

## Tamralipti Port

Tamralipti Port is one of the prosperous towns and ports of ancient Bengal. From ancient times to the 8th century AD, Tamralipti's fame as a significant port of Bengal spread throughout the world. Tamralipti was not only a seaport but also a center for conducting trade and commerce by land.

Evolution of Tamralipti Port in terms of sources:

Various sources have various synonyms for Tamralipti, the oldest port in South and Southeast Asia; such as Tamalitti, Tamalipti, Tamalik, Tamalipta, Tamraliptika, Velakula, Stambapu, Vishnugriha, Tamlini, Gambhira, etc. In addition, it is mentioned as Damalipta in Dandi's Dasakumarcharita and Adikhanchintamani, Tamaliti in Ptolemy's account, Ta-mo-liti in Fa-hian's account, and Tan-mo-li-ti in Hiuen Tsang's account.

The Mahabharata describes a sea route from Tamralipti to Bharukachchha (Bharuch) through which there was communication with Sumatra, Java and other places. The first mention of Tamralipti is found in the Sinhalese Pali epic Mahavamsa, where it is narrated that the Sinhalese king Devanampiya Tisa used to exchange gifts with the Mauryan emperor Ashoka regularly. Emperor Ashoka brought a Bodhi tree from his capital Pataliputra to Tamralipti by ship on the Ganges in just seven days. Then he took the Bodhi tree from Tamralipti by land and installed it on the shore of the ocean. After completing all the religious rituals, the ship with the Bodhi tree anchored at Jabukola (Sri Lanka) by sea. Although the Mahavamsa does not mention the specific geographical location of Tamralipti, it is assumed that it was on the shores of the Bay of Bengal (on the coast of the ocean). From this description, it can be concluded that Tamralipti was under the Mauryan Empire and was connected to it by both land and sea routes.

The descriptions of the Mahajana Jataka, the Samudra Jataka and the Samuddabanihya Jataka mention the maritime trade of Bengal. Until approximately the 4th century BC, the Ganges was the only means of internal communication in this region. In the Jataka's story, Tamralipti is called the port of communication between the Lower Ganges and the Middle Ganges valleys. In the descriptions of the Mahajana and the Samudra Jataka, there is a mention of

a port (Tamralipti) near (the mouth) where the Ganges flows into the Bay of Bengal, which is on the seashore. There was commercial communication with it by road and waterway; it had special economic importance for the import and export of goods.

Various descriptions of Tamralipti are also found in literary sources. It is mentioned in the Daskumar Chari of Dandi that Tamralipti is a prosperous port of Suksha Janapada; it is situated on the seashore and near the Ganges. Merchants of various nations, especially Arab merchants, used to anchor at Tamralipti with large ships for commercial purposes; Tamralipti was always busy with the movement of merchants. The convenience of navigation and commercial exchange bear the sign of its prosperity. The political importance of Tamralipti as mentioned in the source in question is that the Suhmas controlled and managed the port.

In the 11th century literary source Somadeva's Kathasaritsagar, Tamralipti is described as a city on the coast of the Eastern Sea. The palace where King Chandasingh resides is spacious; it is very well planned and decorated with gardens and ponds. The basis for the development of Tamralipti port was its commercial potential. From here, an estuary meets the sea. That is why Tamralipti has been identified as a sea port not far from the sea and on the coast of the sea.

The Greek geographical source Periplus of the Erythraean Sea does not clearly state the location of Tamralipti. Its translator Schoff identifies Tamralipti with the Ganges. Megasthenes' Indica also does not provide clear information about the location of Tamralipti; it only states

The Ganges River was used to travel from the sea to Bokhara (Pataliputra). Pliny's Natural History mentions a people called Taluctae; this probably refers to the inhabitants of Tamralipti. For he states that the last boundary of the Ganges River flows through the Gangaridai; its inhabitants were known as the Gangaridai-Kalingas.

The city of Tamalites (possibly Tamralipti) mentioned in Ptolemy's description is located within the Mandalay region. It is here that the royal palace of the capital,

Palibokhara (Pataliputra), was located. Palibokhara is located on the banks of the Ganges River and half a degree south of Palibokhara. Due to its location, it had special administrative and economic importance. Ptolemy calls the Ganges and Tamralipti two separate ports.

Geographical location and political boundaries of Tamralipti:

According to the Matsya and Vayu Puranas, the Bhagirathi, one of the tributaries of the Ganges, flowed through the Tamralipti region; the famous trading port of Tamralipti was located on the banks of the Ganges, not far from the sea. This stream flowed southwards through the northern Radha district; to its east was Bengal and to its west was Tamralipti. Following the oldest course of the Ganges-Bhagirathi flow, it is seen that the Ganges, passing Rajmahal in the south of Purnia, passed through the lowlands of the Santal land of Chotanagpur-Manbhum-Dhalbhum and fell into the sea towards the south, and this flow was the confluence of the Ajay, Damodar and Rupnarayan rivers. The port of Tamralipti was at the southern end of this combined flow.

Tamralipti is mentioned as a separate kingdom in the Mahabharata. The Jain Sutras claim that it is part of Bengal and the Dashakumarchari claim that Tamralipti is part of Suksha. Somadeva's Kathasarisagara (1063-82 AD) states about the location of Tamralipti that the city of Tamralipti is close to the sea; it is situated on the coast of the Eastern Sea. According to Ptolemy's An Outline of Geography, there were five cities on the banks of the Ganges; Tamaliti (Tamralipti) was one of them. It was an important administrative centre located half a degree south of the capital Pataliputra on the banks of the Ganges. Stabo describes that the Ganges, the largest river in India, descended from the hills to the plains and flowed eastwards, and beyond Pataliputra, it fell into the sea through a single mouth. From this it is assumed that Tamralipti was located near where the Ganges flows into the sea.

According to the account of the Chinese traveler Hiuen Tsang, Tamralipti is located 900 li west of the coast. The total area of the land is 1400 li. Its capital is 10 li; it was located on a bay of the sea. The port city was an important commercial center as important waterways and land routes converged at one place. According to Fa-Hien, the distance from Champa to Tamralipti is 50 yojans. Its capital was a prosperous seaport. I-Tsing mentions Tamralipti as a

prosperous port on the sea coast of eastern India. In Buddhist texts, Tamralipti is mentioned as belonging to the empire of Shashanka.

#### Current Location:

There is disagreement among historians about the present location of Tamralipti port. Taylor and Ferguson have identified Tamralipti as ancient Subarnagram (present Sonargaon). Skoff opposes this view and says that Tamralipti port is identical with present Tamluk. Shastri agrees with this and says that Tamaliti mentioned in Ptolemy's Geography can be clearly identified with modern Tamluk which is located on the banks of the Rupnarayan River, 12 km upstream from the confluence of the Hooghly and Ganges. Most modern historians including Nihar Ranjan Roy have accepted this view. In Nihar Ranjan Roy's description, Tamralipti is described as being located somewhat further south than modern Tamluk. Agreeing with this, Ashok Dutta says that Tamralipti was located further south than present Tamluk. Because most literary sources state that Tamralipti is on the Ganges

On the banks of the river; not on Rupnarayan. So the location of the ancient Tamralipti port must have been on the banks of the Ganges River. 'Natsali' on the banks of the Hooghly River, 10 miles south of Tamluk, was the ancient Tamralipti.

#### Historical Importance:

Most sources refer to Tamralipti as a prosperous trading center and port of ancient Bengal. There is clear evidence from various sources about the role of the city and port of Tamralipti in internal and external trade, both by water and land.

From the various stories of Jataka, it can be easily inferred that Tamralipti was the main means of communication between the countries of Southeast Asia, especially the countries of South India, by water. Merchants from Madhya Pradesh would travel from Varanasi or Champa, cross the Ganges-Bhagirathi, reach Tamralipti, and from there cross the sea to reach Sinhala or Burma. Buddhist sources also mention maritime trade from Tamralipti to Burma and

Sinhala. Information about the prosperity of Tamralipti port as a commercial port is available in Ptolemy's Geography. Hiuen Tsang's account identifies the commercial prosperity of Tamralipti and the superiority of this port in terms of internal and external trade. It is mentioned in the Kathasari Sagara that Tamralipti was the center of wealthy merchants. From here, they conducted maritime trade with Sri Lanka, Subarnadwipa and other countries.

Based on various sources, it is known that foreign trade was conducted through three main routes centered around the port of Tamralipti. The first route maintained communication between Bengal and Sinhala. The second route, via the Chittagong-Arakan coast to Burma. The third route is mentioned in Ptolemy's description; trade was conducted through this route with the Malay Peninsula and the Far East. Sailing from Tamralipti, the ships reached the port of Palaura in Orissa and from here, they sailed across the Bay of Bengal to various places in Malaya, Java and Sumatra.

The commercial prosperity of Tamralipti was linked to various parts of the country by sea as well as by land, with various parts of the country and even with many places in the outside world. According to Hiuen Tsang's account, the route from Tamralipti extended northwards through Karnasuvarna to Rajmahal Champa and Pataliputra. The second route connected Bengal with South India directly southwards from Tamralipti. The third route is mentioned in the account of It-Sing; it extended north-westwards from Tamralipti through Bodh Gaya to Ayodhya.

Trade and commerce flourished in ancient Bengal; as a result, the port of Tamralipti became an important and prosperous commercial center. The convenient geographical location of the port of Tamralipti and the ease of communication by land and water probably facilitated the commercial expansion and prosperity of Bengal. According to Hiuen Tsang's account, various types of valuable goods, gems and rubies, etc., used to accumulate in abundance in Tamralipti and therefore the inhabitants of Tamralipti were very wealthy.

#### Reasons for the decline of Tamralipti Port:

The commercial prosperity of Tamralipti port continued from a few centuries before the birth of Christ to the 8th century AD. After the 8th century, no further

information is available about Tamralipti port. There is no evidence of Tamralipti's existence not only as a seaport, but also as a commercial center by land.

Historians have identified several reasons for the decline of Tamralipti port. The most significant reason among them was natural factors; that is, the change in the course of the river. In river-dominated Bengal, the role of the continuous change in the course of the river has been particularly important in changing the boundaries of various regions and the rise and fall of cities, ports and towns since ancient times. The special rise, prosperity and decline of Tamralipti port was due to the change in the direction of the Ganges River. The river on which this port was located (Ganga) probably silted up and its mouth was blocked, changing the riverbed

In the 8th century, the port of Tamralipti lost its ability and importance due to silting up of the river mouth.

The indirect reason behind the decline of the Tamralipti port was the political situation in Bengal at that time. From the middle of the 7th century onwards, the fishing industry in Bengal was in a state of chaos for almost a century. The prolonged anarchy and lack of peace and order hampered the progress and prosperity of trade and commerce. Along with the decline in trade, the importance of the port also declined.

In ancient Bengal, the port of Tamralipti had a long-lasting influence on the economic, social and cultural environment of the place. As a result of Bengal having its own port, a lot of gold and silver was regularly earned by exporting goods through it. Due to the abundance of maritime trade, Bengal's reputation spread to foreign countries as well. Due to the convenience of the Tamralipti port, Bengal also developed as a significant religious and cultural center due to regular communication with the countries of Southeast Asia. Evidence that Tamralipti was one of the centers of Buddhist practice is available from Chinese accounts. Several Chinese travelers stayed in Tamralipti for many years and acquired Sanskrit education. Through them, the culture and education of Bengal expanded to the outside world as well. Therefore, it would not be an exaggeration to say that in addition to being a commercial center, the Tamralipti port also prospered as a religious and cultural center.

## Ganges port

There is not much significant information available from local sources about Ganga Port, the oldest port of Bengal. In this case, the main source is foreign accounts, especially Greek, Roman and Chinese accounts.

Evolution of Ganga ports in terms of origin:

2 Greek accounts show that in 327 BC, the Greek hero Alexander led a victorious campaign in India and after conquering several kingdoms, he crossed Taxila and reached the banks of the Bipasha River in Punjab. From intelligence information, he learned that on the other side of the Bipasha there was a kingdom called Prasioi, to the east of which was the strong Gangaridai kingdom. The Gangaridai kingdom had a huge army; 6,000 infantry, 1,000 cavalry and 700-800 elephants. Despite Alexander's interest, due to the reluctance of the war-weary soldiers, he did not advance further and returned.

Diodorus, while describing the country after the Indus, says that the region beyond the Ganges was dominated by the Prasioi and the Gangaridai. Quintus Curtius Rufus mentions two peoples living on the other side of the Ganges. These were the Gangaridai and the Prasioi. According to Stabo's Geography, the Ganges river flowed through the Gangaridai kingdom, which defined its eastern boundary. Its location was probably Prayag (Allahabad). The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea describes the Ganga port as being on the seashore, adjacent to the territory of the Chrysae (Chrsyi) and the barbarian tribes. It was a trading city on the banks of the Ganges. The port was used for the export of raw silk, silk thread and silk cloth. Claudius Ptolemy, in his An Outline of Geography, mentions that Gangabandar was the capital of the Gangaridai kingdom. According to Megasthenes, the eastern boundary of the Gangaridai was where the Gangaridai flowed from north to south and fell into the sea. The Gangaridai had a powerful military force that struck fear into the minds of neighboring kings. It was never defeated by foreign powers. He also says that the coastal Gangaridai kingdom was inhabited by a small ethnic group called the Kalingai. According to Pliny's Natural History, the last part of the Ganga

It flows through the Gangaridai kingdom and empties into the sea. Its inhabitants were known as Gangaridai-Kalingai. Virgil's description mentions the location of Gangaridai with the kingdom of Prasoi, which is located on the eastern border of the Ganges.

In the first century AD, Pan-ku's Chien-han-su describes the sending of a Chinese mission to the western region of Huan-chi. The Huan-chi region was rich in brilliant pearls and rhinoceros. Amitabh Bhattacharya comments that Pan-ku's Huan-chi probably refers to the Ganges or Ganges. The Chinese mission was sent under the orders of Prince Wang-mang, who later founded the Xin dynasty.

Analyzing Greek and Roman sources, Nihar Ranjan Roy says in his book Bengali History that the kingdoms of Prasiya and Ganga were united sometime in the fourth or third century AD. The king Mahapadana (who is called Ugrasena in the Mahabodhi) mentioned in the Puranas united the eastern and Ganga states. The news of the great wealth and powerful army of Ugrasena's combined Prasiya and Ganga states reached Alexander's camp.

#### Geographical Location:

There is a difference of opinion among historians regarding the location of Gangabandar, a prosperous town and powerful port on the banks of the Ganges in the 10th century BC. Goswami says that Chandraketugarh is similar to the ancient city and port of Gangaridai described in the Periplus. Modern historians such as Nihar Ranjan Roy, Gautam Sengupta agree with this. Their point is that the location of ancient Gangaridai is within the geographical boundaries of West Bengal. Gangaridai consists of parts of South and 24 Parganas, Hooghly, Howrah and Medinipur districts of West Bengal. According to Nihar Ranjan Roy, "The oldest city in East and South Bengal is called Banganagar in Sinhala mythology and Ganga-Bandar in Ptolemy. Ganga-Bandar was located at one of the five mouths of the Ganges; possibly on the banks of the second mouth, but this cannot be said with certainty. According to the Periplus, Ganga-Bandar was a famous center of maritime trade in contemporary times and, according to Ptolemy, the capital and main city of the Ganga state."

According to Bratin Dhan Nath Mukherjee, the area up to the mouth of the Padma in present-day Bangladesh, i.e. the coastal region of Bangladesh, was within

Gangaridai. Analyzing Ptolemy's data, Gangaridai can be identified as the area between the two main branches of the Ganges in West Bengal, India, and Bangladesh. Although the above geographical boundaries of West Bengal and Bangladesh are assumed to be the ancient Gangaridai kingdom, no archaeological site has been identified with certainty as Gangaridai so far.

Sufi Mostafizur Rahman commented that the famous sea port of Ganga was the capital and commercial center of the Gangaridai kingdom. Muslin cloth was exported to far western countries through this port. There were gold mines near the capital. Many have tried to identify Chandraketugarh and Tamralipti in West Bengal as ancient Gangaridai ports, but this was not possible due to insufficient information. However, in the light of recently discovered archaeological data, Sufi Mostafizur Rahman commented that Wari Bateshwar was the famous ancient Gangaridai kingdom. The vast land surrounding the area through which the lower reaches of the Ganges River flowed is known as the Ganges Delta. Although Wari Bateshwar is close to the Brahmaputra River, it is geographically better known as the Ganges Delta. As such, Wari Bateshwar is on the banks of the Ganges.

Shahnaz Husne Jahan commented that the geographical location of Chandraketugarh, its location on the banks of the Vidyadhari River, is indicative of maritime trade - all of which suggest that Chandraketugarh was the location of the ancient Gangetic port. He also said that Chandraketugarh is similar to the Gangaridai Sea mentioned in the Periplus - located at the mouth of the sea. This can be inferred from the Mauryan and Pala-Sena period artifacts found during excavations at Chandraketugarh.

#### Historical Importance:

Gangabandar was the capital and administrative centre of the Gangaridai kingdom. Archaeological excavations reveal that it was surrounded by a strong (mud) wall and was naturally fortified during the Mauryan period in the first century AD. From this, it can be easily inferred that all kinds of civic amenities and security arrangements existed in the Gangabandar area.

The evidence found at Chandraketugarh, especially the cultural evidence, testifies to the fact that a distinct regional entity developed around Gangabandar. Its inhabitants had different living spaces and religious atmospheres. The excavators believe that the brick temples and houses at Chandraketugarh developed during the same cultural period (Gupta period).

Ganga Port was a prosperous commercial center and port city of ancient Bengal. It is known from Chaiki sources that Chinese silk fabrics were exported to Tamil Nadu and other regions through Ganga Port. In Greco-Roman sources, Ganga Port has been described as a very prosperous seaport and the heart of maritime trade. The description of the Periplus mentions the export of Gangetic Nadu. In addition, from the discovery of coins, seals, black-glazed pottery, rolled wire, etc. found at Chandraketugarh, it is assumed that Ganga Port was of immense commercial importance due to its geographical location from the pre-Mauryan period to the Gupta period. Using this port, an uninterrupted commercial network of Bengal with the Mediterranean and Southeast Asian countries was established.

#### Reasons for decline:

Gangabandar is believed to have gained prominence during the Mauryan period in the first century BC or the first century AD. Later, the port remained an important place for a long time until the end of the Gupta period. Archaeological excavations show that towards the end of the Gupta period, the quantity of coins decreased and the number of artifacts began to decrease. Historians have identified two reasons for the decline of Gangabandar.

First, natural causes, i.e., changes in the course of the river due to earthquakes or other reasons. As a result of changes in the course of the Ganges, the usefulness of the port changes and its necessity decreases. Since the port is the heart of commercial communication, the importance of the Ganges port decreases due to changes in the course of the river and it is plunged into decline.

Secondly, the shift in political power, although historians debate the extent of its influence, also accelerated the decline of the Gangetic ports due to commercial decline, particularly the decline in maritime and international trade in the post-Gupta period.

Although there is debate among historians about the location of Gangabandar, there is no doubt about its importance and commercial prosperity. After reviewing the evidence found at Chandraketugarh, socio-economic environment, production center, administrative center, housing system, etc., most historians have agreed that it is identical to Chandraketugarh. However, Sufi Mostafizur Rahman believes that it is more likely to be the Gangabandar due to the geographical location of Wari Bateshwar, the evidence found, the period and prosperity.

### Chittagong port

Location:

Currently, the main international maritime port of Bangladesh, the second largest port city of the country and the gateway to Bangladesh, Chittagong Port is a prosperous port of ancient Bengal. It is located at 22° 52' 44" East longitude at the mouth of the Bay of Bengal and the Karnaphuli River. Chittagong Port is the only port that still survives and is developing at the same time.

Historical evolution of Chittagong Port in terms of sources:

In Hindu scriptures and mythology, the port of Chittagong is called Chattalbal. Buddhist sources mention it as Chit-ta-gong. The Muslims of Chattashala named it Chattogram or Chatgaon. Arab merchants and traders mention Chittagong as Samandar, Sudkawan and Satijam. European travelers call it Chatigan, Chatgan; Chinese accounts call it Che-ti-chiang. Local Muslim rulers named it Islamabad (and Fatehabad). João de Barros clearly marked Chattogram on his map in 1550, and Van den Broek called it Jetiga in 1660. Portuguese accounts call Chittagong port Porto Grande or Great Port.

Shahnaz Husne Jahan, analyzing Greek, Roman, Arabic, Persian, Chinese and European sources, said that Chittagong port was established in the second century AD; in Greco-Roman sources it is called Pentapolis. In the descriptions of Arab and Persian merchants and geographers from the 9th to the 14th century,

it is known as Samandar Port. From the 14th to the first half of the 16th century, it was called Sudkawan, Satigam, Chatigam, Chatigabo, Bafetanya and Che-ti-Chiang etc. To the local residents, it was known as Harikela from the 7th to the 10th century and from the 10th century it came to be known as Chittagong.

The port of Samandar is mentioned in the descriptions of Arab and Persian geographers from the 9th to the 14th centuries. Ibn Khurdadbih in his *Kitab al-Masalik wal-Mamalik* says that after a three-day sea voyage from the ports of Kalakan (Kalingapattam), Al-Lawa and Kanja, ships would anchor at Samandar. Its distance from Kamrun (Kamrup) was 15-20 days' journey. Al-Idrisi in his *Nuzhatul-Mushtaq* (12th century) says that Samandar is 30 miles from Kanja. It is a prosperous and large trading city; doing business here is profitable. The port city is subordinate to the king of Kanuj (Kamrup). It is situated on the banks of a river coming from Kashmir.

From the accounts of Sulaiman, Ibn Khurdadbih, Al-Idrisi, etc., historians like Mukherjee, Abdul Karim, Chakraborty, etc. have agreed that the present-day Chittagong port is the famous Samandar port mentioned in the Arab accounts.

In the fourteenth century, the Moroccan traveler Ibn Battuta referred to Chittagong as Sudkawan in his travelogue. He said that Sudkawan is a large city on the seashore. It is situated near the Ganges; it is located near the place where the Ganges and the Jamuna join in the same stream and fall into the Bay of Bengal. In the fifteenth century, the important mention of Chittagong port can also be seen in the account of Mahuan. He came to Bengal in the early part of 1432. He referred to Chittagong port as Che-ti-chiang. He said that Su-

After traveling by ship from Men-ta-la for 20 days, he reached Che-ti-chiang. Chittagong is also mentioned in the descriptions of Fei-sing and Niccolò de Conti.

From the 9th century AD, Arab merchants came to Bengal through the port of Chittagong for trade purposes and numerous Sufi dervishes came to spread Islam. Until the first half of the 14th century, the port of Chittagong was transferred between Tripura and Arakan. In the 13th century, Marco Polo's account shows that Chittagong was under Arakan. During the reign of Sultan

Fakhruddin Mubarak Shah, Chittagong became part of the independent Sultanate. At that time, the port of Sudkawan was mentioned in Ibn Battuta's travelogue. In 1493, Alauddin Hussain Shah captured Chittagong.

In the early 16th century, due to its strategic importance, the conflict between Gaur, Tripura and Arakan centered on the port of Chittagong reached its peak. In 1517, Nasrat Shah defeated the Arakanese and occupied Chittagong and named it Fatehabad. The ruins of the mosque, dugouts and palaces built by Nasrat Shah at the present-day Fatehabad in Chittagong serve as a reminder of that time. The stability of the Fatehabad capital did not last long; in 1538, Sher Shah defeated and killed the Sultan of Gaur, Mahmud Shah, and occupied Bengal. Shortly before his death, in the wake of a conflict with the Portuguese, they set fire to a large part of the Chittagong port and committed many murders. After the fall of the independent Sultanate of Bengal, the Arakanese Magras, taking advantage of the Afghan-Mughal conflict, occupied Chittagong for almost a hundred years and established a kind of reign of terror. In 1666, Shaista Khan's son Umed Khan expelled the Magadans and established peace in Chittagong.

#### Locational and Historical Importance:

Locationally, Chittagong Port was in an important geostrategic position. Its location at the mouth of the Karnaphuli River, which originates from the mountain range to the northeast of the hilly Chittagong and flows into the Bay of Bengal. The unique feature of this port is the facility of deep-sea anchorage a few miles inland from the sea.

Due to the location of the port and its natural harbor, Chittagong became an important center of trade and commerce from the 9th century AD. At that time, it was a profitable trading center for Arab merchants. The Chinese traveler Ma-Huan came to Chen-Ti-Chiang with a delegation. According to his description, it was a prosperous port. Chinese merchant ships carrying goods often traveled here.

In 1313, Sir John Herbert described Chittagong as one of the most prosperous and populous cities. The Portuguese were the first Europeans to arrive at the port of Chittagong. Under their rule, the port of Chittagong flourished; it became an important commercial center. They named it Porto Grande or the Great Port.

One of the overland routes mentioned by Nihar Ranjan Roy for communication with the outside world from Bengal is the Chittagong-Arakan route. It extended from Chittagong in the south through Arakan to Prom or ancient Srikshetra in lower Burma. He assumes that there was also a sea-bound waterway running parallel to this route.

Ma-Huan's account mentions that in the 15th century, officials appointed by the Sultan of Bengal welcomed the Chinese mission at the port of Chittagong. It is believed that during the Ilyas Shahi era, the northern Chittagong or Hathazari area was the heart or capital of Muslim rule. Inscriptions, mosques and various monuments of their reigns built during the reigns of Sultan Ruknuddin Barbarak Shah and his son Sultan Shamsuddin Yusuf Shah have been discovered here.

Nasrat Shah established an administrative unit or regional capital at Fatehabad in Chittagong. From the ruins found, it can be inferred that during the Sultanate period, Muslim administrative centers were located somewhat north of the present city of Chittagong. Daulat Wazir Bahram Khan, the author of the poem Laili Majnu, praised Fatehabad and said, "Seeing the city of Fatehabad is a holy city/Chattogram's fame is revealed/Beautiful as beautiful as Amaravati/Many saints and honest people reside there."

Besides, Chittagong city was a vast playground of religion and culture. Since the Middle Ages, it was known as the land of the Twelve Saints. Poet Muhammad Mukim has mentioned the influence of the Bisti Sufis among the Sufis of Chittagong. There is a saying that many of them settled here by sea from the Middle East. The influence of saints can be seen among the followers of Hinduism and Buddhism. Vaishnavism was able to gain special expansion here. The presence of numerous tombs and pilgrimage sites of saints and Sufis in Chittagong is proof of its religious and cultural importance.

Chittagong Port is also an ancient city and a prosperous port of Bengal. Due to its geostrategic and natural location, it attracted the attention of various ruling groups. Evidence of its special importance as a regional capital and administrative center of Muslims in the Middle Ages is found in the findings of coins and inscriptions and excavations. In addition, the arrival of Sufi saints and

the pilgrimages built around their tombs and shrines acquired special importance for the people of Bengal and the Indian subcontinent. Above all, its importance and demand as a prosperous trade center and port city existed throughout the ages and still do.

### Sonargaon city

Location:

Sonargaon or Subarnagram was a famous administrative center and capital city of East Bengal under Muslim rulers. It is currently an upazila of Narayanganj district, located 27 km southeast of Dhaka. Although the exact location of this medieval city is difficult to determine, the available evidence shows that it was a sprawling town surrounded by the Meghna to the east, the Shitalakshya to the west, the Dhaleswari to the south and the Brahmaputra to the north. Present-day villages such as Aminpur, Panam, Goaldi, Mograpara etc. indicate the location of this ruined city. Sonargaon was the capital and main city of East Bengal before Dhaka became the capital. The ancient city of Sonargaon was the capital of the Sena kings in the 13th century and was famous as the capital, commercial center and mint city of the independent Bengal Sultanate for almost three centuries after that.

The transformation of Sonargaon throughout history:

The importance of Sonargaon in the pre-Muslim era can be understood from the ancient name Subarnagram. The name Sonargaon originated from this Subarnagram in the Muslim era. The two traditional holy bathing places of the Hindu community on the west bank of the old Brahmaputra, Langalband and Panchamighat, which belong to the territory, testify to the ancient importance of this region. In the land grant inscription of Samachardev in the 6th century

Sonargaon was formerly the south-west (Gograhati script) of the region indicated by the Suvarnabithi. In the 13th century, the local Hindu king Danujamadhak Dasharhadeva shifted his capital from Bikrampur to Suvarnagram sometime in the middle of that century. In Bengal, the administrative center of Muslim south-east Bengal. Since the establishment of rule, the city of Dhaka has been

Shamsuddin Firuz Shah conquered the region in the early 14th century and incorporated it into the Lakhnauti kingdom. This ended the independent Hindu kingdom of Sonargaon. After this, Sonargaon's importance temporarily declined until the rise of Ghiyasuddin Azam Shah, but it gained importance as a port and mint town. In 1324, Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq conquered Bengal and divided it into three administrative units: Lakhnauti, Sonargaon and Satgaon. As a result, Sonargaon became the administrative center of the eastern part of Bengal - a system that continued until 1338. From 1338 to 1352, Sonargaon became the capital of the independent kingdom founded by Fakhruddin Mubarak Shah. In 1352, Ilyas Shah conquered Sonargaon and minted coins from here. Sonargaon was their capital during the reign of Isa Khan and his descendants. The decline of Sonargaon accelerated after the establishment of the Mughal capital in Dhaka.

Muazzam Hussain Khan comments that it is clear from the existing architectural evidence that the entire Mograpara and Goaldi area was once a prosperous and extensive Muslim settlement. It is likely that the Muslim capital city extended from Mograpara and its surrounding areas on the banks of the Menikhali River and as far as Goaldi and Baidyer Bazar.

#### Historical Importance:

Sonargaon became a commercial city in the first half of the 14th century. Large merchant ships from West Asian and Southeast Asian countries used to arrive at Sonargaon by sea. Ibn Battuta (1346 AD) mentioned Sonargaon as an important port city. Sonargaon had direct commercial relations with China, Indonesia (Java), and the Malay Archipelago. The Chinese traveler Ma-Huan (1406 AD) witnessed Sonargaon as a large commercial city. Hou-Hien (1415 AD) in his account mentioned Sonargaon as a fortified walled city and a trading center with numerous ponds, paved roads, and markets. All kinds of goods were sold here and there was a storage system. Ralph Fitch (1584 AD) described the city of Sonargaon as a busy trading center. Muslin, especially the finest muslin cloth called Khas, produced in Sonargaon was in great demand worldwide. After losing its political status from the second decade of the seventeenth century, Sonargaon's commercial importance gradually declined.

Sonargaon became a significant intellectual and cultural city in the pre-Mughal era. During this time, Sonargaon gained more fame as the abode of religious and scholarly society than any other city in India. A madrasa and khanqah were established here under the leadership of Sharfuddin Abu Tawama. It provided teaching and study in all branches of Islamic education and basic sciences. Sonargaon was once a meeting place for learned Sufis, dervishes and Pirs and Fakirs. From here, arrangements were made to compile important books like Maqamat, Naam-i-Haq, Mazum-i-Khani-fi-Ain etc.

Notable among the ancient monuments of Sonagao were the tomb of Ghiyasuddin Azam Shah, the tomb of Hazrat Syed Ibrahim Daneshmandeo, the tomb of his son Syed Yusuf Ahl-i-Ilam and his wife Ayesha Banu, a Nahbatkhana and mint, the tomb of Panch Pir in Bhagalpur village, the tomb of Manna Shah in Mogra Para, the Khanqah of Sheikh Mohammad Yusuf, a domed mosque built during the reign of Jalaluddin Fateh Shah (1484), the mosque of Mullah Akbar Khan built during the reign of Hussain Shah in Goaldi village, the ruins of the lion gate of the fort, etc. All these monuments clearly testify that Sonargao was a prosperous city and a religious and cultural center in medieval Bengal.

#### Reasons for decline:

Not much is known about the fall of Sonargaon. After Musa Khan, the son of the Baro Bhuiyan leader Isha Khan, surrendered to the Mughal Subadar Islam Khan in 1611, the city gradually fell into ruin. According to James Wise's account, the atrocities of the Mughal bandits were one of the main reasons for the depopulation of Sonargaon. Meanwhile, the establishment of a new capital at Dhaka by Subadar Islam Khan led to the rise of Dhaka, which in turn accelerated the fall of Sonargaon.

Aniruddha Roy comments that the Mughal-Afghan conflict reached its peak after 1575. The Mughals emphasized on securing the city of Dhaka to prevent attacks from external enemies; as a result, Sonargaon was gradually abandoned. The change in the course of the Brahmaputra River may have been partly responsible for this. Mohammad Mosharraf Hossain says that although no direct evidence has survived regarding the reason why Sonargaon became a ruined city, it is certain that the fall of Sonargaon began with the establishment of the Mughal

capital in Dhaka in 1608 AD and the defeat of Musa Khan in 1611 AD. And with that came various changes related to the river.

Due to its location, especially at the confluence of the Meghna-Brahmaputra and being surrounded by rivers, the medieval city of Sonargaon was geostrategically bound by a kind of natural barrier. Based on the available information and evidence, it is beyond doubt that Subarnagram or Sonargaon attained the status of a capital, administrative unit and mint city at the same time during the Muslim era. It also had deep communication links with the medieval trade circle.

Sonargaon had direct commercial links with West Asia and Southeast Asia through waterways. The high-quality muslin here was in great demand and was exported worldwide. It also had a unique identity as a religious and cultural city. In the pre-Mughal era, Sonargaon became a meeting place for Sufis and dervishes. The discovery of ruins of mosques, madrasas, khanqahs, dargahs, etc. attests to this. Foreign accounts and other sources indicate that Sonargaon was a very wealthy and prosperous city. The city presents various pictures of infrastructure, layout, civic amenities. It is believed that the decline of this prosperous medieval city occurred in 1608/10 AD due to the defeat of Musa Khan and the transfer of the capital to Dhaka by the Mughals to prevent external attacks and due to the change in the course of the river.

### Dhaka city

Dhaka is the capital of Bangladesh; it has a long history. It is difficult to pinpoint the existence of Dhaka in the pre-Muslim era. It developed as an urban center during the Sultanate period and gained prominence during the Mughal era after the demise of the provincial capital. According to Abdul Karim, Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, had some importance in the pre-Mughal era, but the city gained prominence in history

During the Mughal era.

Reason for naming:

Not much is known about the origin of the name Dhaka. There are several popular theories about it. First, there were many dhaka trees in the region; hence the name Dhaka. Second, it was named Dhaka because the goddess

Dhakeshwari or Durga Devi was discovered in this region in a hidden state. Third, on the day of the inauguration of the capital, the dhaka was played here on the orders of Subadar Islam Khan. Fourth, a Prakrit language called Dhaka Bhasha was prevalent in the region. Fifth, the word Dhaka is mentioned as an observation center in Kalhan's Rajtarangini or the eastern kingdom of Samudragupta mentioned in the Allahabad inscription is Dhaka.

Evolution of Dhaka in terms of sources:

Due to the paucity of contemporary information and data, it is difficult to reconstruct the ancient history of Dhaka. There are two pre-Mughal archaeological sites in Dhaka city and one in Mirpur, the oldest of which is dated to 1456 AD. João de Barros identified Dhaka as an important place and indicated its location on a map drawn in 1550 AD. Dhaka is mentioned as a thana (military outpost) in Abul Fazl's Akbar Nama and as a pargana of Sarkar Bajuhar in Ain-e-Akbari.

In the early 17th century, Dhaka was a centre of commerce and a place of employment for many professions. In 1608/10, Islam Khan Chishti shifted the capital of Suba Bengal from Rajmahal to Dhaka and named it Jahangirnagar after the emperor. Since then, Dhaka's political and military importance has increased. Although it was administratively named Jahangirnagar, it is more commonly known as Dhaka to the general public. Almost all foreign tourists and company officials have also used the name Dhaka in their descriptions and letters.

Islam Khan chose Dhaka as the capital of the province of Bengal due to its strategic location. The Buriganga and its source river Dhaleswari connected Dhaka to almost all the districts of Bengal through other major rivers. Dhaka was part of the Bhati region and was the home of leaders who rebelled against Mughal rule. Islam Khan, in his plan to establish Mughal rule in Bengal, chose Dhaka as the capital.

Mirza Nathan's Bahristan-i-Ghaybi mentions an old fort in Dhaka. From this, it can be inferred that the main center of human settlement in Dhaka during the pre-Mughal period was the area adjacent to the east of Babubazar. Before Islam Khan's arrival in Dhaka, two high-ranking officials and their subordinate

mansabdars were sent to renovate the fort. After the renovation, Islam Khan started living in the Dhaka fort. Since then, the work of establishing settlements in Dhaka gradually accelerated around the fort.

After becoming the capital, Dhaka continued to grow with the increase in administrative needs and government activities. Thirty years after the establishment of the capital, Sebastian Manrique came to Dhaka in 1640 AD. According to his description, the circumference of Dhaka city was 7 km. In 1663 AD, Manucci commented that the city was not that large. In 1666 AD, Tavernier's description of Dhaka city mentioned that its length was 9 km. In 1669-70 AD. Thomas Bowry said that Dhaka city was spacious; its circumference was not less than 40 miles. John Taylor, while marking the boundaries of Mughal Dhaka in 1800, said that it extended to Buriganga in the south, Tongi in the north, Jaffrabad in the west and Postgola in the east.

#### Historical Importance:

Due to its location along the river route, Dhaka became a center of local trade in the pre-Mughal era. The population increased here as a result of the transfer of the capital. In addition to the army, navy and administration, people of various professions such as artisans, manufacturers and others started coming here. Provincial, inter-provincial and foreign trade expanded widely in Dhaka. Arabs, Persians, Armenians,

Merchants from countries such as China, Malaya, Sumatra, Java, etc. used to flock to Dhaka for trade. Many moneylenders and Marwaris also settled here.

From the mid-17th century onwards, European companies arrived in Bengal and established factories in Dhaka. The Portuguese came first; they set up factories in Dhaka, and the clergy built churches. Later, the Dutch, the English, and the French came in order. All of them established their main settlements on the banks of the Bhagirathi River.

Dhaka was a famous manufacturing center. The fine cotton cloth produced here was of excellent quality and was in great demand almost all over the world. Various types of cotton cloth known as muslin were exported to the outside world. European companies imported the gold and silver they received to purchase

these goods. . The port facilities in Dhaka were also very suitable for the movement of domestic and imported goods, as indicated by the presence of the present Sadarghat port.

East India Company documents show that both essential commodities and labour were very cheap in Dhaka. It has now become a proverb that during the reign of Shaista Khan, eight maunds of rice could be obtained for a taka. The price of rice fell back to its previous level during the reign of Sarfaraz Khan in 1740.

So far, a total of 124 old structures, including monuments of medieval Dhaka, have been identified in different parts of the city. Notable among them are 68 mosques, 8 tombs, 5 temples, 4 arches, 4 bridges, 16 buildings, 3 Sikh sangats, 4 forts, 2 memorials, etc. This classification shows that people of many races, groups, communities and professions lived in Dhaka city. Among the people of different religions, Muslims, Hindus, Christians and Sikhs were among them. This hierarchical social system testifies to the advanced civic life and non-communal consciousness of contemporary Dhaka.

Reasons for the capital transfer:

Dhaka city had this status for almost a century after its establishment as the provincial capital in 1610. It was both the administrative headquarters and the residence of the subahar and other officials and employees. For personal and political reasons, Shah Shuja (1639-59 AD) shifted the capital from Dhaka to Rajmahal. Although he initially stayed in Dhaka for a few years, Dhaka lost its importance as a capital and became a local administrative center. After Shah Shuja fled to Arakan after a succession dispute between Shah Jahan's sons, the next subahar, Mir Jumla, again elevated Dhaka to the headquarters (capital) of the subahar of Bengal. In the early 18th century, due to a dispute between the subahar, Shahzada Azim Uddin and Diwan Murshid Quli Khan, the subahar was shifted from Dhaka to Patna and the Diwani to Murshidabad. Until then, Dhaka's status as the capital was intact.

Pundranagar

Pundra or Paundra is the oldest of the ancient Bengali towns; its heartland was known as Pundranagar. In the Aitareya Brahmana, the Pandras, who lived in the border region of Aryavarta, are called bandits. In the Digvijaya episode of the Mahabharata, Bhima is said to have killed the king of Modagiri (Munga) during his eastern campaign and conquered Pundra or Kaushik-Kutcha and advanced towards Bengal. The location of the son of this source is identified as east of Munga. The Puranas mention the Pandras among the eastern countries. The Brihat Samhita of Varahamihira also mentions the Pandras as being from the east.

Location and evolution of Pundranagar in terms of sources:

The place of residence of the Pandras was known as Pundra or Pundravardhana. There is no doubt that the Pudgal (Pundranagar) mentioned in the Mahasthan Brahmi inscription of the 2nd century BC is identical to the Mahasthangarh of Bogra and that Pundranagar is the center of the Pandras' residence of Pundravardhana. The fact that the Karatoya River, which is now flowing slowly near the historical ruins of Mahasthan, once flowed strongly past Pundranagar is clearly mentioned in the 11th century Karatoya Mahatmya. However, the location of Pundranagar is very clearly described in the description of the 7th century Chinese traveler Hiuen Tsang. He traveled east from 'Ku-chu-zu-khi-lo', crossed the Ganges River 600 li and reached the country of 'Pun-na-f-tan-na' and from there traveled 900 li east to reach the country of 'Ka-mo-lu-po'; On the way he had to cross a large river. 'Pun-n-f-tan-n' mentions the 'Po-ship-po' Vihara 20 li west of the capital of the country. Alexander Cunningham had long ago assumed that Pundranagar and Mahasthan were identical and that Vasu-vihara, 4 miles west of Mahasthan, was Hiuen Tsang's Po-ship-po Vihara. Archaeological excavations have now uncovered the ruins of Vasu-vihara and Cunningham's identification is considered correct. Hiuen Tsang crossed the Karatoya river from Kajangal to Pundravardhana, 18 miles south of Rajmahal, and went to Kamarupa. The land between Kajangal and Karatoya is Pundravardhana and the centre of this region is Pundranagar or Mahasthan, on the outskirts of which was Vasu-vihara. Hiuen Tsang crossed the Ganges from Kajangal and entered Pundravardhana. Therefore, it can be said that the land from the Ganges River in the west to the Karatoya River in the east is Pundravardhana.

During the Gupta period, an administrative unit called Pundravardhana Bhukti was formed covering almost this area of North Bengal. The expansion of political power often increased the scope of geographical entities - a good example of this is Pundranagar. Perhaps this is why the names of seven countries (Gaura, Varendra, Nirati, Sukka, Jharikhanda, Varahbhumi and Vardhman) included in Pundradesa are mentioned in a commentary on Bhavishyapurana.

Along with Putra, there is another ancient town called Varendra or Varendri. The Trikandakosha dictionary identifies Varendri and Putra as identical. Several inscriptions prove that Varendri is a part of Pundavardhana. In the description of Varendri, the ancestor of the Palas, in the Ramcharita poem by Sandhyakara Nandi, it is said that the Ganges was to the south and Karatoya and Pundranagar were the main cities of Varendri.

Pundranagar continued to be the administrative headquarters of the Pundravardhana division from the Mauryan period to the end of the Pala period, although not until the Sena period. During the Gupta period, it was the administrative centre of the Guptas in Bengal and the capital of Pundravardhanabhukti.

Situated on the west bank of the Karatoya River, Pundranagar was well connected to the rest of Bengal by both land and water; it flourished as an important centre of trade and commerce throughout the ancient period. Even during the early Sultanate period, the importance of the city as the residence of the famous saint Shah Sultan Balkhi or Mahiswar remained intact. Shah Sultan Balkhi defeated the Kshatriya prince Parashuram of Mahasthan and played a role in spreading Islam here. He established a Khanqah in the south-eastern part of the ancient city. Balkhi's tomb is located on a high mound in the south-eastern corner of Mahasthan.

Mahasthangarh, on the west bank of the Karatoya River, spread over a vast area of Bogra district, existed as a prosperous town and city for about eighteen hundred years. The Karatoya River on the east side of Mahasthangarh played a specific role in the defense system of this city. Mahasthangarh is protected on all other sides by high walls and adjacent ditches. This fortified city, which is walled all around, is 1524 meters long and 1372 meters wide in the north-south

direction. The interior of Mahasthangarh is about 4.6 meters higher than the surrounding plain. In places, especially at the corners and in the bastions, the height of the walls from the outer plain is about 10.67 meters. When Alexander Cunningham visited Mahasthangarh in 1879-80, he saw the north-west and south

He mentioned in his description and design that there was a moat on the four sides. He mentioned that there were four entrance arches on the four walls of Mahasthangarh and another arch towards Shila Devi Ghat.

Reasons for decline:

The lifeline of Pundranagar was the Karatoya River. The change in the course of the Karatoya River accelerated the decline of Pundranagar, a prosperous city of ancient Bengal. All communication and urban life of Pundranagar was centered around the Karatoya River. Over time, as the riverbed changed, the normal civic amenities of Pundranagar changed. The city also gradually sank into the abyss of decline.