**The Historical Roots of Bangladesh**

**(From Ancient to Median Bangladesh)**

**Introduction:**

For much of history, the state that today we call Bangladesh was known only as Bengal; what happened elsewhere on the Indian subcontinent affected this region, too. Dominated at different periods of history by Buddists, Hindus, the Mughals and the East India Company, modern Bangladesh is a product of imperial Britain's Partition of India – a majority-Muslim nation initially joined to Pakistan, and finally born as an independent nation in 1971 after a bloody liberation war.

Bangladesh’s existence is deeply rooted in three historical phases:

1. Ancient Period
2. Mediaeval period
3. Modern Period

**Ancient Time** :

The history of Bengal dates back to 20,000 year. Remnants of Copper Age settlements in the Bengal region date back 4,000 years. People had a separate language in this part, and with time, two language families— Dravidian and Tibeto-Burman—seem to have settled in Bengal. Archaeological discoveries furnished evidence of a degree of civilization in certain parts of Bengal as far back as the first millennium BC.

Here I would like to mention a few ancient Bengal kingdoms.

**The Ajoy Valley Civilization :**

Indus valley civilization was a large community of people living on the banks of Indus river.

Its also called the Haprappa Civilization as the first city to be excavated was Harapppa.

These people were usually traders and did their trade with Sumerian Civilization (Iraq).

Most of the artifacts which were excavated were toys, which made the archeologists think that IVC was mainly populated by children.

**The Copper Age :**

The Nisad , Pundra and Banga races of Bengal developed a rich civilization in Bengal before the advent of the Aryans and after the development of Ajoy Civilization. At that time the people of Bengal earned their livelihood by agricultural pursuit. Many of them were engaged in trade and commerce . They worshipped the Kali , Siva , and Manasha along with different phenomena of nature .

**The Ancient Janapadas :**

The historic term “Janapada” means human settlement. The sources of ancient Bengal suggest that, in the earliest period Bengal was divided among various tribes or kingdoms which are known as the Janapadas. The ancient Janapadas are as follows:  
 1)Banga  
 2)Pundra  
 3)Gaura  
 4)Radha  
 5)Somotate  
 6)Horkel

The name of these Janapads ware purely descriptive and had no ethnic connection. These Janapads are inhabited by non-Aryan people.  The Hindu sources like : the Mohabharat and other Bhedic literature are the primary sources about these human settlements.

**The Banga :**  
The Banga is an ancient human settlement situated in Eastern Bengal. But its geographical connotation varied in different periods of history. The Hindu literatures indicate that the Banga is sea-faring nation and its realm extended up to the sea. They also mentioned that this is an area where finest quality white & soft cotton fabrics were produced. There was a coastal area approachable from the sea in the territory of Banga. From the above mentioned references, Banga appears to be an area of south and southeastern part of present Bangladesh.  
  
**The Pundra  :**  
The Pundra or Pundranagara is the earliest urban centre in Bangladesh, which goes back to the 4th century BC. The ruins of this have been identified at Mahasthan in Bogra district. It continued to be the headquarters of the administration of Maurya, Gupta and Pals. It was the capital of Pundrabardhan Bhukti under the Gupta rule. The famous China visitorâ€™ Hiuen-tsangâ€™' visited this place in the 7th century AD.  
  
Pundra was situated on the western bank of the Karatoya. It was well connected with other parts of Bengal through land and river routes. For this connection it was an important centre of trade and commerce throughout the ancient period.  
Pundra continued its importance after the Hindu regime and in the early Muslim period. The famous Muslim saint Shah Sultan Balkhi Mahisawar established his Khankah here.    
  
**The Gauda:**  
As an ancient human settlement, Gauda is the important Janopad of Bengal. The discovered evidence suggests that ancient Gauda located at coastal region. The famous & the first independent ruler of Gauda  is Shashanka. He ruled Gauda at the 7th century AD and his capital was the Karnasuborna which is located at present Murshidabad district. The Janapad of Gauda lay to the west of Bhagirathi and that its core area was Murshidabad.  
In the 13th century, under the Sultans, Gauda denoted the entire area of the Muslim sultanate. Its capital also called Gaur or Lakhnaboti, located at present Chapai Nawabgonj district.  
  
**The Radha (ra-ro):**  
Radha is the ancient human settlement of Bengal. It is difficult to locate exactly its geographical position. But historical sources suggest that Radha is the west-southern part of ancient Bengal.  
Howrah, Hughli and Burdwan in West Bengal are some areas of ancient Radha.

**The Somotate:**

Samatate is an ancient territorial unit in ancient Bengal.  Chinese traveler Hiuen-tsang visited Samatat at 7th century AD. As per his account, it was the South-eastern part of Bengal and was a Buddhist cultural centre. The archaeological discoveries in the Lalmai-Mainamati area, it can now be stated with certainty that Samatata was formed at  Comilla-Noakhali areas and the adjacent parts of hilly Tripura.  
  
**The Harikel:**  
Harikel is another geographical entity in ancient Bengal. But it is so difficult to locate it. Most of the evidence support that Harikel is the similar with our present Sylhet region. Another archeological evidence suggests its location at present Chittagong district. Harikel was situated by the side of Samatat.

**The [Mauryan Empire](https://www.ancient.eu/Mauryan_Empire/) (322 BCE - 185 BCE):**

It was supplanted the earlier [**Magadha Kingdom**](https://www.ancient.eu/Magadha_Kingdom/) to assume power over large tracts of eastern and northern [**India**](https://www.ancient.eu/india/). At its height, the [**empire**](https://www.ancient.eu/empire/) stretched over parts of modern Iran and almost the entire Indian subcontinent, barring only the southern peninsular tip. The empire came into being when [**Chandragupta Maurya**](https://www.ancient.eu/Chandragupta_Maurya/) stepped into the vacuum created by [**Alexander**](https://www.ancient.eu/Alexander/) of [**Macedon**](https://www.ancient.eu/macedon/)'s departure from the western borders of India. [**Chandragupta**](https://www.ancient.eu/Chandragupta/) subjugated the border states, recruited an army, marched upon the [**Magadha**](https://www.ancient.eu/Magadha/) kingdom, killed its tyrannical king who was despised by the populace, and ascended the throne. He thus founded the Mauryan dynasty. In his rise to power, he was aided and counselled by his chief minister **[Kautilya](https://www.ancient.eu/Kautilya/)** (also known as **[Chanakya](https://www.ancient.eu/Chanakya/)**), who wrote the **[Arthashastra](https://www.ancient.eu/Arthashastra/)**, a compendium of kingship and Governance .

**Mediaeval Period (712-1757 A.D)**

The history of the conquest of India by the Muslims is divided in to three phases:

1. The Arab conquest of Sind
2. The invasions By Sultan Mahmud
3. Expedition by Muhammad Ghori: permanent Muslim establishment
4. Turkish , Khalji , Tughlaq , Syed and Lodi rule (The Muslim political establishment )
5. The Mughal Dynasty (1526-1761 the significance of mughal rule)
6. The end of the Mughal Era

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