Chapter 3
Organisation of Rural Social Networks and Their Interactions with Political Authorities: c. A. D. 400-550

Though we know the existence of sedentary agricultural society in Bengal even in proto-historical period from the archaeological data of sites in West Bengal\(^1\) and have the epigraphic reference to an urban centre and agricultural communities belonging to the third century B. C. from North Bengal,\(^2\) it is only after the beginning of the fifth century that some aspects of the rural social networks in Bengal became accessible for somewhat minute scrutiny, thanks to the commencement of the issue of copper plate grants.

Among those copper plate inscriptions, most of the early inscriptions belonging to the period between the first half of the fourth century and the middle of the seventh century were issued by local bodies in contrast to ones belonging to the later period, which were exclusively issued by kingship. In these inscriptions, the procedures related to land purchases and donations are minutely recorded and they are characterised by the involvement of individuals and social groups in each locality who have their own interests and stakes. The most conspicuous point of the procedure is the participation in the process of decision making by at least dominant section of the local society through the organisation called adhikarana. Such activities presuppose the existence of a local social network through which local people gather and decide important matters related to themselves. This network may also have been, as delineated from the information contained in the

copper plate inscriptions, the arena in which they interacted with political authorities. On the other hand, we can recognise dominance and subordination among local social groups and the possible conflict over authority or even clash of interests among them in these processes. First of all, such aspects of rural social networks gleaned from these inscriptions will be discussed. As is supposed easily, there are historical changes in this aspect of rural social networks. In this chapter, I deal with the first phase of this process through the analysis of the copperplate inscriptions belonging to the period from 432 to 543 A.D. Most of them, eleven among twelve, are associated with Pundravardhana, North Bengal. First to analyse is the procedure and the combination of the people involved in each case as a preliminary.

1. Procedures and People Involved

The basic pattern of procedure mentioned in these copper plates is as follows. An *adhikarana* which literally means 'office' and connotes an office of local administration at a certain level of the administrative hierarchy in these cases, or local people associated with it, are approached by an individual petitioner or a group of them. The petitioners ask them to give a certain stretch of fallow land (*khila-kṣetra*) with perpetual revenue-free status against the payment of certain amount of money, counted in *dināra* or *rūpaka*, for donation to a *brāhmaṇa* or any other religious agents, or for their own subsistence in case the petitioners themselves are *brāhmaṇas*. The *adhikarana* or the local body refers this petition to *pustapālas* (record keepers) and they verify whether the petition conforms to the local custom.

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3 *Dināra* is a unit of gold coins and *rūpaka* is a unit of silver coins in the Gupta period. According to the evidence of Baigram CPI, one *dināra* is equivalent to sixteen *rūpakas*. *SI*, 1, pp.355-359. For currencies mentioned in inscriptions from Bengal, see B. D. Chattopadhyaya, 'Currency in Early Bengal', *JIH*, 55, 3, 1977, pp.41-60.
and confirm the validity of the petition. With their verification, the *adhikarana* or the local body gives, or asks residents of the locality to measure, divide and give the land to the petitioners. Then the latter gives it to the donee. The *adhikarana* or the local body asks present and future administrators and others to protect this donated land. There is difference according to each case and it needs minute scrutiny for it can indicate difference of social settings in each locality. I would like to examine the procedure of each case and indicate possible interpretation before discussing the implication brought out through corroboration of them.

The oldest copper plate inscription so far found in Bengal is the Dhanaidaha copper plate inscription of GE 113. The issuing authority and address are not legible due to corrosion of the plate, though the former may be the *grām-āstakul-ādhikarana* according to the context. Though some parts of the inscription are damaged and not clear, the following procedure is deducible from intelligible parts: the *grām-āstakul-ādhikarana*, constituted by eighteen *kutumbins* including two *brāhmaṇas*, two *mahattaras* and fourteen *goṣṭhakas* was requested by an *āyuktaka*, the latter part of whose name was Viṣṇu, to give him a certain land according to the custom prevalent in Khadāpāra-viṣaya with unbreakable *nivi-dharma* (ll.3-8). Whether he offered some amount of money as in other cases is not clear. Receiving his petition, the *adhikarana* may have consulted or referred to the neighbouring *kutumbins* cultivating land. The latter seems to have come

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5 *Goṣṭhaka* can be the same as *goṣṭhika*, meaning 'member of a committee or assembly' (Sircar, *IEG*, p.119) or a proper name. As to names of members of this *adhikarana*, see Appendix 3 Table 1.
6 *Nivi-dharma* or *aṅśaya-nivi* may mean tenure with perpetual enjoyment of the land without power to alienate it by sale, mortgage or otherwise. C. Gupta, "‘Khila-kṣetras’ in Early Bengal Inscriptions", D. Mitra, G. Bhattacharya (eds.), *Studies in Art and Archaeology of Bihar and Bengal: Dr. N. K. Bhattasali Centenary Volume*, Delhi, 1989, pp.271-283, p.273. The bracketed number indicates relevant lines of each inscription concerned.
together, agreed with his petition, measured one *kulyavāpa* of land and
given it to him (ll.9-11). Finally, the petitioner donated the land to *brāhmaṇa*
Varāhasvāmin, who may have been the resident of another village (ll.11-12).
At the end, it seems to mention Śribhadra as a writer and Sthambeśvara as
an engraver of the inscription (l.17).

In this transaction, the authority of *adhikaraṇa* and its members on
this specific local matter is shown by the fact that even the *āvuktaka*, which
literally means 'appointed' and may connote officer or administrator of a
certain rank, needed to make petition to them. The relative superiority of
members of the *adhikaraṇa* over other *kutumbins* is indicated by the fact
that the former got compliance of the latter, while the latter may still have
kept some power which made the former to seek their agreement and secure
the latter the right to measure and divide the land. It may connote the
difference among local *kutumbins* and even some form of friction between
their dominant section and others over the authority. As to the petitioner,
there is no mention of his purpose for or involvement with the land.
Conspicuously, there is no mention of the arrangement for cultivation. It is
possible that the petitioner got some right over management of the land and
its yield as the donee was a *brāhmaṇa* who stayed outside and may have
needed some arrangement to get the donated land cultivated. In this matter,
some section of *kutumbins* may have got involved with this land though we
have no way to guess whether this involvement brought profit or burden on
them. Śribhadra may or may not be the same as his namesake mentioned as
one of the *kutumbins* in this inscription.

The second record to mention is the Kalaikuri-Sultanpur copper
plate inscription of GE 120.7 It is issued by *āvuktaka* Acyutadāsa and the
*adhikaraṇa* of Śrīgavera-vīthi from Pūrṇakauśikā and addressed to
*grāma-kutumbins* beginning with *brāhmaṇas* in the villages of

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Hastiśirasvibhitaki, Gulmagandhakā, Dhānyapātalikā, and Samgohālis (ll.1·2). The procedure mentioned is as follows: 'we', probably indicating the *adhikarana*, accompanied by (*puroga*) the named eight *mahattaras* and seventy nine *kutumbins* of the *vithi*,\(^8\) were informed by petitioners consisting of *vithi-kulika* Bhima, seven *kāyasthas* and *pustapālas* Sīhanandin and Yasodāman of their wish to purchase nine *kuṭyavapas* of fallow land according to the custom of *vithi* for the sale of one *kuṭyavāpa* of fallow land without revenue yield by two *dināras* with *aṅkṣaya-nivi* tenure, and to donate them to three *brāhmaṇas* living in Puḍravardhana (ll.3·17). Then the aforementioned *pustapālas* verified that the petition conformed to the local custom (ll.17·19) and the *adhikaraṇa* collected eighteen *dināras* from the petitioners and assigned plots in those villages and donated them to the *brāhmaṇas* (ll.19·27). It required present and future *viṣayapatis*, *āyuktakas*, *kuṭumbins*, *adhikaranikas* and *samvyavahārins* to protect this donation (ll.27·29).

In this transaction, the collective activity of petitioners is conspicuous and indicates existence of horizontal interaction and shared interest among such social groups like artisans, scribes and record keepers. The fact that the same record keepers acted at the same time as petitioners and as verifiers indicates that the petitioners may have been sure about acceptance of their petition beforehand or even they could arbitrarily lead the procedure to their favour. In any case, they still needed the formality to be completed and it shows authority of the *adhikarana* in this matter. As to the *adhikarana*, the enormous number of its members is conspicuous. The donees may have got these lands in villages as far as about 86 km from their residence, if we interpret Puḍravardhana mentioned here as the city of the same name identified with present Mahasthan in Bogra district, accept the

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\(^8\) There is difference of opinion among editors of the inscription about the number of names mentioned according to how they divide names. As to my interpretation, see Appendix 3 Table 2.
identification of Vātā·nadi mentioned in this inscription with present Barnai river,⁹ and take Jagadishpur, the find spot of another inscription which pertains to the same locality, and its environs as the area associated with both the inscriptions.¹⁰ Those brāhmaṇas may have needed local agents to receive yield from those land plots. It is possible that these petitioners had some involvement with this arrangement though there is conspicuously no mention of such an arrangement.

The third is the Damodarpur copper plate inscription of GE 124.¹¹ The time of event is referred to as the reign of mahārājādiraja Kumāragupta (I), when Pundravardhana·bhukti is governed by uparika Cirātadatta appointed by him, and kumārāmātya Vetravarman, appointed by Cirātadatta, accompanied by nagaraśreṣṭhin (leader of the city or banker merchant) Dhṛtipāla, sārthavāha (trader) Vandhumitra, prathamā·kulika (foremost artisan) Dhṛtimitra and prathamā·kāyastha (foremost scribe) Śambapāla, was managing the adhīśṭhān·adhikarana (city office) in Kotivarsa·viśaya (ll.1-6). There is no mention of the issuing authority and address, though the former may be the adhīśṭhān·adhikarana according to the context. The procedure described is as follows: the adhikarana was approached by brāhmaṇa Karppaṭika (ll.6-7). He asked it to give him one kulavāpa of unyielding uncultivated fallow land in exchange for three dināras, with the status of perpetual enjoyment and nivi·dharma tenure, for his performance of Agnihotra ritual (ll.7-9). Accepting his money, the adhikarana gave the land in village Doṅgā with the verification of pustapāla Riśidatta, Jayanandin and Vibhudatta (ll.9-11).

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⁹ SI, 1, p.354, note 3.
This procedure shows the authority of leaders of urban communities even over matters in some part of rural area. As to the petitioner, he could gain the right of perpetual enjoyment over some land by the payment of money. As his purpose was gaining provision for daily ritual like Agnihotra, he may have settled in the village, to which the donated land belonged.

The fourth inscription, the Damodarpur copper plate inscription of GE 128, is similar to the one just mentioned above in form and content. The time of the incident is described in the same manner (ll.1·5). The adhisthān-adhikarana of Kotivarśa-visaya, constituted by the same members, was asked by a brāhmaṇa, whose name is illegible, to give him land according to the custom of aksaya-nividharma for his performance of five daily rituals (Pancamahāyajña) (ll.5·7). With the verification by pustapālas, who may also have been the same with the grant of GE 124, the adhikarana accepted two dināras from him according to the prevalent rate of three dināras for a kulyavāpa (ll.7·9), and gave him five dronas of land accompanied with haṭṭa (market) and pānakas (drinking place for cattle) at Airavatagorajya (ll.9·10). It is said that this donation should be assented by future samvyavahārins (ll.10·11). This transaction may have had much influence on local population as the petitioner got control over markets and drinking place for cattle apart from fallow land.

The fifth is the Baigam copper plate inscription of GE 128. It is issued from Pañcanagarī by kumāramātya Kulavrddhi, appointed by the lord (bhattāraka), and visay-ādhikarana, and announced to grāma-kutumbins headed by samvyavahārin and accompanied with brāhmaṇas at Trivrā and Śrigohāli, both of which belong to Vaiy-grāma (ll.1·3). The procedure mentioned is as follows: the adhikaraṇa was informed by the local kutumbins Bhojila and Bhāskara that the temple of Bhagavat

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13 EI, 21, pp.78·83, SI, 1, pp.355·359.
Govindasvāmin, which was built by their father Śivanandin, had meagre subsistence (ll.3-4). Mentioning that sale of one kulyavāpa of fallow land by two dināras with aksaya-nīvi tenure for perpetual enjoyment was followed in the visaya, whose name may also be Pañcanagari (ll.4-6), they asked the adhikarana to give three kulyavāpas of fallow land in Trivrta and one dronavāpa of artificially raised homestead land (sthala-vāstu) for house and garden (tala-vātaka) in Śrigohāli to Bhojila, and another dronavāpa of raised homestead land in the same hamlet to Bhāskara for the repair of the torn and opened parts and offerings of incense, sandal paste, lamp and flower at the temple, by accepting six dināras and eight rūpakas as income (ll.6-10). With the verification by pustapālas Durggādatta and Arkkadāsa that the sales of land according to the aforesaid custom were prevalent in the visaya, and there would be no obstacle to the king’s profit, but the acquisition of one sixth of the merit for him in such cases (ll.10-13), the adhikarana accepted the money from petitioners and gave them the aforementioned land (ll.13-17). It ordered the addressees, that is, local kuṭumbins, to measure and divide the land with eight by nine nalas fixed by Darvāvikarman’s cubit (hasta) at the place which would not disturb their own cultivation, demarcate four borders with marks like chaff and ash, then give and protect it eternally (ll.18-20). It also invoked present and future samvyavahārins to protect it (ll.20-21).

In this transaction, the petitioners could purchase the rights over land with perpetual tax exemption with the reason of the maintenance of the temple. As the temple was built by their father, they may have taken part in its management and got practical control over the acquired land. The

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14 This temple was identified with a structure excavated in Baigram, the find spot of the inscription. R. C. Majumdar (ed.), History of Bengal. vol.1: Hindu Period, Patna, 1971 (reprint), pp.511-512; ARASI, 1934-1935, p.42, pl.XIX, b, c, d.

15 Needless to say, the term used here is ‘kāritaka’, meaning ‘caused to make’, though I do not translate literally.
adhikarana wielded authority on the local matter and over local kutumbins, while the latter still kept the right to choose the land, which would not disturb their own cultivation.

The sixth inscription, the Jagadishpur copper plate inscription of GE 128, is related to the same locality mentioned in the Kalaikuri·Sultanpur plate.16 This inscription is also issued by āyuktaka Acyuta and adhikarana of Śṛṅgavera-vīthi from Pūrṇākausākā and addressed to prominent (pradhāna) kutumbins beginning with brāhmaṇas in Gulmagandhika and Samgohālika, both of which are also mentioned in the Kalaikuri·Sultanpur plate (ll.1·3). The procedure mentioned is as follows: 'we', which may indicate adhikarana, accompanied by the named four mahattaras and twenty eight kutumbins, among whom twenty four were also mentioned in the Kalailuri·Sultanpur plate,17 were approached by three kutumbins Kṣemāka, a resident of Mūlakavastukā, Bhojila and Mahidāsa, residents of Gulmagandhikā (ll.3·8). These petitioners informed their will to purchase and donate one kulyavāpa of fallow land with aksaya-nīvi tenure of perpetual enjoyment, for the performance of bali, caru, sattra, for the repair of the torn and opened parts, and for the use of incense (gandha), sandal paste (dhūpa) and sesame oil (taila) at the vihāra built at Mecikāmra-siddhayatana in Daksinānsaka-vīthi, at the peripheral small vihāra (prānta-vihārikā) for the worship of arhats in Gulmagandhika and finally at the temple of the Sun god (Bhagavat Sahasraśmi) built in Gulmagandhika (ll.8·12). They mentioned that sales of one kulyavāpa of fallow land by two dināras were followed in the vīthi and asked the adhikarana to give the land by accepting two dināras from them (ll.12·14). Then with the verification by pustapālas Simhanandin and Yaśodāman (ll.14·16), the adhikarana accepted the money from petitioners through

16 EDEP, pp.61·63.
17 As to their names, see Appendix 3 Table 2. Needless to say, the division and interpretation of names are my own.
kulika Bhima, and they purchased the land (ll.16·17). Of the land, six dronavāpas were given to śramaṇak-ācārya Balakuṇḍa, while two dronavāpas were given by Bhojila to Sāmbapura, which may indicate the aforementioned temple dedicated to the Sun god (ll.17·18). Of the latter plots, one dronavāpa was the land adjacent to the temple kept for small flower garden and homestead (ll.18·19). The seven dronavāpas of land are located at north-eastern part of Gulmagandhikā and one dronavāpa is at the vicinity of the temple (ll.19·20). The landmarks demarcating borders of the land are described (ll.20·22). Finally, the adhikarana invoked the protection of the donation by future and other visayapatis, āyuktakas, kutumbins, adhikarantikas or samvyavahārins (ll.22·24). At the end of the document, it is mentioned that this document was written by Rudradasa and heated for soldering seal by Susunāha (ll.28·29).18

In this transaction, the petitioners were residents of two different villages and their collective act indicates the interrelation surpassing a single village. As the purpose of donation is maintenance of religious institutions like Buddhist vihāras and the Sun temple, it is possible that donors kept managerial rights over the landed property donated by them. This possibility is suggested by the fact that names of donors who donated each portion of the land were clearly mentioned: the six dronavāpas donated to Balakuṇḍa were said to be of all the three donors', while two dronavāpas were said to be donated to the Sun temple by Bhojila. If they did not have any stake on the donated land, there would be no need to mention it as the petition itself was made in the names of all of them for one kulyavāpa of the land. As to donees, what is conspicuous is that the vihāra, which belonged to Daksinānāsaka-viṭhī, another administrative unit, and located some distance from the donated land, obtained some rights over this land. It may indicate

18 This Rudradasa can be one of the kāyasthas mentioned in the Kalaikuri-Sultanpur inscription. C. Gupta, The Kāyasthas: A Study in the Formation and Early History of a Caste, Calcutta, 1996, p.70.
the making of fiscal connection between two areas. The fact that Balakunda was entrusted with the land on behalf of vihāras belonging to different areas possibly indicates pre-existence of such a connection between two vihāras and their adjacent areas. What is of note is the function of kulika Bhima in this case. He acted as a cashier on behalf of the adhikarana, but was not counted as a member of the adhikarana like pustapālas. It may indicate the dominance of kutumbins over other social groups, while kutumbins themselves might have had inner difference, as is shown by the fact that neither Bhoyila nor Mahidāsa are included in the adhikarana.

The seventh inscription is the Paharpur copper plate inscription of GE 159.19 It is issued from Puṇḍravardhana by āyuktakas20 and the adhīsthān adhikarana accompanied by ārya-nagaraśreṣṭhin, and addressed to kutumbins beginning with mahattaras, accompanied with brāhmaṇas at the four villages of Vatagohāli neighbouring (pālśika) Palāṣaṭṭa, Prṣṭhimapottaka belonging to (prāveśya) Jambudeva, Gośāmapuṣjaka, and Nitvagohāli belonging to Mūlanāgiratta, all of which belong to Nāgiraṭṭa-maṇḍala in Dakṣināmāṣaka-vīthi (ll.1·3). The adhikarana was notified by brāhmaṇa Nāthaśārman and his wife Rāmi. Mentioning that sales of one kulyavāpa of fallow land and homestead which would not yield tax by two dināras with akṣaya-nīvi tenure of perpetual enjoyment are practised at the adhikarana (ll.4·5), the couple asked it to give them, by accepting three dināras, one and a half kulyavāpas of land scattered around those villages, for the worship of Arhats and as homestead at the vihāra resided by Jaina (Nigrantha) śraman-ācārya Guhanandin of Pañcaastūpa school from Kāśi, his disciples and disciples’ disciples in Vatagohāli (ll.5·9). Then it was verified by prathama-pustapāla Divākaranandin and seven other pustapālas, with the repetitive mention of the petition, that there was no obstacle but increase of

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19 EI, 20, pp.59·64, SI, 1, pp.359·363.
20 They are mentioned in plural form as ‘āyuktakā’ and Sircar infers existence of plural āyuktakas at Puṇḍravardhana. SI, 1, p.359, note 6.
profit (artha) and acquisition of the sixth part of merit (dharma) for the king (ll.9·17). With this procedure of verification, the adhikarana accepted the money from the couple and gave them land for the use in the way mentioned above (ll.17·19). Then the adhikarana ordered addressees, that is, kutumbins to divide the land by six nala labelled dharma and give it at the place, where there was no obstacle to their own cultivation, and to protect it perpetually (ll.19·20).

In this procedure, it is clearly mentioned that the land was given to petitioners for the use specified by them, that is, maintenance of worship at the Jaina vihara and homestead for it. It indicates that they got some rights over cultivable parts of the donated land, from whose yield some portions were supposed to be diverted and used for the aforementioned purpose.

The eighth is the Damodarpur copper plate inscription of GE 163.21 The time of event is referred to as the reign of mahārāja Budhagupta, when uparika mahārāja Brahmadatta, appointed by him, is managing in Pundravardhana-bhukti (ll.1·2). It is issued from Palasavinda, by the aṣṭakul-ahdikarana, beginning with mahattaras, and grāmika-kutumbins, and addressed to brāhmaṇas, adhyakṣas and kṣudraprakṛti-kutumbins of Canda-grāma (ll.2·4). The procedure mentioned is as follows: the adhikarana and grāmika-kutumbins were informed by grāmika Nabhaka of his hope to settle brāhmaṇas and asked to give him fallow land by accepting his money according to the custom about sales followed in the village (grāṃ-ānukrama- vikraya-māryyādā) (ll.4·6). Then it was verified and decided by pustapāla Patradāsa that for the increase of merit of the king, the land should be given to the petitioner, because the case conformed to the custom (ll.6·7). With one more verification by Patradāsa (ll.7·8), after the adhikarana and grāmika-kutumbins accepted two dināras from Nabhaka, and sthāyapālas Kapila and Śribhadra made it income (āvikṛtya) (ll.8), one kulyavāpa of fallow land

adjacent to Väyi-grāma on the north, with proper borders about south, west and east, was inspected and divided with the standard of eight by nine nalas by *adhikarana-kutumbins* beginning with *mahattaras* and given to Nābhaka after marking borders (ll.8-11). Finally, the *samvyavahārins* were asked to protect it in future (I.11).

In this procedure, three categories of *kutumbins* are mentioned. The first is *adhikarana-kutumbins*, who constitute *aṣṭakul-ādhihikaraṇa* with *mahattaras* and fulfil the duty of inspection and measurement of the land to be donated. The second is *grāmika-kutumbins*, who notify about the donation and act as receivers of petition together with the *adhikarana*. All of them can belong to village Palāśavimdaka. The last is *kṣudraprakṛti-kutumbins* of Caṇḍa-grāma mentioned with *brāhmaṇas* and *adhyakṣas*, all of whom are just notified about donation and have no other role in this procedure. It may indicate difference among *kutumbins* and even dominance and subordination among some sections of them. On the other hand, it may have derived from the hierarchical order between two settlements mentioned here. In any case, the *adhikarana-kutumbins* even act as executor of land measurement and division, and the local *kutumbins* of Caṇḍa-grāma do not have any say in these transactions over the land. As the purpose of the petitioner is to settle *brāhmaṇas*, it would definitely affect the life of the residents. So all the more, the dominance of *adhikarana-kutumbins* over residents of Caṇḍa-grāma is conspicuous. As to the petitioner, he may belong to the second category of *kutumbins* as he is called *grāmika*. It can indicate that the *adhikarana* and *grāmika-kutumbins* dealt with the petition of their brethren and did him favour.

The ninth to mention is the Nandapur copper plate inscription of GE 169.22 Though it was found in Monghyur district of Bihar, phraseology similar to the Baigram inscription and the mention of Darvikarman's cubit

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connote its association with North Bengal. It is issued from agrahāra of Anvila-grāma by the adhikarana, whose members are not mentioned, and addressed to kūtumbins beginning with samvavahārins accompanied by brāhmanas at Jaṅgoyika-grāma (ll.1-2). The procedure recorded is as follows: viṣayapati Chattramaha informed 'us', that is, the adhikarana, that he wanted to purchase and donate four kulyavāpas of fallow land to a brāhmaṇa of Chāndoga school and Kāśyapa gotra, who was agrahārika of Khaṭāpūraṇa belonging to Nanda-vithi (ll.2-4). Citing the custom of 'your' viṣaya, according to which sale of one kulyavāpa of fallow land with akṣaya-nīvi tenure of perpetual enjoyment by two dināras was practised, he asked it to sell four kulyavāpas of fallow land in Jaṅgoyika-grāma, by accepting eight dināras from him (ll.5-7). It was verified by pustapālas Pradyotasinha and Vandhudāsa that the practice was followed in the viṣaya and there would be no obstacle to king's profit but acquisition of the one sixth of merit for him in case of donation (ll.8-11). After accepting money from the petitioner (ll.11-12), the land with Gorakṣita-tāmrpatṭa and Gopāli-bhoga as landmarks of south and west was given to him and the adhikarana ordered the addressees, that is, local kūtumbins, to measure and divide the land with eight by nine nalas fixed by Darvivikarman's cubit at the place which would not disturb the cultivation of kūtumbins, demarcate four borders with marks like chaff and ash, then give and protect it perpetually (ll.12-15). It also asked present and future samvavahārins to protect this donation (ll.16).

In this case, the adhikarana may be placed at viṣaya level, as the custom is mentioned as viṣaya's. There is no clue about its membership except that it may have plural members. It wields authority surpassing administrative officers on local matters over local kūtumbins, as the petitioner, the viṣayapati, who may have been the administrator of different division as he called this viṣaya 'your' viṣaya, needed its consent. The petitioner got a stake in this locality through the procedure. As the donee may have had an agrahāra in another place and acquired new land here, it is
probable that the petitioner was involved with the management of this land.

The tenth is the Damodarpur copper plate, mentioning the reign of Budhagupta. Though the letters indicating the year is illegible, the reference to Budhagupta’s reign places the date of issue between GE 157 and 170. The time of incident is referred to as the reign of mahārājādhirāja Budhagupta, when Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti is governed with enjoyment by uparika mahārāja Jayadatta appointed by him, and āyuktaka Śaṅḍaka appointed by Jayadatta, accompanied by nagaraśreṣṭhin Ribhupāla, sārthavāha Vasumittra, prathama-kulika Varadatta and prathama-kāyastha Viprapāla, is managing the adhīsthān-ādhikarana in Koṭivarṣa-visaya (ll.1-4). There is no mention of issuing authority and address, though the former may be the adhīsthān-ādhikarana of Koṭivarṣa-visaya, as its format is similar to the format of other inscriptions issued by the same authority. The procedure described is as follows: the adhikarana was approached by this śreṣṭhin Ribhupāla (ll.3-5). He first mentioned that he had donated four and seven kulyavāpas of fallow land in Doṅgā-grāma to the deities Kokāmukhavāmin and Śvetavarāhasvāmin, located at the summit of Himavat (ll.5-7). Then he conveyed his desire to construct two temples and two small storehouses (koṭhika) marked by the name of the original two deities nearby the land donated by him (ll.7-8), and asked the adhikarana to give him some kulyavāpas of land accompanying homestead according to the custom of sale (yathā-kraya-māryyādā) (ll.8-9). The pustapālas Viṣṇudatta, Vijayanandin, Sthānunandin verified the donation of eleven kulyavāpas of land made by the petitioner before and his petition to give him homestead to make temples and small storehouses (ll.9-12), and probably they verified that it should be given according to the prevalent custom of sale of one

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24 SI, 1, p.337, l.3. Bhandarkar read the name ‘Bhaṇḍaka’, CII, vol.3 (rev.), p.344, l.3.
kulyavāpa by three dināras (ll.12-13). The land may have been given to him with specification of borders though this portion is partly illegible (ll.13-15). Finally, samvyavahārins are ordered, probably by the adhikarana, to agree with the donation in future (l.15).

In this case, the constitution of members of the adhikarana is the same as the adhisthān-adhikarana of Kotivarṣa mentioned in the Damodarpur inscriptions of GE 124 and 128. What is conspicuous is that the petitioner himself is one of the members and the foremost among them. It may mean that the adhikarana members did favour to their colleague with some formality. On the other hand, it may also indicate the authority of the adhikarana and the protocol observed by them, which even an influential person like Ribhupāla cannot bypass. The act of Ribhupāla gleaned from this case is also interesting. According to Sircar, Kokāmukha was a pilgrimage place (tirtha) located in the eastern part of present Nepal, and Ribhupāla may have been there on pilgrimage and donated a large area of land in his native district to the two deities of the tirtha after his return. Then he made two temples of the same deities and two storehouses nearby the donated area, due to the difficulty to send the income from the land to the tirtha in Nepal. His act shows the possible connection and network between temples of the tirtha in Nepal and its donated land in North Bengal, and further between the former and the temples named after them built in the vicinity of the latter. In both cases, Ribhupāla may have been deeply involved with the management of the land and forwarding of income from it to the temples. Through these acts, he may have got strong presence and influence in the village while he kept his own interest in the urban area.

The eleventh inscription, the Gunaighar copper plate inscription of

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26 Ibid., pp.280·281.
27 Ibid., p.281.
GE 188, has characters quite different from other copper plate grants belonging to this period.\(^{28}\) First, it belongs to Samatata which has different environmental background from Pundravardhana, to which all the other inscriptions of this period belong. Second, it is a royal grant issued by mahārāja Vainyagupta, a local king.\(^{29}\) It is issued by him from his military camp (jayaskandhāvāra) Kripura and addressed to his subordinates (svapādopajīvin, literally 'ones depending on (my) own feet') (ll.1-2).\(^{30}\) The case recorded is as follows: Vainyagupta received a petition from mahārāja Rudradatta, his subordinate ((a)smat-pāda-dāsa) (ll.2-3). The latter was building a vihāra as the abode of Āryāvalokiteśvara in the name of ācārya Sāntideva, a Buddhist bhikṣu of Mahāyāna at Gopa-digbhāga (ll.3-4). To the Buddhist samghas of Mahāyāna Avaivarttika order at this vihāra established by the aforementioned ācārya, eleven pātakas of fallow land was given by Vainyagupta in five parts with a copper plate and status as agrahāra, enjoyment in perfect condition, at Kantejadaka-grāma belonging to Uttara-maṇḍala for the continual offering of incense, flower, lamp, sandal paste and others three times a day to Bhagavat Buddha at the abode, for the enjoyment by samgha of cloth, food, bedding, seat, preparation for disease,\(^{31}\) medicine and so on, and for repairing torn and opened part at the vihāra (ll.4-8). Then this order for the donation of the land was conveyed by

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\(^{28}\) IHQ, 6, pp.45-60; SI, 1, pp.340-345.

\(^{29}\) Though he is often identified with the Gupta king of his namesake, the fact that his title is mahārāja, not mahārājādhirāja, the emblem of his seal is Bull, not Garuḍa, and he is a devotee of Mahādeva, not a Bhāgavata, indicates rather he is a local king who has allegiance to Guptas and uses Gupta era.

\(^{30}\) Before it, there are illegible eight letters (l.2). There may be some more address here and Sircar speculates it to be 'brāhmaṇ-ādin=kuṭumbinah' or 'samavetān=kuṭumbinab'. SI, 1, p.341, note 5

\(^{31}\) 'Preparation for disease' (glāna-pratyāya) may mean a cloth kept for defraying the cost of medicine, mentioned by I-ching. J. Takakusu (tr.) A Record of the Buddhist Religion as Practised in India and the Malay Archipelago (AD 671-695) by I-tsing, New Delhi, 1998 (Reprint), p.55.
messenger (dūtaka) Vijayasena, who has titles of mahāpratihāra, mahāpilupati, pañcādhikaraṇoparika, pāyuparika, purapāloparika, mahārāja and mahāsāmanta, to three bhogikas, kumārāmātya Revajjasvāmin, Bhāmaha and Vatsa (ll.15-17). Landmarks demarcating the borders of five plots of donated land and marshy uncultivated land belonging to the vihāra are also minutely described (ll.18-31).

The case described here is quite different from other cases gleaned from copper plate inscriptions belonging to North Bengal of this period. The receiver of petition cum donor is a king under whom several subordinate rulers bearing the title of maharaja are present. He wields authority to donate fallow land, which is wielded by adhikaranas in other cases. His order is conveyed to three kumārāmātyas cum bhogikas, who may make arrangement for donation like land measurement and border fixation, which is done by adhikarana members or local residents in other cases. The petitioner is a subordinate ruler and may have personal connection with ācārya Śāntideva, under whose name he is building a vihāra. The construction of this vihāra and the donation to its Buddhist samghas petitioned by him may contribute to the establishment of his authority over the locality. With the messenger who also has titles of a subordinate ruler, these figures indicate the political and administrative settings quite different from contemporary North Bengal. Apart from this, exclusion of local population from this procedure is conspicuous. The presence of local people holding some land rights is obvious even through a glance of the long border description at the end of the inscription (ll.18-31). In this description, there are references to cultivated land (kṣetra) prefixed with a personal name, names of people, terms indicating profession, and pond

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32 Viṣṇuvardhaki (carpenter), Miduvilāla, l.19, Pakkavilāla, ll.21-22, Jolāri, l.24, Buddhāka, Kālaka, Sūryya, Mahipāla, l.25, Maṇibhadra, ll.26-27, Yajñarāta, l.27.
33 Śūri-Nāsi-Rampūrṇeke, ll.19-20, Piyāk-Āditya-Vandhu, l.20, Nāgi-Joḍāka,
(pushkarin) prefixed with a personal name. They may roughly correspond to *kutumbins* mentioned in other inscriptions while the possession of land by other professionals like carpenter and physician is interesting. They do not have any involvement except notification, which may have been mentioned in the illegible portion.

The twelfth and the last inscription belonging to this period is the Damodarpur copper plate inscription of GE 224. The time of event is referred to as the reign of a Gupta *maharaja-dhiraja*, the former part of whose name is illegible due to corrosion, when Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti is governed with the enjoyment of elephant, horse and infantry by *uparika-maharāja-rājaputra* Devabhaṭṭāraka appointed by him, and *visayapati* Svayambhūdeva, appointed by Devabhaṭṭāraka, accompanied with ārya-nagaraśreṣṭhin Ribhipāla, sārthavāha, *prathama-kulika* Matīdatta and *prathama-kāyastha* Skandapāla, is managing the *adhiśṭhān-ādhikarana* in Koṭivarṣa-viṣayā (l.1·5). Though there is no reference to the issuing authority in the inscription itself, it is issued by Koṭivarṣ-ādhiśṭhān-ādhikarana as is written on the seal attached to it. The address is not mentioned. The procedure mentioned is as follows: the *ādhikarana* received a petition of Amṛtadeva, a son of noble family from Ayodhyā (*Ayodhyaka-kulaputtraka*) (l.4·6). After mentioning that the sale of a *kulyavāpa* of uncultivated fallow land by three *dināras* is practised in this *viṣayā* (l.6·7), he asked the *ādhikaraṇa* to give him a patch of land with *apradā-dharmma*

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34 Vaidya, l.22.
35 Doṣībhoga, l.20.
37 If he is the same person with his namesake mentioned in the tenth inscription above, he has been in this position at least for fifty years and is quite old. It is also possible that he is a descendant or relative with the same name.
38 *SI*, 1, p.347.
tenure, which may be the same as *aksaya-nivi* tenure, by accepting *dināras* from him for the repair of torn and opened parts, practice of *bali, caru, sattra*, offering of milk, incense, flower and use for *madhuparka* (offering of the mixture of honey and milk), lamp and so on at the temple of Bhagavat Śvetavarāhasvāmin located in the forest there (ll.7-10). Then it was decided with the verification by *prathama-pustapālas* Naranandin, Gopadatta and Bhatanandin and made known with the knowledge of *dharm-ādhikāra* that no obstacle should be made by a *visayapati* and there would be acquisition of the one sixth of religious merit by the king (ll.10-13). With this procedure of verification, accepting fifteen *dināras* from the petitioner, two *kulyavāpas* with homesteads in Svaccanda-pātaka and Lavaṅgasikā belonging to Arddhaṭi, one *kulyavāpa* with a homestead in Sāţuvan-āsrāmaka, one *kulyavāpa* in Palaspatikā and one *kulyavāpa* in Puraṇavīndikahari, thus total five *kulyavāpas* of fallow land with homestead were given to Bhagavat Śvetavarāhasvāmin (ll.14-18). Then *samvyavahārins* were asked to consent to it in future (l.19).

The point of interest in this case is Śvetavarāhasvāmin, the donee. This deity may be identical with the one mentioned in the Damodarpur inscription of the reign of Budhagupta, and his temple located in the forest nearby may be one of the temples constructed by Ribhupāla. It may indicate that the authority of the deity and his temple has been established in the locality within fifty years or so, while what has happened to another deity, Kokāmukhasvāmin, and his temple is unclear. Śvetavarāhasvāmin obtained several land plots located in five settlements other than its original location, Ėoṅgā-grāma, and this may indicate spread of its authority and network within the *visaya*. It can allude to the spread of authority and influence of Ribhupāla or his descendant, as he may have been deeply involved with the management of the temple. As the foremost member of the *adhikarana*, he or his namesake descendant did favour to the temple in which he had vested interest, and other members were complicit with him on this matter. As to
the petitioner, he had acquaintance with the local custom while he was from Ayodhya. He may have settled down in the locality and it is possible that he got involved with management of the newly donated temple lands.

With each case, people involved with it and my own interpretation of it being clarified, I would like to proceed to corroboration of all the cases and discussion on some aspects of rural social networks deducible from them.

2. *Adhikarana* as Node of Social Network

What is conspicuous in all these cases, except the case of the Gunaighar inscription, is the function and authority of *adhikarana*. The term itself is applicable to any kind of office, as is shown by clay seals and sealings belonging to this period excavated from Basarh and other sites. But it is exclusively used to denote a kind of office assigned to a certain administrative unit in the context of the copper plate inscriptions dealt with in this chapter. They are *aṣṭakul-ādhikarana*, *vīthv-ādhikarana*, *adhiṣṭhān-ādhikarana* and *viṣay-ādhikarana*. At different levels of administrative hierarchy, they fulfilled the same duty as an authority to receive petition of land purchase and authorise the immunity of donated land from revenue charges.

*Aṣṭakul-ādhikarana* or *grāṃ-āṣṭakul-ādhikarana* is mentioned in the Dhanaidaha inscription of GE 113 and the Damodarpur inscription of GE 163. As is indicated by a word 'grāma' prefixed to it, it is placed at a certain village, and Palāśavṛndaka, from which the latter inscription is issued, must be one of such villages. It literally means 'office of eight families' and may originally have been a village organ composed of representatives of several villages.

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40 *SI*, 1, p.288, l.6.
families, as Yamazaki interpreted, though its character has already changed in this period. It functions rather at supra-village level, as is shown by a mention of the custom followed in a visaya and the fact that the jurisdiction of the adhikarana located in Palāsavrndaka covers Caṇḍagrāma. Chattopadhyaya considers it as 'a link between upper tiers of local political organization and villages interconnected in its network.'

As to membership, these two cases show some difference. In the former, it was constituted by eighteen people categorised as kutumbins with subcategories of brāhmaṇa, mahattara and gośthaka. The order and disproportionate numbers show superiority of brāhmaṇas and mahattaras over gośthakas, which may denote kutumbins with status as an adhikarana member according to the context. Their distinction from ordinary kutumbins is indicated by the reference to neighbouring kutumbins who were informed of and agreed with the petition, and measured the land to be donated. On the other hand, in the latter, the members of the adhikarana are just mentioned as 'beginning with mahattara', and consist of 'adhikarana-kutumbins beginning with mahattaras', who worked as executors of the transaction. Grāmika-kutumbins are mentioned with it as co-issuers of the grant and may have been associated with it. I have already mentioned above that three categories of kutumbins are recognisable in this inscription, with the third category, ksudraprakṛti-kutumbins of Caṇḍagrāma, mentioned

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43 Dhanaidaha CPI, p.288, l.7.
46 *SI*, 1, p.288, ll.3-6.
as a part of addressees. What is common in these two cases is its membership consisting of a part of kutumbins with exclusion of others. In both cases, mahattaras are mentioned as the foremost among them. As I will discuss below, mahattaras may be the upper section of kutumbins with superiority in terms of authority. It shows that the adhikarana is a place where such a dominant section of the peasants comes together and presides over issues related with administration. It presupposes horizontal relation among upper rung of kutumbins and their dominance over other kutumbins and social groups. In case of the Damodarpur inscription of GE 163, other aspects are also recognisable. They suggest existence of several categories of kutumbins and unequal relation among rural settlements. The grāmika kutumbins listed as co-issuers of the grant are not the members of the adhikarana nor have any other involvement. However, their superiority over kutumbins of Caṇḍagrāma is obvious and it may come from their association with the adhikarana. The inequality among rural settlements is clearly indicated by the fact that the aṣṭakul-ādhikarana in Palāśavṛndaka presided over a matter concerning Caṇḍagrāma, where such an organisation did not exist. From these points, aṣṭakul-ādhikarana can be considered as an organisation through which upper strata of kutumbins collectively make decision on the administrative issues related to their own and other settlements at supra-village level, covering a several villages. It presupposes horizontal social relationship and network of these kutumbins and their dominance over other members of rural society.

Vithy-adhikarana is an organisation rather working on supra-village basis. It is mentioned in the Kalaikuri-Sultanpur inscription of GE 120 and the Jagadishpur inscription of GE 128, both of which are related to

51 Ibid., p.333, l.3.
52 Chattopadhyaya, op. cit., p.38.
53 SI, 1, p.352, l.1.
54 EDEP, p.61, ll.1-2.
the same locality within the relatively short period of eight years. *Vithi* is also mentioned in the Paharpur inscription of GE 159 and the Nandapur inscription of GE 169. It is an administrative division placed between *bhukti* and *grāma*, parallel with *visaya*. Sometimes it has *mandalas* as its subdivision, according to the Paharpur inscription.

As is mentioned above, the number of members whose names are listed in both cases related to the *adhikarana* of Śrīgaiva-vīthī is enormous and conspicuous. The names of eight *mahattaras* and seventy nine *kuṭumbins* are listed in the Kalaikuri inscription, while four *mahattaras* and twenty eight *kuṭumbins* are listed in the Jagadishpur inscription, with the overlap of twenty four names. Fluctuation of the number may come from the difference of the number of villages involved: the former mentions four while the latter mentions two. The villages mentioned in the latter are included in the four mentioned in the former. If we take this into consideration with the overlap of names in both cases, it may indicate that people mentioned in both may belong to these two villages. It means that this *adhikarana* is not a regular body based on fixed membership but a temporary one constituted each time by the dominant section of *kuṭumbins* of the villages, which are involved with such a case. The character of their participation is shown by the way of their representation. In both cases, all of them are categorised into two broad categories, that is, *mahattaras* and

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55 ‘Dakṣināmāśaka-vīthī’, *SI*, 1, p.359, l.1. This *vīthi* is also mentioned in the Jagadishpur inscription. *EDEP*, p.61, ll.8-9.
56 ‘Nanda-vīthī’, *SI*, 1, p.382, l.3.
57 ‘Dakṣināmāśaka-vitheya·Nāgiratta·māndalika’, *SI*, 1, p.359, l.1-p.360, l.2.
58 Chattopadhyaya considers them not to be constituents of the *adhikarana*, while being associated with its functioning. Chattopadhyaya, op. cit., p.40. But the use of the term ‘puroga’, which is used in four Damodarpur inscriptions to indicate members of *adhishthān-ādhisṭhānāra*, and the context show that they are members of the *adhikarana* and hold the initiative on these matters.
59 Appendix 3 Table 2.
*kutumbins* of the *vithi*. The possible variations of their social background are indicated by their names, which include names with typical *brāhmaṇa* name endings like śarmman, deva, svāmin and so on, names constituted by single Sanskrit word or name of deity, and names difficult to comprehend as a Sanskrit word like Kaṅkuti and Bonda. Apart from this, they may belong to different villages under the jurisdiction of the *vithi*. No matter what is their social background or which village they reside in, all of them are represented as *mahattaras* and *kutumbins* of the *vithi*. This may be the participation at the supra-village level based on the minimal common identity as *mahattara* and *kutumbin*, with the temporary suppression of inner differences. The participation is limited to *kutumbins* with *mahattaras* as a part of them, with exclusion of other social groups in the locality. Or rather, the participation provides them an occasion for building up social network as a group and establishing their dominance over other social groups. On the other hand, there are unnamed *kutumbins* mentioned as addressees and ones named as petitioners but still not included in the *adhikarana* members. It implies the existence of domination and subordination even among *kutumbins*, while members of the *adhikarana*, who may have dominance over other *kutumbins*, represent themselves as rather a homogenous entity.

We have two *adhīsthan-ādhikaranas* mentioned in the inscriptions from North Bengal in this period. One is the *adhīsthan-ādhikarana* of Koṭivarṣa-ṛṣaya mentioned in the four Damodarpur inscriptions of GE 124,
Budhagupta's reign and GE 224, and another is the one of Pundravardhana mentioned in the Paharpur inscription of GE 159. The former had existed as long as one hundred years at Kotivarṣa, which was the centre of the viṣaya and is identified with present Bangarh in South Dinajpur district, West Bengal. It witnessed a quite stable participation by influential people of the city as is shown by its seats occupied by people with almost the same designations all through the period. The case of the same people having been members for at least four years also endorses the stability and fixity of its membership. It can be said that this adhikarana has more regular character compared with vīthyadhitkaraṇa discussed above. The members who constitute the adhikarana are nagarasreṣthin, sārthavāha, prathama-kulika and prathama-kāyastha. They are leaders of mercantile, artisan and scribal groups in urban settlements. Among these groups, sreṣthin, sārthavāha and kulika are known for running guild-like organisations called nigama by themselves or with other groups at Vaiśāli, as the clay seals belonging to this period found at Basarh in North Bihar indicate. Existence of the composite nigama constituted by these groups alludes to the interaction and connection among them for daily businesses and other transactions. Though it is not clear whether such an organisation existed at Kotivarṣa, as no seal of this kind has been reported from the

63 SI, 1, p.291, ll.3-4; p.293, ll.3-4; p.337, l.3; p.347, ll.3-4. It has often been misinterpreted by scholars as viṣayādhitkaraṇa. Cf. Chattopadhyaya, op. cit., p.39. But it is clearly called adhisthānādhitkaraṇa. Viṣayādhitkaraṇa is a different category mentioned in the Baigram inscription. Ibid., p.356, l.1.
64 Ibid., p.359, l.1.
65 For the limited but well conducted excavation of the site, see K. G. Goswami, Excavations at Bangarh (1938-41), Calcutta: 1948.
66 Appendix 3 Table3.
67 Ibid., GE 124 and 128.
68 'sreṣṭhi·nigama', ARASI, 1913-14, p.126, no.36, 53, p.140, no.286 etc.; 'sreṣṭhi·sārthavāha·nigama', ARASI, 1903-04, p.111, no.40; 'sreṣṭhi·sārthavāha·kulika·nigama', ARASI, 1903-04, p.110, no.28 etc.
excavation of Bangarh.\textsuperscript{69} it is probable that mercantile and artisan groups in the city also had organisations like \textit{nigama} and interacted each other on a daily basis. As mercantile transactions may require documents, their daily interaction with \textit{kāyasthas} can be easily inferred. The \textit{adhikarana} may be organised on the basis of such an interaction and connection among these urban influential groups. With the sanction and collaboration of the administrator of \textit{visaya}, in these cases \textit{kumārāmātya},\textsuperscript{70} \textit{āyuktaka}\textsuperscript{71} or \textit{visayapati},\textsuperscript{72} they may regularly assemble and solve the daily administrative issues in the city. Petitions of land purchase and donation might have been one of such issues which they dealt with. In the case of the \textit{adhiśthān-ādhikarana} of Puṇḍravardhana, it has \textit{ārya-nagarāśreṣṭhin} as a member or members.\textsuperscript{73} It may be almost the same as \textit{nagarāśreṣṭhin}, as these terms are used interchangeably in the Damodarpur inscriptions of Budhagupta’s reign and GE 224.\textsuperscript{74} He or they may also be the influential person of the urban settlement and function with the sanction and collaboration of administrators, for \textit{āyuktakas} are mentioned with the \textit{adhikarana} as issuers of the inscription.

There is another aspect of the activity of the \textit{adhiśthān-ādhikarana}, which requires our attention. The \textit{adhikarana} offers its members, who are urban elites, an occasion to wield their authority over rural area and even extend their personal interest in the form of involvement with the management of landed property located there. The procedures show how those urban elites preside over matters in rural area as members of the \textit{adhikarana}. The case of Puṇḍravardhana, in which the \textit{adhikarana} notified

\textsuperscript{69} The seals excavated there mainly belong to the earlier period. Goswami, op. cit., pp.12-13.
\textsuperscript{70} \textit{Sl.} 1, p.291, ll.3-4; p.293, ll.3-4.
\textsuperscript{71} \textit{Ibid.}, p.337, l.3.
\textsuperscript{72} \textit{Ibid.}, p.347, ll.3-4.
\textsuperscript{73} ‘āryyanagarāśreṣṭhi-purogañ=c=adhiśthān-ādhikaranaṃ’, \textit{Ibid.}, p.359, l.1.
\textsuperscript{74} Appendix 3, Table 3.
and ordered *kutumbins* including the dominant section like *mahattaras*. alludes to their strong authority which can be imposed even on the dominant section of *kutumbins*. On the other hand, the case of *nagarasresthin* Ribhupāla, mentioned in the Damodarpur inscription of Budhagupta’s reign, can be interpreted as an example of the extension of personal interest in the rural area. Through the procedure in *adhikarana* and especially tacit consent of his colleagues he could establish in Doṅgā-grāma the two temples and their landed property, with which he may have kept vested interest in their management. His success is shown by the fact that at least one of these temples established its position in the locality, and even extended its landed property in other settlements after more than fifty years, as is inferable from the inscription of GE 224. In this time also, Ribhupāla himself or his namesake was the foremost member of the *adhikarana*. Thus the *adhisthān-ādhikarana* is an organisation based on the authority and interrelation of urban elites, which regularly deals with administrative issues with administrators, and through which the members get opportunity to wield their authority and extend personal interest in the rural area.

*Viśay-ādhikarana* is mentioned only in the Baigram inscription of GE 128. The *adhikarana* mentioned in the Nandapur inscription of GE 169, which has no specification, may also be *viśay-ādhikarana* as it works at the level of *viṣaya*. In both cases, there is no specific indication of their membership, while they may have plural members as is indicated by the use of plural form for the verb ‘inform’ and ‘inform and inscribe’ in each inscription. The latter expression may indicate inclusion of scribes in the

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adhikarana, though we have no other way to verify it. The adhikarana in the former inscription may function with the kumārāmātyā, probably the administrator of the viśaya, for he is mentioned as an issuer with the adhikarana.\textsuperscript{82} There is no mention of administrators in the latter inscription and the adhikarana is a sole issuing authority.\textsuperscript{83} In both cases, the adhikarana notified and ordered kutumbins including samvyavahārins.\textsuperscript{84} As I will explain in the next section, samvyavahārins may be the upper section of kutumbins who work or collaborate with the administration for management of local affairs. Thus the notification and order in the Baigram and Nandapur inscriptions is addressed to kutumbins including dominant section like the case of Paharpur inscription mentioned above. It may indicate that the viśay-ādhikarana does not include dominant section of kutumbins as members and is rather set outside of locality as adhisthān-ādhikarana. Its members may accordingly consist of outsiders of the rural society.

These adhikaranas show differences in terms of their regularity and principle of membership. While the first two types, āstakul-ādhikarana and vīthya-ādhikarana are constituted by insiders of a particular rural society, the last two types, adhisthān-ādhikarana and viśay-ādhikarana, are located outside a rural society and at least the former is constituted by the representatives of urban elite groups. As to regularity, the adhisthān-ādhikarana has more regular character than āstakul-ādhikarana and vīthya-ādhikarana, which may be rather an occasional gathering of the dominant section of peasant householders. These differences may be resulted from the difference of administrative settings and localities which the former based on. As I will discuss in the later part of this chapter, the Gupta administration of North Bengal in this period shows some variations

\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., p.356, l.1.
\textsuperscript{83} Ibid., p.382, l.1.
in terms of their hierarchical structure and jurisdiction, according to the localities within the sub-region of Puṇḍravardhana.

Some characters are rather common to all the adhikarāṇas and the social relationship around them, and they can also be extracted from the discussion made above.

First, they are organised on the basis of existing social networks. The aṣṭakulādhikarāṇa and vīthyaḍhikarāṇa, located in rural area, presuppose horizontal social networks and solidarity of dominant kuṭumbins, and their dominance over ordinary kuṭumbins and other social groups. In case of the former, it is based on village level and works on supra-village level, because of the hierarchical relation among those villages. In case of the latter, it works on supra-village level and is based on members' identity as mahattaras and kuṭumbins of the vithī. The adhīṣṭhānāḍhikarāṇa, located in urban settlements, may be based on nigama or other guild-like organisation and daily social relation of urban elites.

On the other hand, they may reconfirm such existing social networks or even contribute to the making of new networks. In rural area, those adhikarāṇas may offer dominant kuṭumbins an occasion to come together and reconfirm their solidarity, and extend their dominance over other social groups. In the case of aṣṭakulāḍhikarāṇa, what is reconfirmed is the cohesion of dominant kuṭumbins in a village and their dominance over other social groups and rural settlements. It is shown by the case of Damodarpur inscription of GE 163 that the difference of the three categories of kuṭumbins and their hierarchical order was made clear through the activity of the adhikarāṇa. Through vīthyaḍhikarāṇa, kuṭumbins living around several villages come together and reconfirm their cohesion as mahattaras and kuṭumbins of the vithī, and reassert their dominance by exclusion of other

85 Chattopadhyaya, op. cit., p.39.
86 Sl, 1, pp.332-334.
groups in the vithi. For urban elites, the adhīsthān-ādhikarana offers the connection with rural area through which they can extend their authority and interest in it, while confirming their own solidarity. The case of Ribhupāla shows how this leading person in the city of Kotivarśa could extend his own personal interest and influence in the rural area through the construction of temples and the establishment of their authority. For his action, the function of the adhikarana and tacit cooperation of his colleagues in it was important.

In general terms, I may conclude that the adhikarana works as a node of social network. It makes an occasion in which different social groups with their own stakes interact. For the rural and urban dominant groups, it is a node around which they come together, wield their authority over other groups and even extend their own personal interest. The cases of grāmika Nābhaka in the Damodarpur inscription of GE 163 and nagaraśreṣṭhin Ribhupāla in the undated Damodarpur inscription may indicate attempt of the members of adhikarana or associated persons to extend their own interest through it. On the other hand, for non-dominant groups who are forced to comply with this system and authority of dominant groups through it, the adhikarana becomes an arena in which they negotiate their relation with these groups. The collective petitions by kulika Bhima, seven kāyavasthas and two pustapālas in the Kalaikuri inscription and by three non-adhikarana member kutumbins in Jagadishpur inscription, and personal petitions by brāhmanas for their own subsistence and other local

88 Ibid., pp.332-334
89 Ibid., pp.336-339.
90 Ibid., pp.352-355.
91 EDEP, pp.61-63. The case of Baigrama inscription, in which two brothers of local kutumbins make petition, may conform to this category, though we have no mention of members of the adhikarana. SI, 1, pp.355-359.
people can be interpreted as attempts by non-dominant but still resourceful and influential groups to achieve personal and collective profit through negotiation.

Another kind of negotiation is also detectable in the cases in which the decision by adhikaranas is implemented by local kutumbins including dominant section. In these cases, they are ordered to divide, fix the border and give the land to be donated at the place which would not disturb their own cultivation. It shows that they still retain right to choose the land to be given, while they should comply with the order of the adhikarana. What is important is that all the adhikaranas mentioned in these cases are located outside the rural society. Here, the tension and negotiation between the outside dominant groups, who try to exercise their control over the rural area through the adhikarana, and kutumbins including their dominant section, who try to retain their power on local matters are detectable. The fact that such traces of negotiation are recognisable only in these cases shows the ability of kutumbins with their dominant section to make effective resistance against the outside authority. In contrast to this, the case of the Damodarpur inscription of GE 163, in which adhikarana-kutumbins implement their decision by themselves, shows stronger authority and power wielded by the dominant kutumbins over the subordinate ones in the rural society.

Apart from these groups, there is another who has stakes in the function of adhikarana. They are officers who constitute the administrative apparatus. There are cases which have such officers as petitioners. Through the procedures around adhikarana, they can encroach into

95 Ibid., p.334, ll.9-10.
96 Dhanaidaha CPI, Ibid., pp.287-289; Nandapur CPI, Ibid., pp.382-384.
governmental authority and extend their own personal interest, as involvement with landed properties, with keeping formality and complying with the authority of the Gupta kingship. Their relation with the *adhikarana* is related to the type of political powers and their interaction with local population.

3. Participants and their Relations: Dominance, Solidarity and Friction

As is discussed in the previous section, the organisation of *adhikarana* presupposes and also reinforces the social networks and relations among participants. Now I would like to discuss about the groups participating in this organisation and their mutual relations.

The most conspicuous social category recognisable in the rural landscape in these cases is *kutumbin*. As a derivative from *kuṭumba*, 'house', it literally means 'one having household' and denotes householder. It was mainly used to denote peasant householder while its synonym *grhapati* (*gahapati* in Pali) rather denoted householder with vast wealth and social pre-eminence in the earlier period, that is, from the first century B.C. to the third century A.D.97 But as the cases of prosperous section of them, who experienced occupational and spatial mobility by involvement with trade and money lending in urban area show,98 the applicability of the term was not always limited to the peasant householder proper.

From the fourth century, *kutumbin* became a regular figure in copper plate inscriptions as a category of rural residents to whom the inscriptions were addressed. Its connotation as a peasant householder with his own house and land is indicated by a passage in the *Nāradsamṛti*, which belongs


98 Ibid., pp.183-187.
to this period, stating that a house and land are two fundamentals of the *kutumbins* existence. The descriptions of *kutumbins* in the inscriptions mentioned above also conform to this connotation. Their engagement in agriculture is shown by the expression 'neighbouring *kutumbins* cultivating land' in the Dhanaiyaha inscription, and the cases of the Baigram, Paharpur and Nandapur inscriptions, in which *kutumbins* were ordered to measure, divide and give land at the place which would not disturb their own cultivation.

As a social category, it has a comprehensive character. It includes *mahattaras* and *brāhmaṇas* as its foremost sections, as is attested by the expressions like 'village *kutumbins* beginning with *brāhmaṇas*,' ‘village *kutumbins* headed by *samvyavahārin* and accompanied with *brāhmaṇas*,’ ‘prominent *kutumbins* beginning with *brāhmaṇas*,' ‘*kutumbins* beginning with *mahattaras*, accompanied with *brāhmaṇas* in the address section of the inscriptions. The difference in terms of economic condition, social prestige and authority is also recognisable. Some of them are relatively well off and resourceful enough to purchase land for donation, while others simply cannot afford to do so. Even among the former group, there is some variation. The brothers *kutubin* Bhoyla and Bhaskara, who made petition in the case depicted in the Baigram inscription, belong to a wealthy section. Their father was wealthy enough to build a temple and they themselves

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104 ‘vrāhmaṇ-ādin=pradhāna-kutu[mbl]nāḥ’, *EDEP*, p.61, l.2.
105 ‘brāhmaṇ-ottarāṇ=maḥattar-ādi-kutumvināḥ’, *SI*, 1, p.360, l.3.
could afford the expenditure of six *dināras* and eight *rūpakas*. On the other hand, three *kutumbins* mentioned in Jagadishpur inscription could afford the expenditure of two *dināras*, though they may have been still well off compared with others.

The difference of social prestige and authority is rather clearly shown by the higher category as *mahattara* and their way of association with *adhikaranaś*. It has already been mentioned in the previous section that only a part of *kutumbins* is members of an *adhikarana*, while others have different associations with it. Here, we may detect domination and subordination among them, and even friction between dominant and subordinate sections. In the Dhanaidaha inscription, neighbouring *kutumbins* may be informed and consulted by the *adhikarana-kutumbins*, agreed with them about the petition, measured and gave the land. Here, the position of non-*adhikarana*-member *kutumbins* towards member *kutumbins* may be relatively stronger. The case of Damodarpur inscription of GE 163 shows rather complicated gradation of power among *kutumbins*. *Adhikarana-kutumbins* including *mahattaras* wield authority as members of the *aśṭakul-ādhikarana*. *Grāmika-kutumbins* associated with it have some superiority over residents of Caṇḍa-grāma. *Grāmika* can be interpreted as ‘a village headman.’ But according to the context in which it is used to refer to the *kutumbins* and their position is lower than *adhikarana-kutumbins*, it may mean ‘belonging to village’ and *grāmika-kutumbin* seems to be a *kutumbin* belonging to the village which

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107 *EDEP*, pp.61-63. Bhojila, one of those three *kutumbins*, may not be the same as his namesake mentioned in the Baigram CPI. They lived in different localities and it is difficult to suppose that he shifted from one place to another within the short period of two months, from Māgha 19 to Caitra 20, GE 128.
108 *SI*, 1, p.288, l.9·p.289, l.13.
110 *IEG*, p.121.
has the *adhikarana*, in this case, Pañāśavāndaka. Finally, *kṣudraprakṛti-kutumbin*, literally meaning ‘small people *kutumbin*’, with other residents of Caṅḍa-grāma has no authority over the issues related to their own village. This difference can be interpreted as a change in which power balance gradually tilted towards the dominant section of *kutumbins*. The augmentation of the power and authority of upper section of *kutumbins* can be interpreted as a precursor to the ascendancy of *mahattaras* from the middle of the sixth century, which I will discuss in the next chapter.

_Mahattara_, philologically a comparative form of *mahat*, ‘large’, may denote a part of *kutumbins* who has some kind of superiority. Their superiority is indicated by the fact that they are mentioned as the foremost among *kutumbins* or ahead of them, and by their smaller number compared with the number of *kutumbins* in the Kalaikuri and Jagadishpur inscriptions. Their distinction from *kutumbins* may not be solely based on the better economic condition, even though the superiority in terms of land holding may be the precondition. This point is indicated by the case of the Baigram inscription, in which brothers Bhoyila and Bhāskara were not called *mahattara*, though they were resourceful enough to purchase three and a quarter *kulyavāpas* of fallow land. The superiority of *mahattaras* may rather be the matter of their authority, which may be based on their family background, knowledge, fame and so on, though there is no clear indication. However, the distinction between them and other *kutumbins*, at least their higher section, is not acute in this period as is shown by the case

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111 *SI*, 1, p.360, l.3.; p.334, l.10.
112 Appendix 3 Table 1 and 2.
113 Appendix 3 Table 2. R. Chakravarti calculates their ratio as nearly one to nine in the Kalaikuri CPI and one to seven in the Jagadishpur CPI. Chakravarti, op. cit., p.190. In my own reading, the number in the former case is *mahattara* eight and *kutumbin* seventy nine. Accordingly, the ratio is rather nearly one to ten.
114 Yamazaki, op. cit., p.27.
of Umayaśas, who figured as a member of the adhikarana of Śṛṅgavera-viśṭi as a mahattara in the Kalaikuri inscription and as a kutumbin in the Jagadishpur inscription.\footnote{115}

Samvyavahārin is philologically derived from the verb ‘sam·vy-ava·yhr’ meaning ‘to have intercourse or business with.’\footnote{116} This verb is used for kumārāmātya and other administrators who manage adhisthān ādhikarana with influential section of the city in the Damodarpur inscriptions.\footnote{117} Thus samvyavahārin in this period and region may mean ‘a person who manages together.’ The fact that samvyavahārin constitutes a part of kutumbins is deduced from the expression ‘grāma·kutumbins headed by samvyavahārin’ and ‘kutumbins beginning with samvyavahārin’ in the Baigram and Nandapur inscriptions.\footnote{118} While they work on the practical part of donation, that is, land measurement and border fixation, with kutumbins by the order of the adhikarana,\footnote{119} samvyavahārins are especially asked to protect the donation.\footnote{120} They are asked to agree with,\footnote{121} or protect the donation in the other inscriptions too.\footnote{122} In case of the Kalaikuri-Sultanpur and Jagadishpur inscriptions, they are asked to protect the donation along with

\footnote{115} He is listed at the fourth position of mahattaras in the former and at the second of kutumbins in the latter. Appendix 3 Table 2. Chattopadhyaya, op. cit., p.43. In his critical review of Chattopadhyaya’s work, V. M. Jha made objection to the identification of Umayaśas in the both inscriptions. V. M. Jha, ‘Settlement, Society and Polity in Early Medieval Rural India’, IHR, 20, 1996, pp.34-65, pp.50-51. But if we consider the occurrence of as many as twenty four common names in both records and their corresponding order, and the common location, it is more plausible that he is the same person.\footnote{116}

\footnote{116} M. Monier-Williams, A Sanskrit-English Dictionary, p.1117, col.1.


\footnote{119} \textit{Ibid.}, p.358, l.20-p.359, l.21: p.383, l.16.

\footnote{120} The Damodarpur CPI, GE 163, \textit{Ibid.}, p.334 l.11.

\footnote{121} The Damodarpur CPIs, GE 128, n. d. and GE 228, \textit{Ibid.}, p.294, ll.10-11: p.338, l.15; p.349, l.19.
visayapatis, āyuktakās, kutumbins and adhikaranikas. The relevant part of the sentence in these sources can be read as either 'adhikaranikas or samvyavahārins or 'adhikaranikas and samvyavahārins depending on the interpretation of conjunction 'vā', which ordinary means 'or', but is sometimes interchangeable with 'api', 'ca.' If the former is the case, samvyavahārins is interchangeable with adhikaranika, which is in the context of these two inscriptions denoting adhikarana members constituted by mahattaras and kutumbins. Considering all these references, I may conclude that samvyavahārins are the upper section of kutumbins who work or collaborate with the administration for management of local affairs, as or not as adhikarana members.

Brāhmaṇas mentioned as a part of kutumbins may be ones who settled in rural areas. The cases of brāhmaṇas who themselves made petitions and purchased land, and who were settled through land donation may indicate the process through which they settled down and got incorporated into the rural society. They may have engaged in agriculture as kutumbins, though whether they themselves tilled land cannot be ascertained. Their identity as brāhmaṇas comes to fore almost exclusively in the context when they are mentioned as donees. In other contexts, they are included in the categories of kutumbin and mahattara, as names of the members of Śṛngavera-vīthya-adhikarana show. Even when their identity is mentioned, they are just called brāhmaṇa, at most with reference to the Vedic school and residential place, with an exception

123 'viṣayapatayāḥ āyuktakāḥ kuṭumbino=adhikaranikā vā [samvyava]hāriṇo', Ibid., p.355, ll.28-29; EDEP, p.62, l.22-p.63, l.23 (almost the same sentence).
124 Monier-Williams, op. cit., p.934, col.2.
126 Ibid., pp.332-334.
127 R. Chakravarti, op. cit., pp.188-189.
128 Appendix 3 Table 2.
129 SI, 1, p.288, l.3; p.291, l.6; p.360, ll.3-4.
which mentions donee’s gotra and title agrahārika. As donees, their presence in rural area may be strong with their landed property: as one of them even obtained right over income from market and drinking water for cattle. But their rise and distinction as a social group would be witnessed in the following period together with the ascendancy of mahattaras.

The networks of kutumbins, which are recognisable in these inscriptions and on which the organisation of adhikarana is based, are horizontal networks mainly based on localities. The case of the Jagadishpur inscription, in which three kutumbins residing in two villages collectively made land purchase and donation, indicates the existence of such a network among residents of neighbouring villages. These networks can be based on a village level, as is the case of astakulādhikarana, or supra-village level, as is the case of vithy-adhikarana. Although the familial relation, which can be the basis of daily life and agricultural operation of kutumbins, is recognisable in case of the Baigram inscription in which brothers are petitioners, or the Paharpur inscription in which a brahmaṇa and his wife are petitioners, we do not have any further information of kin and family networks in this period.

The other groups in the rural area, the glimpse of whose activity we can obtain, are kulika, kāyastha and pustapāla. They collectively made petition in case of the Kalaikuri inscription as kulika, kāyasthas and pustapālas of the vīthī. Their association, in which they accumulate their wealth together and probably share interest in the donated landed property,

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131 Ibid., p.382, l.l.3-4.
132 Ibid., p.294, l.10.
133 EDEP, pp.61-63.
135 Ibid., pp.352-355; EDEP, pp.61-63.
136 SI, 1, p.356, l.3.
137 Ibid., p.360, l.l.3-4.
138 Ibid., p.352, l.3 p.353, l.4.
may indicate the existence of a network based on locality among these professional groups like networks of *kutumbins* mentioned above. Some of them are involved with the process of land purchase and donation in the other ways apart from being petitioners. *Kulika* Bhima acted as a cashier in case of the Jagadishpur inscription.¹³⁹ *Pustapālas* Siṅhanandin and Yaśodāman verified the petitions in both cases of the Kalaikuri and Jagadishpur inscriptions.¹⁴⁰ Though their involvement with the process is important, still they are not members of the *adhikarana*. *Pustapālas* may have some authority as they are involved with administrative function and make verification of petitions, but still the initiative is on the side of the *adhikarana*, which refers cases to them and makes decision. It shows dominance of the upper strata of *kutumbins* over lower strata and other groups in the rural area through the *adhikarana*. The representation of *adhikarana* members as *mahattaras* and *kutumbins* in Śrīgavera-vīthi may be related to their intention to keep their dominance. For this purpose, they need to show their cohesion and solidarity against other groups by temporarily suppressing the inner difference, no matter how different they are within.

In urban landscape, *kutumbins* are conspicuous by their absence.¹⁴¹ Rather, urban elites like leaders of mercantile, artisan and scribal groups show their strong presence. As I discussed above, they may have mutual interaction through guild-like organisation and function of *adhisthān-ādhikarana* on a daily basis. Through the *adhikarana*, they wield authority over affairs in rural area under their jurisdiction and even extend their own personal interest in it. What is important here is the relation between their authority and the authority of *kutumbins*, which can overlap with each other. In all the cases related to the *adhisthān-ādhikarana* of Koṭivarsa, lack of

¹³⁹ *EDEP*, p.62, l.16.
¹⁴⁰ *SI*, 1, p.354, ll.17-18; *EDEP*, p.62, ll.14-16.
¹⁴¹ Chakravarti, op. cit., p.189.
references to *kutumbins* is conspicuous. They give the impression that these procedures were undertaken by the *adhikarana* with the *kutumbins* bypassed. On the other hand, in case of the Paharpur inscription, the *adhiśṭāna-ādhikarana* of Puṣṇdravardhana notified *kutumbins* beginning with *mahattaras* and accompanied with *brāhmaṇas* about the case, and ordered them to execute the practical part of the donation at the place, which would not disturb their own cultivation. Here we may detect retention of some right on the side of local *kutumbins* and possible negotiation between the *adhikarana* and them. As is discussed in the previous section, this negotiation is conducted between the *adhikarana* located outside of rural society and *kutumbins* including dominant section, which is common to the cases of *viśay-ādhikarana*. In these cases of *adhikaranas* of *adhiśṭāna* and *viśaya*, the domination is exercised from outside over *kutumbins* including their dominant section. Both cases of bypassing *kutumbins* and negotiation with them may indicate diversity of power relations between outside authority and rural society.

4. Type of Political Authorities and their Interaction with Local Population

The political authority which is present all through this period and constantly appears in our sources is the Gupta provincial administration in North Bengal. Though local kingship and complex political authority has existed in other parts of Bengal during the Gupta period, as attested by the Susuniya rock inscription of *mahārāja* Candravarman, the description of the Vaiga people in the Mehrauli iron pillar inscription of Candra and the site of Chandraketugarh and its archaeological finds, it is only the Gupta

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144 *SI*, 1, pp.351-352.
145 *CII*, vol.3 (rev.), pp.257-259.
146 For the excavation of the site, see E. Haque, ‘Chandraketugarh: A Resume of Excavation Reports (1956-67)’, *JBA*, 1, 1996, pp.39-75: S.
administration in North Bengal, whose relation with rural society of the period can be studied minutely, thanks to the copper plate inscriptions.

North Bengal in this period was under the jurisdiction of Puṅḍravardhana-bhukti. For most of the period, it was governed by the administrator called uparika, who was appointed by the Gupta kings according to the description in the Damodarpur inscriptions. From the reign of Budhagupta, their title was changed to uparika-mahārāja. Under the bhukti, several layers of administrative units worked above a village level.

Kotivāra-viṣaya can be located around present South Dinajpur district of West Bengal and Dinajpur district of Bangladesh. It included at least the areas around Bangarh, the ruin of the city Kotivāra, and Damodarpur, the find spot of the series of copper plates around 30 km east-northeast from the former. It was governed by administrators appointed by uparikas. They had titles of kumārāmātya, āyuktaka or viṣayapati in each case and ‘manage’ the adhīṣṭhān-adhikarana with’ (samvyavaharati) the members of the adhikarana. Though it is also called viṣaya, administrative settings of Pañcanagar-viṣaya mentioned in the Baigram inscription is different from Kotivāra-viṣaya. This viṣaya included


148 Ibid., p.333, l.2.

149 This village is identified with present Uttara-Damodarpur in Eluari union, Phulbari thana, Dinajpur district. Paul and Shamsuddin, op. cit., p.9.

150 ‘tan-niyuktaka-kulmārāmātya-Veltralvarmmanī’, SI, 1, p.293, ll.3-4.

151 Ibid., p.291, l.4; p.293, l.3.

152 Ibid., p.337, l.3.

153 Ibid., p.347, l.4.
at least the area around Panchbibi, the town identifiable with Pañcanagari, and Baigrama, which is the find spot of a copper plate and located 20 km north from Panchbibi and 35 km southeast from Damodarpur. It was also governed by a kumārāmātṛa. But he was said to be appointed by the Gupta king and there is no mention of the upper unit of administration or a superior administrator. He issued the grant with viśay-ādhikarana. As one of the Damodarpur inscriptions belongs to the same year with the Baigrama inscription, i.e. GE 128, these cases show the simultaneous existence of different administrative system even among the viśavas located in some proximity.

Another lower administrative unit mentioned in these inscriptions is vīthī. Śrīgavera-vīthi is mentioned in the Kalaikuri and Jagadishpur inscriptions. It may be located around present Rajshahi and Natore districts in Bangladesh, from consideration of the find spot of the latter inscription. It had Pūrṇakauśikā as its centre and was governed by āyukta Acyutadāsa or Acyuta, who may be one and the same person. In the latter inscription, he was said to be appointed by the Gupta king. He acted as an issuer of the grants with the adhikaraṇa of vīthī. Though there is no mention of upper administrative unit or a superior administrator, the villages where petitioners lived are referred to as 'in Puṇḍravardhana' in the latter inscription. It may indicate that this vīthī was under the jurisdiction of Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti. Dakṣīṇāṃśaka-vīthī is mentioned in the Jagadishpur and Paharpur inscriptions. It may be located around the border

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154 Baigrama is located in Present Boaladar union, Hakimpur thana/upazila, Dinajpur district. Paul and Shamsuddin, op. cit., p.10.
155 'bhāṭṭāraka-pāḍ-ānuḍhyātāḥ kumārāmātṛa-Kulavṛddhir', SI, 1, p.356, l.1.
156 Ibid., ll.1-3
158 SI, 1, p.352, l.1: EDEP, p.61, l.1.
159 'bhāṭṭāraka-pāḍ-ānuḍhyātāḥ āyukta Acyutah', EDEP, p.61, l.1.
160 Ibid., l.3.
between present Naogaon and Joypurhat districts in Bangladesh. If we consider the find spot of the latter inscription, it is mentioned as an administrative unit to which settlement Mecikāmra, where ‘the place of siddhas (siddhāyatanā) was located, belonged. In the latter inscription, this vīthī is mentioned as an administrative unit to which Nāgiraṭṭā-mandala, which includes several village clusters, belonged. As āvukta-kas and the adhina-adhikarana of Puḍravardhana issued this grant to several villages belonging to these village clusters, this vīthī may be under the jurisdiction of Puḍravardhana-bhukti and at least in this case, the authority of administrators and the adhikarana of the city bypassed any administrative settings of vīthī and mandala, though we have no clue to them. The existence of mandala between vīthī and village levels is quite different from Śrīavera-vīthī.

Apart from the cases mentioned above, there are cases in which aṣṭakula-adhikarana located in a particular village presided over issues of another village or functioned at the viṣaya level. In case of the former, the Damodarpur inscription of GE 163, the village Candagrāma, which was the venue of donation, was bordered by Vāyigrāma mentioned in Baigrām inscription, GE 128. This fact may indicate either an administrative reorganisation made within thirty-five years or co-existence of different administrative arrangement in close proximity. In any case, such an administrative setting was witnessed in some proximity to Koṭivarṣa-viṣaya, whose administration was the same as before. In case of the latter, the

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162 Ibid., l.8-9.
163 SI, 1, p.359, l.1–p.360, l.3.
164 Ibid., pp.332-334.
165 Ibid., p.334, l.9.
166 Damodarpur CPI of Budhagupta’s reign. Ibid., pp.336-339.
Dhanaidaha inscription of GE 113, the *astakul- ādhikarana* functioned as the receiver of petition, despite that the locality of event was mentioned as 'here, Khādāpāra- viṣaya.' It should be also noted that this *visaya* may have been somehow close to Śrīgavera-vīthi, if the find spot of the inscription corresponds to its original address.

The analysis of the administrative units made above shows the diversity and flexibility in terms of their apparatuses. The same categories of administrative units like *visaya* and *vithi* had different administrative apparatuses according to the locality. Some cases show the simultaneous existence of different administrative systems in some proximity, probably adjacent to each other: *visayas* of Kotivarśa and Pañcanagarī; those *visayas* and *astakul-ādhikarana* of Palāśavṛndaka; *vīthīs* of Śrīgavera and Daksināmśaka; and Śrīgavera-vīthi and Khādāpāra-viṣaya.

Now I would like to discuss about the character of officers who fulfilled the duty as administrators. As is mentioned earlier, all the *uparikas* of Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti were said to be nominated by the Gupta kings. The three *uparikas* except rājputra DevabhaHaraka, the last *uparika* in the Gupta period, shared the latter part of their names. It may indicate hereditary character of this position. They may have been either members of a local influential lineage who were nominated to this position, or officers who have established their hereditary position as a result of nomination. In any case, the use of the title *uparika mahārāja* from the reign of Budhagupta may indicate that this lineage established itself as a local subordinate ruler.

In case of the administrators of lower units, their association with

169 Dhanaidaha is identified with present Dhanaidahapara, Durla union, Lalpur thana, Natore district. Paul and Shamsuddin, op. cit., p.9.
170 *SL*, 1, p.347, ll.2-3.
locality and rural society is clearer, though they were nominated by the Gupta kings or *uparikas*. Compared with *uparikas* whose presence is rather remote, as is indicated by the quite nominal mentions of their governance of the *bhukti*, they were closely involved with the *adhikaranas* and especially with their function as issuing authority of grants. The administrator of Kottivarśa-viśaya was said to manage the *adhiśṭhān-ādhikaraṇa* with the members, who were leaders of mercantile, artisan and scribal community.\(^{172}\) The administrators of Śrngavera-vīthi, \(^{173}\) Pañcanagari-viṣaya \(^{174}\) and Dakṣināmśaka-vīthi\(^{175}\) issued grants with the *adhikaranas*. Apart from such a public association with the *adhikaranas* and their members belonging to a particular locality, they had personal stakes and interests in the rural society. It is shown by the cases of the Dhanaiḍaha and Nandapur inscriptions in which *āyukta* and *visayapati* were petitioners of land purchase and grant.\(^{176}\) In both cases, it is probable that they obtained some land right over donated land, as I mentioned in the description of each case. Thus local administrators of lower unit may have had personal stakes and interests in the rural society in the same way as *kutumbins* and other groups belonging to the locality who tried to extend their land allotment, or urban dominant groups who tried to extend their influence and interest there. As I mentioned in the second section, *adhikaraṇa* is a node of social networks and administrators are also publicly and personally involved with it.

One characteristic of the Gupta administration of North Bengal in this period is that the administrations with *adhikaraṇa* carried out the same function no matter which administrative level they belong to, as far as land

\(^{172}\) *Ibid.*, p.291, l.3·6; p.293, l.3·5; p.337, l.3·4; p.347, l.3·p.348, l.5.
\(^{173}\) *Ibid.*, p.352, l.1; *EDEP*, p.61, l.2.
\(^{174}\) *SI*, 1, p.356, l.1.
transactions recorded in the copper plate inscriptions are concerned. They commonly accept petitions for land purchase and donation and authorise perpetual revenue exemption, though we have no clue to the cases of other administrative functions. The administrative functionaries and system which enabled it to function in such a way are *pustapālas* and the system of record keeping. In all the levels of village, *vīthī* and city, they verify the conformity of petitions and price of the land to the custom of locality or administrative unit of each level. As they verify that there is no loss but merit of the king, they are incorporated into the apparatus of the Gupta administration. On the other hand, their proximity to, or rather inclusion in rural society is attested by the case of the Kalaikuri plate. In this inscription, *pustapālas* collectively made petition for land purchase and donation with a *kulika* and *kāvasthas*. They had connection with other professional groups of the same *vīthī*, with whom they gathered wealth and shared interest in landed property in rural settlements. Thus *pustapālas* can be considered as members of the rural society who were involved with the administrative apparatus and mediate between it and the rural society at each level together with *adhikaranas*.

The Gupta administration discussed above mainly interacted with local society through *adhikaranas*. Their lower strata functioned with *adhikaranas* especially as an issuing authority, and in this capacity, they made notification to local population. Their relation with *adhikaranas* also shows diversity. In the urban settlement, they managed *adhisthān*.

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179 *SI*, 1, p.288, l.8; p.356, l.4-p.357, l.6, ll.11-12; *Ibid.*, 23, p.382, l.5-p.383, l.6, ll.8-9; p.348, ll.6-7.
ādhikarana with urban dominant groups.\textsuperscript{183} On the other hand, their presence is quite nominal in rural area. In the case of Śṛgavera-vithi in the Kalaikuri and Jagadishpur inscriptions, it is rather members of the adhikarana, i.e., the named mahattaras and kuṭumbins, who had initiatives in making decision.\textsuperscript{184} In the cases of aṣṭakulādhikarana\textsuperscript{185} and the adhikarana mentioned in Nandapur inscription,\textsuperscript{186} there is no mention of administrators even as an issuing authority, and in the last two cases, the adhikarana and a section of kuṭumbins\textsuperscript{187} or only the adhikarana\textsuperscript{188} are mentioned as issuing authorities. Though there are several varieties in terms of relation between them, all these cases show relatively stronger authority and initiative on the side of adhikaranas. The fact that administrators had to approach them for land purchase and donation endorses this point.

In the later phase of this period, we see the rise of a new type of political authority. It is local kingship. The change of uparikas into uparika-mahārājas has already been mentioned above. Though their presence as remote authority seems not to have changed, the change of title connotes the change of their own cognition and that of lower administration and the rural society. Especially Devabhaṭṭāraka, the last of them, has the title of rājaputra and is mentioned with his enjoyment of elephant, horse and men, i.e. infantry.\textsuperscript{189} It shows his position as a subordinate ruler with military power and his predecessors may have experienced this transformation from provincial governors to subordinate rulers under the Gupta rule. In the same inscription, it is mentioned as a part of verification

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\textsuperscript{184} Ibid., pp.352-355; EDEP, pp.61-63.
\textsuperscript{185} SJ, 1, pp.287-289; pp.332-334.
\textsuperscript{186} Ibid., pp. 382-384.
\textsuperscript{187} Ibid., p.333, l.2-3.
\textsuperscript{188} Ibid., p.382, l.1
\textsuperscript{189} Ibid, p.347, l.2-3.
by *pustapālas* that any obstacle should not be made by a *visavapati*.\(^{190}\) It may indicate that there was some attempt on the side of the administrator to interfere in the affair of land purchase and donation, which had been exclusively decided by *adhikarana*s with the verification of *pustapālas*. Here we may detect rise of some section of administrators and their encroachment into the authority of *adhikarana*s.

In Samatata in this period, we see the appearance of local kingship and subordinate rulers. As is mentioned above, the Gunaighar inscription is a royal charter issued by *mahārāja* Vainyagupta.\(^{191}\) He is the sole authority who issued land grant and authorised the exemption from revenue charge. Under him, there were *mahārāja* Rudradatta, who made the petition to him,\(^{192}\) and *maharaja·mahāsāmanta* Vijayasena, who was sent to three *kumārāmātya* cum *bhogikas* as a messenger of the king.\(^{193}\) What is conspicuous is absence of the *adhikaraṇa* and *kutumīn*s in this process. The existence of peasant householders equivalent to *kutumīn*s of North Bengal is recognisable in the portion which mentions border-marks of donated plots.\(^{194}\) There are references to land plots belonging to individuals or group of them. But they have no place all through the process of land donation. The rise of local kingship and its wielding of the authority otherwise held by the *adhikaraṇa* become rather general tendency in the later period. This case can be a precursor which occurred earlier in the peripheral area, to such a tendency.

5. Glimpses of Other Types of Social Networks

As is discussed above, local networks on which the organisation of


adhikarana is based and which may be reinforced by the activity of adhikarana are dominant in this period. The network based on profession, which may be related to the later development of jāti networks, is not so obvious, though there are mentions of such groups like kāyastha, vaidya or vardhaki (carpenter). Rather, the inter-professional tie based on locality is recognisable in case of the petitioners of the Kalaikuri inscription.\textsuperscript{195} Even among urban professional groups, such a local tie associated with adhikarana looms large though they may have had guild-like organisation and its leader.

Another network detectable in these inscriptions is the network of religious institutions including temples and monasteries. They have their landed properties scattered around a certain geographical stretch. The temple of Govindasvāmin was donated land plots in the two neighbouring villages.\textsuperscript{196} The Jaina vihāra located in Vaṭagohāli was donated land plots scattered around the four neighbouring villages.\textsuperscript{197} The temple of Śvetavarāhasvāmin located in the forest nearby Ḍōṅgā-grāma received donation of land scattered around five villages,\textsuperscript{198} apart from the land it had been donated earlier by Ribhupāla.\textsuperscript{199} In these cases, as these institutions had connection with their estates, it is possible that social networks between cultivators of their estates and the institutions, or among these cultivators, were constituted at supra-village level. The cases of the Jagadishpur inscription, in which a vihāra in settlement Mecikāmra belonging to Dakṣināmāka-vithī, a small vihāra at the periphery of Gulmagandhikā in Śrīgaṇa-vithī and the temple of the Sun got donation of land in the same village,\textsuperscript{200} and the Gunaighar inscription, in which Mahāyāna Buddhist

\textsuperscript{195} Ibid., p.352, l.3·p.353, l.4.
\textsuperscript{196} Ibid., p.357, ll.8·9, p.358, ll.15·17.
\textsuperscript{197} Ibid., p.360, ll.7·9, p.361, l.14·p.362, l.16.
\textsuperscript{198} Ibid., p.349, ll.15·18.
\textsuperscript{199} Ibid., p.337, ll.5·6.
\textsuperscript{200} EDEP, pp.61·63.
The sangha at the vihāra located in Gopa...dighāga was donated five plots of fallow land in Kānteḍadaka-grāma,\textsuperscript{201} indicate the possibility that such networks between religious institutions and their estates cover a wider geographical stretch or surpass the administrative division. The former case also indicates interconnection between such religious institutions, as śramanak-ācārya Balakuṇḍa received land on behalf of both vihāra and small vihāra probably as a trustee.\textsuperscript{202} As he was associated with both, there may have been interaction between them even before the donation.

Among these cases of the networks of religious institution, the most interesting is the case of temples of Kokāmukhasvāmin and Śvetavarāhasvāmin.\textsuperscript{203} As is minutely discussed above, this case includes multiple aspects of the pilgrimage from North Bengal to Eastern Nepal, namely, the initial connection between original deities in Nepal and their estates in North Bengal, the construction of temples named after them and their connection with original ones, and finally the establishment of one of these 'copied' temples in the locality and the extension of its influence and estates. It may allude to the existence of long distance pilgrimage network, with which Ribhupāla was familiar and two sets of temples were linked in some way.

\textsuperscript{201} SI, 1, pp.340-345.
\textsuperscript{202} EDEP, p.62, 1.17.