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Abstract

The history of post Gupta period is hazy in the annals of ancient Bengal. Little is known about later Gupta rulers of Bengal due to lack of source materials. After the later Guptas, for more than a century roughly from 650 to 750 AD, the history of Bengal is obscure in the extreme which in general marked as Matsyanyayam, period of political chaos and confusion. Recently, scholars have published sketches of a few post Gupta dynasties of Bengal which suggests reorganization of the chronology of post-Gupta period. This short paper discusses the post Gupta ruler's chronology and their dominations, where primary concern is to throw some light on that obscure part of Bengal history through a discussion on inscriptions, coins and literatures.

The history of post Gupta period is hazy in the annals of ancient Bengal. Little is known about later Gupta rulers of Bengal due to lack of source materials. After the later Guptas, for more than a century roughly from 650 to 750 AD, the history of Bengal is obscure in the extreme. In general term the period was marked by Matsyanyayam¹, political chaos and confusion. Recently, scholars have published a few sketches of some later dynasties of Bengal that suggest existing historical ideas need to be reassessed in the light of these new materials. This paper is an attempt to throw some light on that obscure part of Bengal history through a discussion on inscriptions, coins and literatures.

After the imperial Guptas, at the beginning of the six century continuous Huna² invasions, sudden entry and exit of Yashodharman on the political stage of northern India gives great shocks to the eastern India. Simultaneously Maukharis rose to prominence in the central part of northern India sway over later Guptas towards Magadha, western and northern Bengal. There was a long-drawn-out struggle between the Maukharis and the later Guptas for the possession of Magadha (southern Bihar) and parts of western and northern Bengal.

¹ Ancient Indian treatise Kautilya's Arthashastra defines the Sanskrit term matsyanyayam (matsya+nyayam) (Sanskrit: मत्स्य, fish law) as 'When the law of punishment is kept in abeyance, it gives rise to such disorder as is implied in the proverb of fishes, ie, the larger fish swallows a smaller one, for in the absence of a magistrate, the strong will swallow the weak'. In general, the condition of Bengal in the century following the death of shashanka and before the rise of the Palas (c 750-850 AD) has been described as matsyanyayam.

² The Huna were a part of the Hephthalite group, who established themselves in Afghanistan and Pakistan by the first half of the fifth century, with their capital at Bamiyan. They sometimes call themselves "Hono" on their coins, but it seems that they are similar to the Huns who invaded the Western world.

LATER Gupta rulers of BENGAL

Buddhist Mahayana literary work *Arya-Manjusri-Mulakalpa* throws some light on the later Gupta rulers. According to this literature, after the Imperial Budhagupta (ruled AD 476 to 495), two kings of the Gupta line were crowned one in Magadha and other is Gauda (Mookerji 2007). Bhitri and Nalanda seal of Kumaragupta III and a large number of gold coins makes quite clear that Narasimhagupta crowned in Magadha after Budhagupta.

Though the boundary of Narsimha's reign is uncertain, clay sealing archived from monastery site I of Nalanda provides some information regarding his territory. His title '*Paramabhadragavata Maharajadhiraja*³' indicates his exercise of authority beyond the Magadha region (Willis 2005), to be specific power over part of Bengal. Earn Posthumous stone pillar inscription (AD 510) of Goparaja⁴ mentions Bhanugupta, governor of Malwa during Narasimha, was defeated by a Huna king Toramana who carried his expedition up to Magadha and compelled Narasimha to retreat to Bengal (Mookerji 2007). Narasimha's 'archer type' gold coin was unearthed from different parts of Bengal (Chakravarti 2008) also testifies his reign over there. Most possibly he reigned over Pundravardhana (Northern Bengal).

After Toramana, the Hunas were led by his son Mihirakula. According to Hsuan-Tsang, Baladitya vanquished Mihirakula (Beal 2004) around AD 530 (Weiner 1963) and recaptured Magadha. This confirms that, Narasimha was not completely extinguished and he was a powerful King during his reign over Bengal.

On the other hand, Gunaigarh copperplate inscription brought to light one more name of eastern Bengal Gupta king, that of Vaniyagupta (Mookerji 2007). The date of the inscription is given in numeral and words that is Gupta year 188 (AD 507) refers; Vaniya Gupta lived at the time of Narasimhagupta. Buddhist text *Arya-Manjusri-Mulakalpa* also refers to a king called '*Va*', which may point to Vaniyagupta as a contemporary king of Narasimhagupta (Jayaswal 1934). That Gunaigarh copperplate was soldered with a royal seal bearing the legend of '*Maharaja Sri Vaniya Guptah*', signifies his sovereign over a part of Bengal. He was also named on Nalanda seal, which states him as a son of Kumaragupta II (ruled AD 473 to 476) (Willis 2005).

The above mentioned inscription also states Vaniyagupta's camp of victory was located at '*Kripura*', that indicates the location of his headquarters was in south Tripura. Thus the sphere of his authority was lay far away from Pundravardhana and Magadha, at the remote eastern Bengal. Numismatic evidences also support his presence in this region (Chakravarti 2008). Three gold coins of archer type have been discovered from Samatata bearing the name '*Vaniya*'. Most possibly, he exercised his authority over the parts of Bengal, therefore Srihatta, Samatata and Harikela Kingdom, and his reign may be extended to circa AD 515 (Willis 2005).

During the reign of Narasimhagupta, according to Earn stone pillar inscription, Bhanu Gupta lost Malwa to Hunas. Most probably a part of later Guptas were ruling there as feudatories (Sen 1999). Perhaps for this reason from Baladitya II to Adityasena, were on subordinate position, are absent on *Arya-Manjusri-Mulakalpa* (Jayaswal 1934).

³ A royal ruler's title on the Indian subcontinent, roughly meaning 'great king of kings', a prestigious indication of the princely state's particularly high rank

⁴ Goparaja was a feudatory of Narsimhagupta and fought against Huna king Toramana in the battle of Eran in AD 510.

Three Mandsaur inscriptions of Yasodharman refer Yasodharman as 'Vikramaditya', who freeing Malwa and neighbouring region from the Huna king, Mihirakula. Early history of Yasodharman is shrouded in obscurity and whatever we know; probably he belonged to the Aulikara family whose members ruled in Malwa. Yasodharman's sway extended over a wide area bounded by the Himalayas in the north, Mahendra mountains in the south, the Brahmaputra River in the east and the ocean in the west. But the flushing brilliance of this great conqueror rise and fell like a meteor between AD 530 and 540 (Sen 1999).

The Apshad inscription refers to glowing campaigns of Jivitagupta in the Himalaya region and south-western Bengal, whose period probably ranged from circa AD 525 to 540. Jivitagupta appears to be more important than his father Harshagupta (AD 490 to 505) or his grandfather Krishnagupta (AD 505 to 525) who were based in Magadha. Jivitagupta extend his territory beyond Magadha and reign over Pundravardhana and Vanga.

Kumaragupta III, son and successor of Jivitagupta, ruled between AD 540 and 560. He is described as '*Paramadaivata Paramabhattacharaka Maharajadhiraja*' as well as '*Prithivi-pati*', meaning 'Ruler of the earth' according to Damodarpur (no. 5) copperplate inscription of Gupta year 224 (AD 543) (Mookerji 2007). It also states that Pundravardhana was a '*Bhukti*' of Kumaragupta III and its Governor was his son. The Apshad inscription informs us that Kumaragupta III decisively defeated the Maukhari king, Isanavarmana in AD 554 which eliminated the presentation of the Maukharis from the central Gangetic valley and let him extend towards Prayaga.

The struggle between the Maukharis and later Guptas to control the Gangetic valley was continued in the reign of Damodargupta, son of Kumaragupta III. Damodargupta lost his life without achieving any decisive victory over the Maukharis. He was succeeded by his son Mahasenagupta, who achieve single success at the beginning of his career. In all probability he defeated Susthitavarman (ruled c. AD 590 to 595), the father of king Bhaskarvarman (ruled c. AD 600 to 650) of Kamrupa and advanced as far as Brahmaputra river. However, Mahasenagupta met misfortune in the later part of his reign. Both Bhaskarvarman and Chalukya king Kirtivarman (AD 567-597) attacked Mahasenagupta. Kirtivarman subdued Anga, Vanga, Kalinga and Magadha. Furthermore, in likelihood Mahasenagupta was defeated by the Tibetan king Strong Tan Gampo (AD 581- 600), enabling Maukhari king Sarvavarman to occupy some territories of his kingdom. According to Rajmala, the chronicles of Tipra dynasty, King Himti (118th king of Twipra) take over a part of Bengal on AD 590. To mark this victory Twipra Era, known as Tring, started from that day. The situation was made critical by internal discord. Sasanka the Gauda ruler, not only founded an independent kingdom, but also tookover Magadha, the eastern territories of Mahasenagupta. He, therefore, was pushed eastwards to Vidisha where he spent the rest of his days until his death in AD 601.

At the height of his power the north Indian king Harshavardhana (AD 590-647), ruled the Punjab, Gujarat, Bengal, Orissa and the entire Indo-Gangetic plain after the downfall of Imperial Guptas. According to Apsha inscription Harsha invested Madhavagupta, son of Mahasenagupta, as the Governor of Magadha in the later part of his reign. Harsha's overlordship forced overshadows later Guptas for nearly half a century. After the downfall of Harsha, Madhavagupta ruled for a brief period and was succeed by his son Adityasena in AD 650.

Adityasena was a powerful king titled as '*Maharajadhiraja*' and ruled over an extensive kingdom. According to Aphasad inscription, his empire included Magadha, Anga and Bengal, whereas *Arya-Manjusri-Mulakalpa* describes Adityasena as master of the central Gangetic valley who repeated the feat of Samudra Gupta in reaching the South, up to the Chola country. This source also refers to him as Gauda King (Jayaswal 1934) and his reign come to an end in AD 675 (Sen 1999).

Political chaos of POST Gupta BENGAL

After the decline of the Imperial Guptas, a succession of independent kingdoms emerged in different parts of Bengal. Gauda emerged incorporating Pundravardhana/Varendra and Rarh as independent entity. Whereas Vanga/ Vanga-samatata, Samatata, Harikela, Srihatta can be traced from later inscriptions and literatures. Most probably, post Gupta Bengal observed two or three parallel dynastic line.

Among these dynastic lines, Vanga rulers especially Gopachandra was contemporary to Narasimhagupta according to Eran stone pillar inscription of 510 AD. Faridpur copperplate inscription (Year 18) and Mallasarul copperplate inscription describe Gopachandra as '*Maharajadhiraja*' indicates him as a sovereign king (Mookerji 2007). He carved out an independent kingdom in Bengal after the downfall of the imperial Guptas which included a wider area of Vanga comprising Faridpur in eastern Bengal and Bardhaman in western Bengal. Mallasarul copper-plate refers a landgrant of Gopachandra at Vardhamana-bhukti⁵ (Bardhaman and Bankura districts in the Indian state of West Bengal) which proves his power over southern part of West Bengal, whereas Jayrampur copper-plate bears testimony to his flourishing rule over Dandabhukti (southwest Bengal and the bordering area of Orissa). It is highly probable that he ruled from Kotalipara of present day Gopalganj district of Bangladesh (Khan 2007). However, Vaniagupta of Samatata was preceded by this king. Probably Gopachandra's reign extend till c. 540 AD

Faridpur copper-plate inscription refers to another Vanga king named Dharmadiya. The first inscription refers him as '*Prithivyamapratiratha*' (the invincible ruler of the earth), where as the second one refers him as '*Maharajadhiraja*' indicates him a sovereign king. His time in power extend till c. 570 AD. Besides Gopachandra and Dharmaditya, another Faridpur copper-plate mentions a third independent ruler of Vanga named Samacharadeva, but very little is known about him. Most likely Samacharadeva exercise his power over Vanga till Shashanka, a prominent king of Bengal, crowned in c. 600 AD.

The names of two independent chiefs, Lokanatha and Jibodharan Rata, are known from Tipperah copper-plate of Lokanatha; they were contemporary rulers of parts of Eastern Bengal. Vottashali dated that above copper-plate as Gupta era 244 (corresponding to AD 564), perhaps Lokanatha reign north-eastern part of Samatata/Srihatta around second half of sixth century AD (Khan 2004). Among the names of the kings given in the Lokanatha plate, Srinatha is common in Kalapur copper plate of Murundanatha found same region. It is very likely that Srinatha was the common ancestor of both Lokanatha and Murundanatha of Kalapur plate. Similarities between these two copper plates, their common 'natha'

⁵ During the Gupta period Rarh was divided into several smaller regions (Bhuktis); such as Kankagrambhukti, Bardhamanbhukti and Dandabhukti. Bardhamanbhukti (Bengali: বর্ধমানভুক্তি) was spread across what are now Bardhaman and Bankura districts in the Indian state of West Bengal.

ending names suggest a family link. Perhaps Murundanatha was successor of Lokanatha and reign around second half of sixth century AD.

Jivadharana Rata was the founder of the Rata dynasty according to Kailan copper-plate inscription of Shridharana Rata. This copper-plate introduce us another line of rulers of south eastern Bengal and mentions the ruling king Shridharana Rata as '*Parama-Vaisnava*' and successor of Jivadharana Rata. Both the Rata kings are styled as '*Samatateshvara*' (King of Samatata). These record supplies no more significant information about them or their kingdom. Both Jivadharanarata, Shridharanarata minted good quality gold coins based on satamana weight standard of Samatata trend (Chakravarti 2008) and their capital was Devaparvata.

Two dated inscriptions of Midnapore copper-plates (RY-8 & RY-19) and another undated copper-plate from Egra provides information about Shashanka, the first important king of ancient Bengal. Madhavavarma's⁶ copper plate dated 619 AD, Harshavardhan's Banskhara and Madhuvan copper-plates and Nidhanpur copper-plate of Kamarupa king Bhaskara Varman also contains information about him. Contemporary literary accounts of Banabhatta, Chinese pilgrim Hiuen-tsang and Buddhist text *Arya-Manjusri-Mulakalpa* gives Shashanka a prominent place in the history of this region. Both in the inscriptions and literary accounts described Shashanka as the ruler of Gauda. By the beginning of the seventh century he captured power in Gauda. Karnasuvarna was his capital and he was the first known king of Bengal attempted to establish a north Indian empire.

Like other rulers of Vanga, Shashanka minted gold coins on suvarna standard. However from Samatata area satamana⁷ standard gold coins have been discovered which were meant for circulation in the Samatata area only. Thus Shashanka's gold coin of two varieties and weight standards shows his exercise of power over at least two different zones of Bengal, Gauda-Vanga and Samatata. It is generally believed that he ruled approximately till 625 AD.

According to the Vappa-Ghoshavata copper-plate of Jayanaga, Karnasuvarna served as the administrative capital for a king named Jayanaga. It is significant that Jayanaga issued debased gold coins of suvarna⁸ standard which appear to have seen used in Vanga. Probably he ruled the Vanga region after Shashanka.

Buddhist text *Arya-Manjusri-Mulakalpa* confirmed that after Shashanka the state of Gauda was paralysed and in the absence of a strong king, the feudal vassals each one was independent and autonomous (Jayaswal 1934).

Harsha formed an alliance with Bhaskaravarman, king of Kamarupa, and marched on Shashanka. Although he defeated his rival, the result was indecisive as Shashanka continued to rule much of his kingdom. After death of Shashanka, Harsha was able to bring Bihar, Kannauj and northern Bengal under his rule, whereas Bhaskaravarman conquer the remainder of Shashanka's kingdom. Bhaskarvarman issued Nidhanpur copper plate from his camp at Karnasuvarna testifies his control over this region for a short period.

⁶ Madhavavarma was Shashanka's subordinate king whose domination was over Ganjam/Oriisa.

⁷ Satamana standard equals to 100 Rattis or 11 grams of gold.

⁸ The Suvarna weight standard suggests coin of 144 grains or approximately 9.2 gms of gold.

The Mainamati copper plate of Balabhatta referred Khadgodyama as '*khadgakhya*' means 'known as *khadga* (sword)'. While Deulbadi image inscription titled him as '*nripadhiraja*' indicates him a powerful king and Ashrafpur copper plate II of Devakhadga referred him as '*ksitiriyamabhitinirjita*' means he 'conquered this world (*ksiti*) fearlessly (*abhita*)' (Islam 2008). These data suggest that probably Khadgayama was a proficient warrior, especially in sword fighting who fought fearlessly to carve out a kingdom or established him firmly as a powerful king. Khadgodyama was the first king and founder of the Khadga dynasty, who paved the way for a strong paramount dynasty in southeast Bengal. His reign perhaps ranged from circa AD 625 to 640.

Jatakhadga was the next king of this dynasty according to Ashrafpur copper plate inscriptions of Devakhadga. It is mentioned in the same inscription that '*sarvari samgha vidhastha surabhava trinamiba maruta*' means he destroyed the multitudes of all his enemies (*sarvarisamgha*) through heroism (*shurabhava*) as a piece of straw (*trinamiba*) by the wind (*maruta*) (Islam 2008). Probably he had to fight against his enemies to consolidate his position or to extend his kingdom. Yet no more plates have been discovered which may be used as a source of reconstructing his complete history. Maybe his reign extend till AD 654.

Devakhadga, son of Jatakhadga, became king after his father. Ashrafpur copper plates and Shalban vihara copper plates bear legend '*Srimatdevakhadga*' testifies Devakhadga issued these copper plates. On the other hand a number of gold coins discovered which also bears same legend. Devakhadga is also referred in the Ashrafpur copper plate I as '*ksitipala*' (king) while plate II gives title '*narapati*' (king). He is also referred in the copper plate of Balabhatta. All the copper plates and coins bear indication of his powerful reign but none bears any paramount titles such as '*maharajadhiraja*' or '*parambhattaraka*'. Ashrafpur copper plates mentioned Devakhadga conquered his enemies; probably he had to fight against his neighbouring kings to extend his dominion and to conquer Samatata.

Ashrafpur copper plate refers Rajaraja as a son of Devakhadga, probably who became king after his father. Though no copper plate has been discovered bearing his reign, but coins and foreign account throw some light about his ruling in Samatata. Rajabhatta issued Gupta archer type gold coins; seven such gold coins have been discovered from southeast Bengal is metrological, symbolically and stylistically same as Devakhadga's coins bears the testimony that both of them were kings of the same dynasty. These numismatic evidences proofs him as a powerful independent king, however no more activity is known of this king due to lack of source materials. Probable range of his reign was AD 673 to 690.

Balabhatta, another son of Devakhadga, probably became king after Rajabhatta. Salban Vihara Copper plate and a number of gold and silver coins have been discovered from Mainamati area; represent him as a powerful king. According to this inscription his capital was at Devaparvata but it is very difficult to determine the extent of the sway of his kingdom from it. Legend '*Vangasri*' from Balabhatta's coin suggests his sway could have been a part of Vanga, contiguous to Samatata.

Considering the stylistic affinity with other Khadga coins, Prithubhata and Sarvanada may be considered as the kings of the Khadga dynasty. Probably they became successors after Balabhatta. But it is very difficult to determine their exact chronological position.

Though identified archaeological and literary materials till date are not sufficient to give a clear view of the post Gupta Bengal, recent scholars have published sketches of a few post Gupta dynasties of Bengal

which suggests reorganization of the chronology of post-Gupta period. This short paper discusses the post Gupta ruler's chronology and their dominations, where primary concern is on the Matsyanyayam period which was in general term marked as political chaos and confusion. This paper is an attempt to throw some light on that obscure part of Bengal history through a discussion on inscriptions, coins and literatures.

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