

1. Ancient Bengal

- **Vedic Period (1500–1000 BCE):**

Bengal was divided among various Janapadas (kingdoms).

Key regions and their modern equivalents:

- **Pundravardhana:** Rajshahi and Rangpur (Bangladesh), Malda (West Bengal, India).
- **Vanga:** Khulna, Barisal (Bangladesh), Presidency and Medinipur divisions (West Bengal, India).
- **Radha:** Probable location in West Bengal, India.
- **Samatata:** Dhaka, Barisal, Chittagong (Bangladesh).
- **Harikela:** Sylhet, Chittagong, Dhaka (Bangladesh).

2. Bengal under Magadha Empires (684–320 BCE):

- **Nanda Empire (c. 345–322 BCE):**

- Under Mahapadma Nanda, the empire extended from Punjab to Odisha and Bengal.
- Initiated the conquest of Bharatvarsh (Indian subcontinent).

- **Maurya Empire (c. 322–185 BCE):**

- Founded by Chandragupta Maurya, unified the Indian subcontinent.
- Achievements under Ashoka:
 - Spread of Buddhism through missionary activities.
 - Construction of the Grand Trunk Road.
 - Era of social harmony and advancements in knowledge and sciences.

3. Classical Bengal (320–1000 CE):

- **Gupta Empire (Golden Age of India):**

- Significant advancements in science, culture, and Hindu traditions.
- Development of the Hindu numeral system, including the symbol for zero.
- Bengal was a key province with evidence of a monetized economy (Gupta coins found).
- Era marked by peace, prosperity, and flourishing artistic endeavors.

"Matsyanyayam"

Definition:

The term *Matsyanyayam*, from Sanskrit, translates to "law of the fish," where the stronger consume the weaker. This concept is described in the *Kautilya Arthashastra* and symbolizes chaos when law enforcement is absent.

Historical Context:

- Refers to Bengal's political condition between **650–750 AD**, post-Shashanka's death (c. 637 AD), and before the rise of the **Pala dynasty** (750 AD–1161 AD).
- A period of fragmented governance and anarchy across Gauda, Vanga, and Samatata, with no centralized rule.

Consequences:

1. **Anarchy and Instability:**

- Numerous small kingdoms engaged in internal warfare.
- Absence of a strong authority led to social and political disorder.

2. **Economic Decline:**

- Trade and commerce deteriorated.
- Decline of prominent ports like **Tamralipti**.

3. **Cultural and Structural Decay:**

- Ruins of earlier eras in Mahasthana reflect destruction during this time.
- Temples and monasteries built in the Pala period were constructed on these ruins.

4. **Famine:**

- A devastating famine, possibly linked to this chaos, further worsened the situation.

Resolution:

- The anarchy ended with **Gopala**, founder of the Pala dynasty, who unified Bengal and re-established law and order.