript{107} The Kurkihār Bronze Inscription\textsuperscript{108} of the Pāla period refers to Vaṁk Māneka. Sārthavāha Jambhalamitra is stated in the Māndhuk Inscr.\textsuperscript{109} of Gopāla II to have endowed an image of Buddha. In the Nārāyaṇapura Image Inscr.\textsuperscript{110} and the Baghaurā Image Inscr.\textsuperscript{111} of the time of Mahīpāla-I, mention is made of Vaṁiks Buddhamitra and Lokadatta who installed the images of Nārāyaṇa and Vināyaka respectively. The Chandimau Image Inscr.\textsuperscript{112} of Rāmapāla mentions Vaṁk Sādhu Saharanā who

\textsuperscript{107} BI., PP. 327-28.
\textsuperscript{108} JBORS. XXVI, No. 21.
\textsuperscript{109} IHQ. XXVIII, P. 51.
\textsuperscript{110} IC. IX, P. 121; IA. XIV, P. 165.
\textsuperscript{111} EI. XVII, P. 353.
\textsuperscript{112} MASB. V, P. 93-94.
is said to have erected the image of Bodhisattva Padmapañi. In addition to these, the ongoing commercial activities may reasonably be inferred from epigraphic references to the growth of different types of industries, facilities of transport afforded by the river-system and the luxuries of urban life. Commercial and cultural relations between Bengal and South-East Asian countries that commenced in the early centuries of the Christian era seem to have continued in the Pāla period. The Nālandā C.P.¹¹³ of Devapāla records the grant of five villages by the Pāla king to King Bāluputradeva of the Šailendra dynasty, ruler of Jāvā, Sumātra and the Malay Peninsula, for making an endowment in favour of a monastery at Nālandā built by the Šailendra king.

According to the tradition recorded in Ānandabhaṭṭa's Vallālacarita, the power and prestige of Suvarṇavaṇīks suffered decline on the ground of their refusal to agree

to Vallašašena's repeated demand for monetary loan. This might reflect the fact that the patronage of the State was withdrawn from the guild of gold-merchants, as they failed to honour arbitrary royal demand from them. However, the position of the merchants is not to be considered in isolation, because trade and industry were organised through guilds by joint efforts. The merchants had to depend upon the craftsmen and artisans for manufactured goods to be exported in exchange of imported merchandise.

Artisans and Craftsmen:

Epigraphic references to ornaments made of gold, silver, pearl, diamond etc. suggest, no doubt, an indis­
penability of gold-smiths, jewellers and precious stone-
cutters in the life of luxuries led in towns and cities.114
Gold-smith, however, finds mention in the Kurkihār Bronze
Inscr. (no. 49) of MahīpālaIand the Bihar Image Inscr. of
Vigrahapāla III. The Paschimbhāg C.P. of Śrīcandra refers
to artisans Karmakāra (black-smith), Carmakāra (leather-
worker), Sūtrādhāra (carpenter), Sthapati (Masons, Archi-
tects) and Mālakāra (Garland-makers). In the Bhāterā C.P.

114. cf. Deopa Praśasti; CBI, PP. 245-49; RC. III. 33-34.
of Govinda Keśava, reference is made to Dantakāra (ivory-worker) and Kāmsyakāra (Braziers) dwelling in the village. They must have also resided in the towns where there was a constant demand for commodities produced by them. Epigraphic reference to Śaṅkhavādaka¹¹⁵ suggest indirectly the existence of a guild or corporation of conch-shell workers. Wood-crafts were handled in different dimensions by Sūtradhāra (carpenter), Takṣan (engraver) and shipbuilders. That the ship-building industry was in a flourishing condition is affirmed by indirect references to boats by the terms Naupaṇḍaka (the post to fasten boat) Nāvātakṣeni (ship-building harbour)¹¹⁶ Naukhāta¹¹⁷ (the channel open to boats), Nauyoga¹¹⁸ (port), Nāvika¹¹⁹ and explicit mention of various types of fleet meant for warfare Nānāvidhanauvātaka-sampādita, Khalimpur C.P. of Dharmapāla. Reference to Nauvitāna (war-fleet) in the Deōpāḍa Praśasti (v.22) of Vijayasena is no less significant.

¹¹⁵. EDEP., P. 67.
¹¹⁶. Faridpur copper-plates of Dharmāditya, CBI., PP. 80,76.
¹¹⁸. Ibid.
¹¹⁹. CPS., P. 161.
Sculptors and engravers were collectively known as śilpins during the Pāla period. Most of the records of this period mention the name of the artist who inscribed those records on metals or stones. In some of the records, we find mention of the places wherefrom the engravers hailed. It indicates the localisation of particular arts and crafts. Varendri was a famous centre of arts and crafts developing a particular style of its own. The Deopāḍā Praśasti of Vijayasena is said to have been engraved by Rāṇaka Śūlapāṇi, the crest-jewel of the guild of Varendri. Two prominent artists of the Pāla period were Dhimān and Bītpāla, who are said to have belonged to Varendri. It may be reasonably held that the guild of artists belonging to Varendri was responsible for developing the East-Indian school of Art in early medieval Bengal.


121. Tāranātha : History of Buddhism in India (tr.), IA. IV, P. 102; Aksayakumar Maitra, Introd. to Gauḍarājāmalā, P. IV.
Weaver:

The weavers appear to have occupied an important position in the society, because, the weaving industry flourished in Bengal since very early times. As it has been already stated above, the Arthaśāstra of Kauṭilya refers to varieties of cloths manufactured in Bengal.

The artisan class may be broadly divided into two groups: artists and craftsmen, and producers of consumers' goods, viz. Tailika (Oilmen), Modaka (Sweet-meat-makers), Tantuvāya (weavers).

Menial Class:

The menials presumably formed the lowest stratum of the urban society. They formed some occupational castes like, Rajaka (washerman) and Nāpitas (barber). The outcaste Candaśālas seem to have been charged with the duties at the cremation ground. The existence of the menial class cannot be considered as the characteristic of the urban society, because their relevance to the rural society cannot be questioned.

122. Vide Chapter III ; Mixed Castes.
Other professional groups:

Concentration of wealth and luxuries stemming from it in towns and cities reasonably gave rise to professions like those of acting, dancing and singing etc. The Paśchim-bhāg C.P. Inscr. refers to Naṭa (dancer), Cetikā (maid-servant probably Devadāsī), Dhakkāvādakā (drummer), Kāhalikā (player on Kahala, a kind of drum), Drāgaḍikā (player on kettle-drum) etc. City-damsels and the temple-girls (Devadāsī) are referred to in the epigraphic records.¹²³

Composition of the urban society:

From the above discussion, it appears that the urban society was composed of the ruling class, priestly class, mercantile class, artisan class, menial class and parasite professional class. The magnates of the society were the royal dignitaries, the wealthy Brahmins, merchants and industrial entrepreneurs. Sometimes, it so happened that absentee land-lords lived in towns and maintained remote

control on their landed property in villages. It would not be unreasonable to hold that the land-owning class, known by the generic term Mahattara, often shifted from villages to towns in search of richer and more luxurious way of life and thus was responsible, to a great extent, for draining out the surplus production of villages for consumption in towns and cities. The Deopāḍa Praśasti of Vijayasena draws our attention to the simplicity of the village-dwelling Brāhmaṇas in contradistinction to the luxury of the townfolk. It is said: "Through the favour showered by him, wives of Brāhmaṇas, as they amassed great fortune, were instructed by city-damsels to recognise pearls from their similarity with seeds of cotton, pieces of emerald from their resemblance with leaves of Śāka, pieces of silver from their similitude to bottle-gourd flowers, jewels from their likeness with developed seeds of pomegranates and gold from its closeness to blooming flowers of the creepers of pumpkin-gourd". "Muktah kārppāsavījairmmarakataśakalam śākapatrailābupuspai rūpyāṇi ratnam parinatibhidurairkuṣibhirdadīmāṇīm kusmāndī-vallārinīm vikasitakusumaih kāñcanaṁ nāgaribhiḥ śikṣyante yatprasādād-vahuvibhavajuśāṁ yositaḥ śrotriyāṇāṁ". vv. 237.
Interdependence of Village and Town:

A village or a cluster of villages was often transformed into a town or a city for administrative, strategic, commercial and cultural reasons; already pointed out above. Again, when a town or a city faced decline, its position would be reduced to that of a village. However, a town or a city used to be surrounded by a large number of villages. The town was entirely dependent on the villages for its subsistence. The surplus production from the villages seems to have been supplied to the towns in the form of food-grains and raw-materials for manufacturing industries. Commodities were transported from villages to towns by land-routes and waterways, following the usual rules of marketing. In the Gunäighar C.P. of Vainyagupta, we find mention of the ports at Cūḍāmaṇī, Nagaraśī and Pradāmāra in connection with the boundaries of the gifted land Purveṇa Cūḍāmaṇī - Nagaraśī - nauyogayormadhye jolā 1. 28. References to Vyāpārakāraṇḍya and Vyāpāraṇḍa (customs-officer) in post-Gupta epigraphs and to Saulkika (collector of tolls and custom dues) and Tarika

124. CBI., p. 67.
125. Ibid., pp. 80, 83.
(officer collecting ferry dues) in the Pāla epigraphs \(^{126}\) seem to suggest the anxiety of the State to determine or control import-export process by collection of tolls and custom-duties. The Chittagong-C.P. \(^{127}\) of Dāmodara-deva refers to Rājapatha (royal-road or highway) that should have facilitated trade and commerce.

In addition to food-grains, salt was one of the items that might have been supplied from villages to the towns. Saltpit has been often referred to in the land-grant charters allowing to the donees the right to the salt-pit \(\text{salavanaḥ, lavanākara}\). \(^{128}\) Forest-products like wood, bamboo, cotton and mineral-products seem to have been supplied from the villages in order to make provisions for raw materials required by industrial establishments in towns. In the land donation records, mention is made of the natural resources like forest \(\text{sajhā-tavitaḥ}\), \(^{129}\) orchards \(\text{sāmrāpanasa, saguvākanārikela}...\) \(^{130}\) to the

---

\(^{126}\) Ibid., P. 168.

\(^{127}\) Ibid., P. 158ff.


\(^{129}\) Tarpandighi Grant of Laksmanasena, CBI., P. 293.

\(^{130}\) Belāva C.P. of Bhojavarman, Ibid., P. 239; Mādhāinagar Grant of Laksmanasena, Ibid., P. 291.
enjoyment of which the donees were entitled. In other words, the donees might consume, distribute or exchange those products from forests and gardens for other commodities. Again, in case of rent-free holdings, the villagers were similarly entitled to enjoy those products and exchange the surplus in nearby markets for other goods.

The villages were hardly in need of commodities manufactured in towns, especially the luxury-goods. The daily necessities of the villagers seem to have been provided by the rural artisans and craftsmen. The rural society, no doubt, hinged upon the economy based upon agriculture and small industries.

It appears from the verse 23 of the Deopāḍā Praśasti of Vijayasena, as quoted before, that the Brahmins dwelling in villages sometimes used to settle in the towns, accepting royal favour and their wives, who were accustomed to the simplicity of the village-life, were not familiar with the pomp and luxury of the urban life. The epigraphic evidence suggests also that the contact between towns and villages was regularly maintained. Although the villages were not at all dependent upon towns economically, the University towns and places of pilgrimage might have often
been visited by villagers, belonging to the upper class of the society, seeking higher education or religious merit (Puńya). Some Brahmins and Kāyasthas seem to have been recruited from villages to join the judicial or administrative service in towns.

Taking into consideration the relevant data that can be derived, directly or indirectly, from the corpus of Bengal inscriptions, it appears that the social structure in ancient Bengal was an integration of the rural and urban society. The caste-ridden society in the village comprising Brahmins and non-Brahmin Sudras was economically stratified into two main classes, namely, the land-owning class and the peasantry. On the other hand, the urban society, having less emphasis on the caste-system, comprised occupational classes that might have been divided into two strata, namely, the privileged and the non-privileged. The position of the non-privileged in towns corresponded to that of the peasantry in villages, while the status of the land-owning class in villages was almost equivalent to that of the privileged in towns and cities. It can hardly be denied that those in possession of the religious and ruling authorities enjoyed the most privileged position in the society, while those who were in charge of producing the
wealth and resources of the country, namely, the peasantry, artisans and traders, not to speak of the menial class, formed the less privileged or non-privileged stratum in the society. However, the urban society may be distinguished from the rural society, when we find the former dependent upon the latter economically and the latter upon the former politically and, to some extent, culturally. It can hardly be held that villages were alienated from towns and vice versa, as suggested by the propounders of the theory of "Asiatic society".