Chapter 2
Geographical Delineation

It is needless to underline that a region as a geographical unit is a historical construction whose boundary is defined and redefined by the contemporary political and cultural conditions. Even geographical features cannot be a sole determinant of the boundary, though they may have implication to its historical formation. While admitting these points, still we need to delineate the region for our research purpose. Our delineation of a region depends on our perspectives on its history. In his thought-provoking article, B. S. Cohn concluded as follows:

(Regions are far from fixed, enduring things, especially if any historical perspective is taken. They are not absolutes and they are difficult, if not impossible, to define by objective criteria. Where one stands and for what purpose one is observing or studying will determine the boundaries of the unit one is studying.\(^1\)

Conversely, our geographical delineation of a region reflects our perception of it as a historical entity. In this chapter, as a preliminary to my main discussions, I would like to discuss how we can delineate Bengal and its sub-regions from historical perspectives and explain how I delineate them according to my research interest. The first to discuss is the delineation of its geographical features, and the consideration on Bengal as a region.

1. Bengal as a Region

Bengal dealt with in this research is a region approximately corresponding to the present territories of the Indian state of West Bengal and the republic of Bangladesh. It is mainly constituted by alluvial plains and deltas, surrounded by Chotanagpur and Rajmahal hill tracts,

\(^1\) B. S. Cohn, 'Regions Subjective and Objective: Their Relation to the Study of Modern Indian History and Society', idem, *An Anthropologist among the Historians and Other Essays*, New Delhi, 1987, pp.100-135, p.132.
Himalayan terai, Meghalaya plateau, Tripura and Chittagong hill tracts, and finally the Bay of Bengal. As a region with some of the biggest rivers and the largest delta in the world, its variations in the geographical features were mainly brought out by the activity of these rivers and their tributaries. Such variations can entail as many as twenty four geographical sub-regions only on the side of Bangladesh. According to Spate, this 'Bengal Delta' can be subdivided into five sub-regions as follows: (1) the sub-montane terai (Duars), (2) the northern paradeltas (the Ganga-Brahmaputra Doab) and the Barind, (3) the eastern margins: the Surma valley, the plains along the Meghna and along the Chittagong coast, (4) the western margins: largely lateritic piedmont plain between the Hooghly and the Peninsular Block, and the Contai coastal plain and (5) the Ganga Delta proper between Hooghly-Bhagirathi, Padma-Meghna and the sea, including moribund, mature and active sections. If we add Madhupur tract, Haor basin in central Sylhet and Tippera surface, it may somehow satisfactorily cover the geographical features relevant to our research. From these features, we can consider Bengal as a geographical region constituted by deltas and relatively higher older alluvial tracts surrounding them, which are in turn surrounded by higher hill tracts. This geographical entity is open to outside mainly through coast lines at its south-west and south-east corners, through Ganga and Brhmaputra valleys in the Garo-Rajmahal gap to the north-west and north-east directions, and through Bay of Bengal at the South.

The most prominent geographical feature in this low land is its river system, mainly constituted by the great rivers Ganga and Brahmaputra, and their tributaries and distributaries. Those rivers divide the land into four

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4 For these features, see Rashid op. cit., pp.22-26, 28-29.
major divisions, while their waterways have functioned as important channels of communication. Because of tectonic activities and diluvial land formations, river courses have not always been stable and may have been different in the period of my concern. Though it is difficult to precisely delineate these old courses, we can note some important changes discernible in historical records. First, the southward channel of Ganga, roughly represented by the present Bhagirathi-Hooghly and the moribund channel called Adiganga, was a strong current and the main course of the river. Padma, the south-eastward flow which is the main channel at present, had been relatively narrower than another channel and started to be perceived as the main channel of Ganga as late as early fourteenth century, while its importance as a channel of Ganga had already been recognised in the twelfth century. Apart from that, the course of Ganga after it passed Rajmahal hill cut across the present Maldah district through the present course of the river Karindri and lower course of Mahananda, and passed the eastern side of the ruins of Gaur. Second, Tista, which presently flows through Jalpaiguri and Rangpur into Jamuna, the present main course of Brahmaputra, had been flowing through Purnabhava, Atrai and Karatoya until floods of 1787 changed its course. Accordingly, Karatoya, which is a shallow and narrow stream at present, was a mighty river and formed the eastern border of Varendra or Pundravardhana with Kamarupa. Third, Brahmaputra, of which Jamuna is presently the main channel, flowed through south-eastward channel presently called old Brahmaputra before 1787.

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6 Ibid., pp.14-20.
7 Ibid., pp.23-25.
9 Bhattacharyya, op. cit., pp.28-29.
10 Ibid., pp.29-30.
11 Rashid, op. cit., pp.18-19 and p.23, Map 2.4. Bhattacharyya considered the
The cognition of this geographical stretch as a region is a relatively new one. Bengali language, which constitutes one of the most important elements of the regional identity, established its distinction from Assamese, another descendant of Eastern Māghadhi, in the fifteenth century. Politically it had never constituted one unit before it was made a province (Sūbah) under Mughals, though ‘Bengal’ had already been considered as a distinct territory by the middle of fourteenth century. The use of the term ‘Bengala’ to denote the affinity of whole region was rather initiated by foreign travellers with much uncertainty from the thirteenth century onward. Bhattacharyya even hints at the possibility that ‘it was through these foreigners that the term Bengala gained currency and that the whole of Bengal came to be known as Bengala (sic.)/ Bengal / Bengal.’ Before that, Vangala, an antecedent of the term, denoted south-eastern part of Bengal differentiated from the region named Vanga, one of the historical sub-regions which subdivided Bengal. As K. Chakrabarti extensively shows in his monograph on Bengal Purānas, the making of the cultural formation which would be considered as typical of Bengal may trace its inception from present Jamuna as the principal course of Brahmaputra in the early medieval period, on the basis of Yasodhara’s mention of Vanga to the east of Lauhitya in his commentary on the Kāmasūtra. Bhattacharyya, op. cit., pp.32-33. As he admits, it is highly doubtful whether Yasodhara had a clear conception of the geographical denotation of Vanga. On the other hand, as the zone of subsidence between Barind and Madhupur tract can be considered as a long-term cause of the shift of Brahmaputra (Rashid, op. cit.), it is more plausible that the river flowed through its old course before the shift. Precisely, North Bengal dialect got differentiated from Assamese. S. K. Chatterji, The Origin and Development of the Bengali Language (reprint), New Delhi, 1993, pp.98-99

12 Precisely, North Bengal dialect got differentiated from Assamese. S. K. Chatterji, The Origin and Development of the Bengali Language (reprint), New Delhi, 1993, pp.98-99
14 Bhattacharyya, op. cit., pp.2-5.
15 Ibid., p.5. The first ‘Bengala’ may be the mistake of ‘Bangala’, the term used by Marcopolo.
16 Ibid., pp.62-65.
the 'Purānic Process' in the early medieval period, with local brāhmanas as its agents.\textsuperscript{17} But its culmination through vernacular literary culture and new religious movements were witnessed in the late medieval period\textsuperscript{18} and the making of Bengali identity is rather a process intensified through the complicated experience of colonialism and modernisation.\textsuperscript{19}

Thus the imposition of Bengal as a region onto this geographical stretch in the period of my concern is a retrospective exercise and the historical sub-regions like Vanga had more prevalence in this period, as B. M. Morrison discusses on the basis of inscripational evidence.\textsuperscript{20}

However, I would still like to claim validity of the region called Bengal as a research object. First, the sub-regions of Bengal had interacted with each other in many respects. Though political powers were based on each of those sub-regions and none could integrate all of them, some political powers could extend their influences over other sub-regions and as a result, the terms like Gauḍa and Vaṛa connoted rather wider territories in some points of time. As the rivers, which constituted the borders between these sub-regions, also worked as channels of communication, non-political interaction like trade may have been prevalent among them. Second, there are some historical phenomena and changes which were commonly witnessed in those sub-regions. Some of these phenomena and changes constitute the theme of my research and they will be discussed in the following chapters. For these reasons, I still find the validity of using Bengal as a geographical framework, while keeping its arbitrariness in my mind.

\textsuperscript{18} \textit{Ibid.}, pp.297-305.
\textsuperscript{19} One aspect of this process is writing of the history of Bengal. N. R. Ray's \textit{Bāṅgālir Itiḥās} can be considered as a culmination of this process, which started in the second half of the eighteenth century. J. W. Hood, \textit{Niharranjan Ray}, New Delhi, 1997.
\textsuperscript{20} B. M. Morrison, 'Region and Subregion in Pre-Muslim Bengal', D. Kopf (ed.), \textit{Bengal Regional Identity}, East Lansing, 1969, pp.3-20.
2. Sub-regions and their Characteristics

As I mentioned briefly, historical sub-regions in Bengal had more prevalence and relevance in its early history. I would like to discuss them in this section. Needless to say, borders and extent of these sub-regions are unfixed and prone to change, according to geological events like change of river course or political situations. Therefore, what I offer here are general sketches of them with some explanation of their historical implications.

Among the sub-regions in Bengal, four sub-divisions have constituted the main parts. They are Puṇḍravardhana or Varendra, Rañgha, Vaṅga and Samatāta. Courses of the rivers Bhagirathi, Ganga·Padma, Karatoya and Meghna roughly constitute their borders.

Puṇḍra or Puṇḍravardhana, which is called Varendra in later period, is located in Northern Bengal. Geographically, it is mainly constituted by Barind tract, one of the several Pleistocene terraces within the Bengal Basin, and the floodplains, which are mostly old, of rivers Padma, Mahananda, Purnabhava, Atrai, Tista and Karatoya. Padma and Karatoya rivers demarcate its borders with other sub-regions.

Administratively, it was constituted as Puṇḍravardhana·bhukti when it became a province of the Gupta kingdom. This bhukti had remained till the end of the Pāla rule. When the jurisdiction of Puṇḍravardhana·bhukti, which had covered Samatāta and Śrīhaṭṭa from the beginning of the tenth century, was extended to Vaṅga and Puṇḍravardhana under the Senas, this sub-region was designated as Varendra·maṇḍala within the bhukti. The centre of this sub-region has been Puṇḍravardhana or Puṇḍranagara,

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21 Rashid, op. cit., pp.13·15.
22 Ibid., pp.12·13, 15·20.
23 Bhattacharyya, op. cit., pp.73·75.
24 Puṇḍravardhana·bhukti and Puṇḍravardhana·bhukti were differentiated in the inscriptions of the Pālas and the Candras. This point was overlooked by Bhattacharyya. Cf. Ibid., pp.75·78.
identified with present Mahasthangarh near Bogra, since the third century B.C., as is indicated by the Mahasthan stone inscription. Apart from it, Koṭīvarṣa, identified with present Bangarh near Gangarampur in South Dinajpur district, was the secondary centre, whose jurisdiction covered the visaya of its namesake.

As an area adjacent to Anga and Videha, respectively corresponding to the eastern and northern parts of present Bihar, it experienced the cultural inflow from the Mid-Ganga heartland earlier than any other sub-regions in Bengal. One of the evidence is the aforementioned Mahasthan stone inscription. It is the oldest inscription in Bengal, written in Brāhmī script palaeographically assignable to the third century B.C. It attests the existence of urban settlement in this early period and its interaction with the sedentary agrarian society. It also reveals that this sub-region was under the political authority of the Mauryas or the other Magadhan dynasties with Puṇḍanagala (Puṇḍranagara) as its administrative centre.

Such a political connection between this sub-region and the powers in Magadha continued in the later period. As Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti, it had been under the Gupta rule from the first half of the fifth century to the middle of the sixth century. It constituted the core territory of the Guptas until the end of their rule. On the contrary, the Pālas, whose ancestral land was this sub-region according to Sandhyākaranandini, extended their influence to Magadha region and held the latter as their stronghold until the end. Thus during the period of my concern, 'the political relations of' Puṇḍravardhana 'with the territories lying further up the Gangetic plain were much closer than its relations with the other sub-regions of the Delta', and this sub-region 'might be characterized as a buffer zone between the

25 \textit{SI}, 1, pp.79-80.
26 \textit{Rāmācarita}, 1. 38.
north Indian dynastic territories and the dynastic territories of the kingdoms centred further down the Ganges-Padma Rivers.\(^{28}\)

Rādhā is located in Western Bengal. Geographically, it is constituted by lateritic old alluvium flanked by the coalesced fans of rivers Ajay, Damodar, Rupnarayan and Kasai, and the moribund and mature deltas along Bhagirathi-Hoogly River.\(^{29}\) It is bordered by the Rajmahal and Chotanagpur hill tracts on the west. Padma and Bhagirathi rivers demarcate it from the other sub-regions.

This sub-region is further divided into Dākṣīna (South) and Uttara (North) Rādhā with Ajay River as their border.\(^{30}\) The former was called Suhma in the earlier period and Tamralipti, a famous ancient sea port identified with present Tamluk, was also incorporated into it sometimes.\(^{31}\)

The administrative unit which corresponds to this sub-region is Vardhamāna-bhukti, which appeared in the Mallasarul copper plate inscription, belonging to the second half of the sixth century.\(^{32}\) This bhukti is also divided into Uttara Rādhā and Dākṣīna Rādhā mandalas, as the former is mentioned in the Naihati copper plate inscription of Vallālasena.\(^{33}\) During the reign of Kānkaḍāmanasaṇa, northern part of this sub-region was reorganised as Kānkagrama-bhukti and Uttara Rādhā was also incorporated into it.\(^{34}\) The southernmost part of this region was known as Dānda-bhukti according to the copper plate inscriptions belonging to the sixth and seventh centuries.\(^{35}\) This bhukti corresponds to the southern part of present

\(^{29}\) Spate and Learmonth, op. cit., pp.586-588.
\(^{30}\) Bhattacharyya, op. cit., p.51.
\(^{32}\) SI,1,372-377.
\(^{33}\) Bhattacharyya, op. cit., p.81.
\(^{34}\) *Ibid.*, pp.82-83.
Medinipur district of West Bengal and Baleswar district of Orissa.\textsuperscript{36} It was incorporated into Vardhamāna-bhukti as Danda bhukti-mandala by the second half of the tenth century, according to the copper plate inscriptions of the Kambojas.\textsuperscript{37}

This sub-region witnessed the earliest occurrences of the proto-historic settlements with the evidence of agriculture, characterised by black and red ware. This is indicated by archaeological sites scattered all over this area, especially along river valleys like Ajay and Damodar.\textsuperscript{38} The development of sedentary agricultural society and the secondary state formation in the following period are attested by the Susuniya rock inscription, which indicates the existence of a kingdom in the Damodar valley in the middle of the fourth century.\textsuperscript{39} Expansion of rural settlements towards the western fringe of this sub-region is also indicated by the Mallasarul copper plate inscription, which recorded the land purchase and donation in the forest area located around present Galsi subdivision of Bardhaman district.\textsuperscript{40} But both of these processes are rather continuous ones. The process of state formation in the western fringe of this sub-region continued during the Pāla period as is inferable from the reference to sāmantas in the Rāmacarita,\textsuperscript{41} and even until the seventeenth century in the

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{36} Bhattacharyya, op. cit., pp.81-82.
\bibitem{39} \textit{SI}, 1, pp.351-352.
\bibitem{41} \textit{Ibid.}, p.87.
\end{thebibliography}
westernmost area, as a number of tribal kingdoms like Mallabhūm flourished around the area shows. Agricultural expansion, especially peasantisation of lower class members of society in this sub-region, proceeded from the sixteenth century in relation to the new religious movement represented by the Neo-Vaiśāvī movement of Caitanya and popular cults of Dharma and other minor deities.

In the coastal area of this sub-region, the urban settlements with the implication of thriving seaborne trade rose up at the estuary of Ganga and its distributaries from the third century B. C. onward, according to the available archaeological data. The period between the second century B. C. and second century A. D. marks the most active phase of these settlements, while the lively trade activity in Tamralipti was witnessed by Chinese monks who visited this port city from the beginning of the fifth century to the end of the seventh century.

Another place name associated with this sub-region is Gauḍa. At the beginning, it is consisted of the present Murushidabad district and southernmost areas of Maldah district, with Karṇasuvarna, represented by the ruin of Rajbadidanga, as its centre. Thus it overlaps in most part with Uttara Rādhā mentioned above. As the political power based in this region extended its sway over other sub-regions in Bengal and some parts of present Bihar and Orissa, especially after the rise of Šaśāṅka at the beginning of the seventh century, the term Gauḍa attained wider connotation.

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45 *Ibid.*, p.120.
denoting the western part of Bengal or East India in general.18

From the later phase of Pāla rule, the area around present Gaur and Pandua in Maldah district, which was the northernmost area of Gauda with old course of Ganga demarcating it from Pundravardhana, became the centre of the western and northern parts of Bengal following the construction of the city of Rāmāvatī by Rāmapāla. Laksmanasena also constructed the city of Laksmanāvatī in this area and it continued to be the political centre of Bengal through the early phase of the Turkish rule.

Vanga occupied the southern part of Bengal. Geographically, it is constituted by Ganga Delta proper, which can be further subdivided into the moribund, mature and active,49 or the moribund, immature, mature and active deltas.50 The area surrounded by rivers Bhagirathi, Padma and Meghna constitutes the main part of this sub-region, while the boundaries of it have changed according to the period.51 In the period of my concern, it might have included the present districts of Dhaka, Manikganj, Narayanganj and Munshiganj in Bangladesh apart from this core part.

There is no administrative division corresponding to the whole of this sub-region. In the sixth century, the unit called Navyāvakāśikā was used to denote the southern part of present Dhaka division, especially the area around Gopalganj district.52 From the beginning of the tenth century to the middle of the thirteenth century, this sub-region was under the jurisdiction of Pauṇḍra-bhukti in the inscriptions of the Candras and the Varmans, and Pauṇḍravardhana-bhukti in the inscriptions of the Senas.53 In this period,

48 Ibid., pp.122-128.
49 Spate and Learmonth, op. cit., p.588.
50 Rashid, op. cit., pp.29-34.
51 For somewhat inconclusive explanation on this issue, see Bhattacharyya, op. cit., pp.pp.56·62.
52 Ibid., pp.78-79. Bhattacharyya overlooked the fact that Navyāvakāśikā is mentioned as the highest administrative unit in the context of the inscriptions from Kotalipara region.
53 Pauṇḍra-bhukti and Pauṇḍravardhana-bhukti were differentiated in the
Vanga was subdivided into Vikramapura-bhāga, Nāvyā and other smaller units.\textsuperscript{54} Vikramapura-bhāga, named after the centre of the Candras, the Varmans and the Senas, which is identified with the area around present Rampal in Munshiganj district, may correspond to the central part of present Dhaka division, as it included parts of the present districts of Dhaka, Shariatpur and Gopalganj, according to the inscriptions which mention this administrative unit.\textsuperscript{55} Nāvyā, meaning navigable, included at least the area around Gaurnadi thana of Barishal district.\textsuperscript{56} It may denote present Barishal subdivision, 'which abounds in creeks and rivers and is navigable (nāvyā) all through the year.'\textsuperscript{57}

Vanga is mentioned as a group of people living outside of Āryāvarta in the early texts like the \textit{Baudhāyana Dharmasūtra}.\textsuperscript{58} It may indicate the existence of some political organisation of these people as a \textit{janapada}. The continuance of such an organisation may be attested by the description of the conquest of Vanga people in Kālidāsa's \textit{RaghuvaT[lsa}\textsuperscript{59} and the Mehrauli iron pillar inscription of king Candra,\textsuperscript{60} both of which are assignable to the beginning of the fifth century. This sub-region witnessed the rise of an inscriptions of the Candras and the Varmans. This point was also overlooked by Bhattacharyya. Cf. \textit{Ibid.}, pp.75-77.

\textsuperscript{54} \textit{Ibid.}, pp.60-62.


\textsuperscript{56} Bhattacharyya, op. cit., p.61.

\textsuperscript{57} \textit{Ibid.}


\textsuperscript{60} \textit{CII}, vol.3 (rev.), pp.257-259. There is a controversy over the identity of this king. For several theories on it, see A. Agrawal, \textit{Rise and Fall of Imperial Guptas}, Delhi, 1989, pp.177-185. As the inscription is palaeographically placed in the fifth century, I take it as one of the descriptions of contemporary Bengal from outside, while refraining from any conclusion about the identity of the king.
independent kingdom in the second half of the sixth century. From the tenth
to the middle of the thirteenth century, it was under the rule of the Candras,
the Varmans and the Senas. As the core territory of these dynasties, Vaṅga
became the most important sub-region of Bengal, just as Vikramapura, its
centre, can be considered as the capital of the Bengal Delta.\footnote{Morrison, op. cit., pp.152-153.}

Vaṅgāla is a place name which has an intricate relationship with
Vaṅga through history. Originally, it denoted the coastal regions of
south-eastern Bengal.\footnote{Bhattacharyya, op. cit., pp.62-63.} Thus it may have overlapped with Nāvyā
subdivision of Vaṅga and it is supported by the inscriptive evidence in
which the place named Vaṅgāla-vadā was mentioned within
Rāmasiddhi-pāṭaka of Nāvyā.\footnote{Vangiya Sahitya Parishad CPI of Viśvarūpasena, year 13, 14, IB, p.146, ll.42-43}
In this light, D. C. Sircar’s interpretation of
the term as the combination of Vaṅga and Prakrit suffix ‘āla’ in the sense of a
notable district belonging to Vaṅga seems to be valid.\footnote{D. C. Sircar, op. cit., p.140.}
This region may be con-extensive with Candradvīpa, which was the stronghold of the Candras
before the expansion of their rule to the whole of Vaṅga.\footnote{Ibid., p.133.}
As they expanded
their dominion to the wider areas of the south-eastern part of Bengal, the
connotation of the name also expanded to the extent that all the parts of
eastern Bengal were indicated by Vaṅgāla, especially in inscriptions outside
of Bengal.\footnote{Bhattacharyya, op. cit., pp.62-63.}

Samataṭā is located at the eastern fringe of Bengal, with sub-regions
of Śrīhaṭṭa and Harikela respectively on its northern and southern sides.
Geographically, it is a low land constituted by a delta and floodplains made
by the activities of the rivers Surma and Meghna, and Tippera surface, with
low hill range of Lalmai on its eastern end.\textsuperscript{67} The area around Lalmai hill was known as Paṭṭikera from the eighth century onward, according to the inscriptions and silver coins discovered there.\textsuperscript{68} Śrihaṭṭa corresponds to the depression called Haor basin in present Sylhet division,\textsuperscript{69} while Harikela corresponds to the coastal region of the present Chittagong district.\textsuperscript{70} Meghna River constitutes the border between Samatata and Vanga,\textsuperscript{71} while its border with Śrihaṭṭa and Harikela is not so clear.

From the beginning of the sixth century, names of several administrative units covering some parts of this sub-region are known. However, an administrative unit which covers the whole area of this sub-region appeared in the eleventh century, under the Candra rule. In their inscriptions, this sub-region was under the jurisdiction of Samatata maṇḍala belonging to Pauṇḍra-bhukti.\textsuperscript{72} Śrihaṭṭa constituted a maṇḍala of Pauṇḍravardhana-bhukti under the Candras,\textsuperscript{73} while Harikela maṇḍala is mentioned in the Chittagong copper plate inscription of Kāntideva, which belongs to the first half of the ninth century.\textsuperscript{74}

Samatata was listed as one of the territories of the peripheral kings (pratyanta-rāja) with places like Ḍavāka, Kāmarūpa, Nepāla and Kartṛpura in the Allahabad inscription of Samudragupta, which belongs to the middle of the fourth century.\textsuperscript{75} No matter what kind of political system was there, it witnessed a highly developed form of kingship with hierarchy of rulers at the beginning of the sixth century, as is shown by the Gunaighar copper plate

\textsuperscript{67} Rashid, op. cit., pp.28-29, 36.
\textsuperscript{68} Bhattacharyya, op. cit., pp.70-71.
\textsuperscript{69} Rashid, op. cit., pp.24-26.
\textsuperscript{70} Bhattacharyya, op. cit., pp.69-70.
\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., p.67.
\textsuperscript{72} Mainamati CPI of Lāḍahacandra, year 6, no.1 and 2, \textit{EDEP}, pp.69-75, 75-76: Mainamati CPI of Govindacandra, \textit{Ibid.}, pp.77-81.
\textsuperscript{73} Paschimbhag CPI of Śricandradeva, year 5, \textit{Ibid.}, pp.63-69.
\textsuperscript{74} \textit{EI}, 26, pp.313-318, p.317.
\textsuperscript{75} \textit{CII}, vol.3 (rev.), p.213, l.22.
inscription. Both in Samatata and neighbouring sub-regions, the existence of such kingship and their further complexity with the appearance of more elaborate hierarchy of rulers are attested within the next three centuries. From the tenth century to the third decade of the thirteenth century, this sub-region was ruled by kingship which had Vanga as their stronghold, that is, the Candras and the Senas.

One tendency which characterises these sub-regions of the eastern fringe is their marginality and unreclaimed condition. Such a character is shown by the cases of large scale grants to a group of brahmans or religious organisation in forest region. These cases recorded in copper plate inscriptions indicate the ongoing process of reclamation and agricultural expansion, which would be further intensified in the following period. Another characteristic is the strong presence of Buddhism attested by the existence of the large scale Buddhist complex around Lalmai hill.

There are two sections of Bengal which are not covered by any of the sub-regions discussed above. They are the area from the Ganga south to the Sundarbans contained in the present Kushtia, Jessore and Khulna districts, and the tract stretches from the northern part of the Dakha district up to the Meghalaya plateau, which includes the Madhupur jungle area as well as the low marshy lands lying at the foot of the western part of the plateau. As was discussed by Morrison, no copper plate inscriptions were recovered from these tracts. The existence of these tracts creates the uncertainty of the borders of Vanga. It is possible that as land tracts with dense forest and

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76 *SI*, 1, 340-45.
78 Appendix 4 Table 1 to 3.
79 *Infra*, pp.139-141.
80 For the agricultural expansion and Islamisation in East Bengal, see Eaton, op. cit., especially pp.194-227.
82 Morrison, ‘Region and Subregion in Pre-Muslim Bengal’, p.5.
marshy lands, these tracts were not reclaimed and settled by the sedentary agricultural society, whose landscape was recorded in the textual sources.

Those sub-regions have kept interactions, while they had their own characteristics. One element is the political expansion of sub-regional powers. Pālas, who based their power on Puḍravardhana, extended their rule to Rādha in the early phase. Candras, who started as rulers of Candradvīpa, expanded their territory to the whole of Vaṅga and then Samataṭa. Senas, who migrated from Kārnāṭa and became subordinate rulers in a part of Rādha, spread their power over Vaṅga and Puḍravardhana, with their centre shifted to Vikramapura in Vaṅga.

The traffic between those sub-regions can be easily supposed as they are mostly located in the low land without obstacles, and rivers dividing them were navigable and might have functioned as waterways. The itinerary of Hsuan-chang, a Chinese Buddhist monk who visited South Asia in the first half of the seventh century, offers a glimpse of such traffics. From Kajaṅgala, present Rajmahal, he first travelled to Puḍravardhana. Then he proceeded to Kāmarūpa, present Assam, and went south to Samataṭa, according to his account edited by Pien-chi. According to his biography written by Hui-li and Yan-zong, he travelled from Puḍravardhana to Karnasuvarna, then to Samataṭa. From Samataṭa, he travelled to Tāmrālipi in both versions. Then he reached Karnasuvarna according to the former. Though these accounts contain discrepancies and confusions, they allude to the existence of following routes as a whole: the first route running from Kajaṅgala to Kāmarūpa through Puḍravardhana; the second

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84 S. Beal (tr.), *The Life of Hiuen-Tsiang by the Shaman Hwui Li* (2nd ed.), New Delhi, 1973 (Reprint), pp.131-132.
route which goes from Pundravardhana to Tamralipti via Karṇasuvārṇa, probably along the river Bhagirathi; the third route connecting Assam with south-east Bengal, probably through Brahmaputra; the fourth route which runs between Karṇasuvārṇa and Samatāta, probably along the Padma channel; and the fifth route passing through coastal Bengal, which linked south-east and south-west Bengal. In terms of sub-regions discussed above, the fifth route is the one which connects Samatāta and Daksīna Rādha or Suhma through lower Vaṅga.

As it is unimaginable that he travelled unbeaten tracks, one may assume the existence of traffics connecting these sub-regions, most probably for trade. Such traffics went beyond Bengal and connected it with the neighbouring regions, as I will discuss in the next section.

3. Interactions with Neighbouring Regions

As is discussed above, Bengal is open to neighbouring regions through several channels. Some of them are land and river routes provided by the flows of great rivers like Ganga and Brahmaputra, narrow passes cutting across hill ranges and coast lines on the shore of the Bay of Bengal. On the other hand, sea lane facilitated the traffics not only to neighbouring regions, but also to and from regions further south and south-east.

The regions corresponding to present Bihar, especially Magadha, has had close relation with Bengal, as is discussed above. The main route of traffics between Bihar and Bengal goes along Ganga and passes Rajamahal hill. This route was taken by Fa-hien and Hsuan-chang, when they travelled from Campā to Tāmralipti, and Campā to Pundravardhana through Kajaṅgala respectively. The former may have taken the route along with

Ganga and then Bhagirathi. It may indicate the existence of a trade route along Ganga and its channel through which Bihar and the regions far up the stream were connected with the sea ports located in Rādha and with larger seaborne trade networks. This route may also have been taken by the merchant Udayamana and his brothers who were said to have been to Tamralipti from Ayodhyā for trade, according to the Dudhpani Rock Inscription belonging to the eighth century. Apart from trade, this route may have facilitated the military expedition from both sides. Śaśāṅka and Dharmapāla, both of whom got involved with struggle surrounding Kānyakubja, may have taken this route if we consider that their centres were located respectively on the banks of Bhagirathi and Ganga. Vijayasena also made naval expedition along the course of Ganga, according to his Deopara inscription. On the other hand, the political powers based in Bihar and upper Ganga basin, like Later Guptas and Harṣavardhana, used this route for their expedition to Bengal.

Another route which connected Bihar and Bengal was one which passed through Chotanagpur hills and the forest of Hazaribagh. I-ching took this route on his way from Tamralipti to Rājagrha and then on his way back from Nālandā to Tamralipti. On his way, he joined a group of several hundred merchants and around twenty residential monks of Nālandā. This fact may show that this route was frequented by merchants for their trade, while it facilitates the network between Buddhist monasteries in Magadha and Rādha. I-ching also narrates his encounter with a band of brigands on

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88 EL, 2, pp.343-347.
91 Ibid.
92 As to the network of Buddhist monasteries, see Infra, pp.155-156.
this steep hilly route. He was robbed again on his way back from Nālandā to Tāmralipti. The presence of brigands is an evidence of the brisk trade and traffic through this route, as absence of them may not afford any incentive for those brigands.

The political relation between powers in Bengal and Assam was rather hostile. In the seventh century, Śaśānka, the king of Gauḍa, and Bhauma-Varman kings of Kāmarūpa had protracted conflict, which finally culminated in temporary occupation of Karnasuvrana by Bhāskaravarman. The Mlecchas or Sālastambhas, who ruled Kāmarūpa from the middle of the seventh century to the end of ninth century, had struggle with Pālas of Bengal. The Pālas of Assam engaged in wars with both the Pālas and the Candras of Bengal from the tenth to twelfth century.

The main route which facilitated traffics between Bengal and Assam might have been the one which passed over Karatoya River and connected the cities of Pundravardhana and Prāgyotīṣa. Hsuăn-chang might have taken this route as is mentioned above. It may also be the route which Bhāskaravarman passed to join Harṣavardhana’s camp at Kajailgala with his fleet and elephants. Military engagement between the powers in Kāmarūpa on the one hand, and powers in Gauḍa and Puṇḍravardhana on the other hand, may also have been enacted by this route. This route is further connected with Tibet. According to the Tabakāt-i-Nāsiri of Minhāj, Muhammad Bakhtiyār Khalji made his ill-fated expedition to Tibet by the route from Lakhnawatī through Kāmrūd (i.e. Kāmarūpa). Minhāj also

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93 Adachi, op. cit.; Lahiri, op. cit.
94 Adachi, op. cit., p.140; Lahiri, op. cit., pp.82-83.
96 Ibid., p.138.
97 Ibid., pp.144, 147, 161-165.
98 Beal, Life of Hiuen-Tsiang, p.172.
mentions horses sold in Lakhnawati imported by the mountainous passes through Kāmrūd and Tirhut.\textsuperscript{100}

Another route connects Kāmarūpa with Samatāta. This route is mentioned in the account of Hsuan-chang.\textsuperscript{101} It probably went along with Brahmaputra River. Apart from this, there might have been the route which connected Samatāta with the hilly area of Assam. In his \textit{Kitāb al-Masālik wa'l-Mamālik} ('The Book of Roads and Kingdoms') written by A. D. 846-7, Ibn Khurdadhbih, a Persian geographer living in Iraq, stated that aloes-wood was brought from Kāmarūn (i.e. Kāmarūpa) through fifteen to twenty days' river journey to Samundar, a port in coastal Bengal.\textsuperscript{102} Though the location of Samundar has not yet seen the agreement of scholars,\textsuperscript{103} the river mentioned here is identifiable with Meghna River and accordingly Samundar may be located around Meghna estuary. Ibn Battūta, who visited Bengal in 1346 A. D., travelled from Chittagong to mountains of Kāmarū (Kāmarūpa), probably indicating the area around the present Sylhet, and went back to Sonargaon through the river identifiable with Meghna.\textsuperscript{104} He mentioned innumerable boats commuting on this river route.\textsuperscript{105} These descriptions show the thriving condition of trade activities between Assam and Samatāta.

The interaction between Bengal and Orissa was facilitated by the pass along the coast line of the present Baleswar district. This border land

\textsuperscript{100} \textit{Ibid.}, pp.567-568.
\textsuperscript{101} Beal, \textit{Buddhist Records}, pt.2, p.199.
\textsuperscript{102} S. Maqbul Ahmad (tr.), \textit{Arabic Classical Accounts of India and China}, Shimla, 1989, 13, p.5.
\textsuperscript{103} As to these opinions, see S. H. Jahan, ‘Samandar: An Important Centre for Maritime Activities in Bengal’, \textit{JBA}, 5, 2000, pp.223-243. Her opinion mainly based on geographical and satellite data is not convincing either.
\textsuperscript{105} \textit{Ibid.}, p.241.

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was under the control of political powers which kept Danda-bhukti under their jurisdiction like Gopacandra, Šaśānka and the Kambojas. Through this channel, Šaśānka might have extended his political influence to Kōngoda, the coastal area of South Orissa, as is shown by the Ganjam copper plate inscription of the Śailodbhava king Mādhavārāja, in which his suzerainty is acknowledged. This route was taken by the kings of Orissa like the Eastern Gangas of Kālīṅga, and even by the kings of South India like Rājendra Cola and Viṅkaraṇīdītya VI of the Western Cālkyas for their military expedition to Bengal.

The interaction between Bengal and Orissa through this route was not limited to military expeditions. Hsuan-chang took this way to travel from Tamralipti to Odra, then further to Kōngoda and Kālīṅga. This route may have been frequented by other travellers like traders.

The last region to mention for its interaction with Bengal is Burma. They are connected by several routes passing through mountainous ranges, which further lead to the south-eastern frontier of China. Apart from them, coast line of Chittagong may also contribute to this interaction.

The existence of interaction between the political authorities of both sides is indicated by the use of Burma era in the metal vase inscription of Devātideva belonging to the eighth century Harikela and the mention of

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106 Jayarampur CPI of the time of Gopacandra, year 1, IO, pp.174-179; Medinipur CPI of Šubhakirtti, year 8, Medinipur CPI of Somadatta, year 19, JRASBL, 11, p.19-9; Irdā CPI of Nayapāladeva, year 13, EI, 22, pp.150-159; Kalanda CPI of Nayapāladeva, year 14, EI, 41, pp.199-205.
107 EI, 6, p.144, ll.1-3.
109 Bhattacharyya, op. cit., p.105.
110 Beal, Buddhist Records, pt.2, pp.204-207; idem, Life of Hiuen-Tsiang, p.134.
people with a peculiar name ending ‘eba’, which is characteristic of Burmese
names, in the Mainamati CPI of Harikaladeva, dated SE 1141, that is, A. D.
1220. It is also possible that the Candras of south-eastern Bengal were
associated with the Candras of Arakan. All these cases indicate a close
connection between Arakan on one side and Samatata and Harikela on the
other side.

Their connection in terms of economy is attested by a series of small
silver coins with high purity found in south-eastern Bengal, which circulated
mainly in Harikela and Samatata from the seventh to the thirteenth
century. Early specimens of these Harikela coins are typologically and
metrologically related to the coins of the Candra dynasty of Arakan, and
might have been acceptable in Arakan region too. Circulation of such
currencies may be prompted by the close economic relation between those
regions. The connection between Samatata and kingdoms located in the
coastal areas of present Burma, like Śrīkṣetra, Kāmalāṅkā and Dvāravatī, is
alluded to by Hsuan-chang, though he did not visit these places and
depended on hearsay.

The Bay of Bengal, which acted as southern limit of Bengal,
facilitated far-reaching sea-borne connections between this region and wider
areas. On the one hand, it connected Bengal with coastal Orissa and Burma
through littoral routes. On the other hand, it tied Bengal with the vast trade
network which covered ports on the coasts of South India, Śrīhala and South

*Essays on Buddhist Hindu Jain Iconography and Epigraphy (Studies in
Bengal Art Series no.1)*, Dhaka, 2000, pp.471-480.

113 *IHQ*, 9, pp.282-289.

114 Chowdhury, op. cit., pp.162-165.

115 B. N. Mukherjee, ‘A Survey of the Samatata and Harikela Coinages’, *JBA*,
8, 2003, pp.199-212.


pp.132-133.
East Asia.

The most important port from the earliest time to the eighth century is Tāmralipta in Suhma or Daksīṇa-Rādha. As is mentioned above, this port was connected with regions of Mid-Ganga plain through the river Ganga and its Bhagirathi channel. The thriving condition of the trade between Tāmralipta and Simhala in the fifth century, further stretching to islands of South East Asia, is attested by the account of Fa-hien. He embarked on a large merchant-vessel at this port and went to Simhala.\(^{118}\) After staying there for two years, he took another merchant-vessel and reached Java.\(^{119}\) The continuance of the route between Tāmralipta and Simhala in the seventh century is confirmed by its mention in the biography of Hsuan-chang.\(^{120}\) It is also endorsed by the itinerary of the Chinese monk Ta-ch'êng-têng, whose biography is included in the biographies of Chinese monks compiled by I-ching.\(^{121}\) His encounter with pirates in the estuary nearby the port may also indicate brisk trade around the port, which attracted them.

Another route connecting Tāmralipta with South East Asia was the one which linked this port with Kedah, the port city facing Malacca strait on the side of Sumatra Island, via Andaman-Nicobar Islands. I-ching travelled by this route and kept a minute account of transactions between the merchants and the islanders.\(^{122}\)

While Tāmralipta kept its position as a major port, the rise of another port and its involvement with the trade network in the Bay of Bengal was witnessed in the seventh century. Two of the Chinese monks, whose biographies were included in I-ching's account, disembarked at Harikela. Among them, T'ang-kuang travelled from China to Harikela through South

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\(^{118}\) Legge, op. cit., p.100.

\(^{119}\) Ibid., pp.111-113.

\(^{120}\) Beal, *Life of Hiuen-Tsiang*, p.133.

\(^{121}\) Adachi, op. cit., p.78, Lahiri, op. cit., p.41.

\(^{122}\) Adachi, op. cit., p.139, Lahiri, op. cit., pp.78-79.
East Asia, though his itinerary was not minutely recorded.\textsuperscript{123} Another monk Wu-hsing travelled from Kedah to Nāgapattinam, Simhala, and then Harikela.\textsuperscript{124} The itinerary of the latter shows the involvement of Harikela with the commercial network connecting East Bengal with South India and Simhala. Though it is not clear which port is mentioned as Harikela in these accounts of the journey of Chinese monks, the rising importance of this sub-region for trade network in the Bay of Bengal is attested by the account of Sulaymān and other Arab merchants compiled in A. D. 851, in which the Bay is called ‘Sea of Harkandh.’\textsuperscript{125} The shift of trade centres towards east Bengal is also attested by the mention of Samundar on Meghna estuary as a trade centre in another account of Arab geographer,\textsuperscript{126} or mentions of Sudkāwān (Chittagong) and Sunurkāwān (Sonargaon) by Ibn Battūta.\textsuperscript{127} The latter travelled to Chittagong from Maldive Islands and embarked on the ship to Java at Sonargaon in 1346 A. D.\textsuperscript{128}

What should be noticed here is that this network, with which Bengal was involved, was linked to the wider commercial network which covered the whole of Indian Ocean and connected the Mediterranean world, Middle East and Ethiopia on the west, and South East Asia and southern China on the east. The trade network with the ‘West’ is recorded in the classical accounts in Greek, especially in works like the \textit{Periplus Mari\ae Erythraei}, which belongs to the second half of the first century.\textsuperscript{129} This text clearly shows the

\textsuperscript{123} Adachi, op. cit., p.123, Lahiri, op. cit., p.70. Lahiri misunderstood this portion and interpreted that T'ang-kuang first arrived at West India.
\textsuperscript{124} Adachi, op. cit., p.174, Lahiri, op. cit., pp.94-95
\textsuperscript{125} \textit{Akhbār Al-Šin wa'l-Hind} ('An Account of China and India') in Maqbul Ahmad, op. cit., pp.34-35, 38.
\textsuperscript{126} \textit{Kitāb al-Masālik wa'l-Mammālik} in \textit{Ibid.}, p.5.
\textsuperscript{127} M. Husain, op. cit., pp.235-236, 241.
\textsuperscript{128} \textit{Ibid.}, Introduction, pp. lxix-lxx.
\textsuperscript{129} W. H. Schoff (tr.), \textit{The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea: Travel and Trade in the Indian Ocean by a Merchant of the First Century}, New Delhi. 2001 (reprint).
fact that the port called Ganges at the estuary of the river Ganga, which may be located somewhere in the coastal West Bengal, was well-embedded in the trade network which connected the Roman Empire with South Asia.\textsuperscript{130} This trade network was maintained by various participants like Persian merchants even after the decline of the Roman Empire.\textsuperscript{131} The active role played by the Arab merchants in this trade network in the later period is obvious in their accounts cited above.\textsuperscript{132} The trade network with South East Asia and southern China is also attested by the accounts of journeys of Chinese Buddhist Monks.

In the discussion made above, I tried to make a general delineation of the geographical character of Bengal, its sub-regions and their interactions with each other and with the neighbouring regions. Now I would like to proceed to my main discussions.

\textsuperscript{130} Ibid., 63, p.47; Bhattacharyya, op. cit., pp.36-40.
\textsuperscript{132} Maqbul Ahmad, op. cit.