

Chapter 2

Historical Geography of Ancient Lower Northern Bengal

Historical Geography is the investigation of human, physical, anecdotal, hypothetical and the investigation of geographic change in a spot or region over some undefined timeframe. Historical Geography contemplates a wide assortment of issues and subjects. Numerous Historical geographers have learned about the geological patterns through time, including how population have cooperated with their conditions and made a cultural identity. Historical Geography tries to decide how cultural features of different social orders over the planet emerged and evolved, by understanding their cooperation with their spatial condition and encompassing. (Hoiberg, 2016, pp. 17202-17203)

The historical geography of our study area presents some ticklish problems. In ancient and medieval times, the sub-regions of our study area had different names, now erased out of public memory in the modern times. Ancient Bengal was known to the classical Greek writers as *Gangaridae* and *Prasii*. (Mukharjee, 2004, p. 37) They mentioned the people of the region as the *Puṇḍras*. The nomenclature of the study area has been changed to Puṇḍravardhana during the time of the imperial Mauryas. During the Gupta period, this area became an important part of their empire and to be known as Puṇḍravardhana *bhukti*. Most part of the region as is well-known formed part of the ancient region called Puṇḍravardhana. During the early medieval time, particularly after the fall of Śaśānka, the first independent king of Bengal, the northern Bengal region was known as Varendra. The ancient river Mahananda forms the western boundary of the region which extends to the southward course of the Karatoyato the east. This region is washed by several ancient rivers, mostly tributaries of the rivers we have named heretofore and ultimately pour out their water to the Ganges forming the southern boundary of Varendra. Such rivers were the lifeline for the urban centers engaged in trade and commerce and rendered fertile the vast agricultural fields by their silt deposits. So Puṇḍranagara on the Karatoya (Bangladesh), Bangarh on the Punarbhava, Gauḍa on the Ganges and several other

urban centers owed their life and prosperity to the swift and navigable rivers connecting them with vast regions in northern, eastern and north-eastern India. The suggestion is that there was continuous maritime link between Puṇḍra and the ancient port of Tāmralipta near the shores of the Bay of Bengal is not at all farfetched since it is the Ganges that flows down to the sea washing the regions like Magadha, Mithilā, Puṇḍravardhana and Rādhā. The epigraphs of the Sena's write the name of the study area as Varendrī.

1. Puṇḍravardhana

No less confusing is the fact that the land of Puṇḍra also seems to be synonymous with Varendra and includes the district of Rajshahi, Malda, Dinajpur, Pabna, Bogra and Rangpur. This land according to Xuan Zang's account had its capital at Puṇḍravardhana. The site of Puṇḍravardhana has been identified with Mahasthangarh on the bank of the river Karatoya in the district of Bogra (Bangladesh). A Mauryan Brahmi inscription mentioning a city called *Puṇḍranagara* forms the basis of this identification. (Sircar 1942, pp. 82-83; Bhandarkar, 1931-32, pp. 83-91)

In Gupta land records, Puṇḍravardhana is described as a *bhukti* or province of the Gupta Empire. As late as the Sena period Puṇḍravardhana retained its status as a *bhukti* of the Sena kingdom. Curiously enough, the ancient *bhukti* in the Sena inscriptions included Vyāghrataṭī *maṇḍala*, wrongly identified by the scholars with the coastal region of lower Bengal infested with *Vyāghra* or tiger.

Nonetheless, the present dissertation seeks to define its study area as the territories in the districts of North Dinajpur, South Dinajpur and Malda. The reason is that the area of ancient Matsya, Varendra and Puṇḍra forms part of West Bengal as full-fledged political entities. To highlight the importance of this sub-region, present scholar would like to add that it was for several centuries known as the capital region of the Pāla-Sena era. The most important archaeological sites located in this sub-region being Gauḍa, Amati, Bangarh and Asuragarh.

In the *Śunahsepa* legend of the *Aitareya-brāhmaṇa*, *Puṇḍras*, who among the hundred sons of Visvāmitra had been cursed by his father to have the lowest caste for their descendants. 'Therefore are many of the most degraded classes of men, the

rabble for the most part, such as the *Andhras*, *Puṇḍras*, *Sabarās*, *Pulindas* and *Mūtibas*, descendants of Visvāmītra'. (Haug, 1922, pp. 469-470) The same legend we also find in *Sāṅkhyāyana-śrauta-sūtra* with alteration to *Andhrāḥ Puṇḍrāḥ Sabarā Pulindas* and *Mūcipā* iti. (Ch. XV, 26) In the *Sabhā-parva* of the *Mahābhārata* (Ch. XXX) mention has been made of *Puṇḍras* while describing the hill tribes defeated by Bhīma in the battle against Karṇa (the king of *Aṅga*).

In the *Mahābhārata* and the *Harivaṃśa*, (*Mahābhārata*, *Ādi-parvan*, ch. CIV, vv. 52-55; *Harivaṃśa-parva*, Ch. XXXI. vv. 33-42.) the *Puṇḍras* is said to be a descendent of the blind sage Dirghatamas (born of the queen of the demon Bāli) along with *Aṅgas*, *Vaṅgas*, *Suhmas* and *Kalingas*. In the epic period, the name of the *Puṇḍra* tribe uttered with many variations, viz., *Puṇḍraka*, *Paṇḍra*, *Paṇḍraka* and *Paṇḍrika*.

The **Damodarpur CPIs** and **Dhanaidaha CPI**, dating from 143 to 214 of the Gupta era, prove that *Puṇḍravardhana* was the name of a large territorial division in the possession of the Guptas at least from the second quarter of the fifth century to about the middle of the sixth century CE. (Sen, 1942, p. 104) From the time of Dharmapāla it was an important province of the Pālas. During a long period extending from the eighth to the twelfth century CE *Puṇḍravardhana* witnessed political vicissitudes of different dynasties. The metropolitan district of the *Puṇḍravardhana* territory was situated in this area. The *Tarpandighi Grant* of Laxman Sena (12th century) assigns *Varendrī* to *Puṇḍravardhana*. (Sen, 1929, pp. 116-39) The *Madhainagar Grant* of Laxmansena and the *Selimpur inscription* of the Kamrupa king Joypāla also proved the inclusion of *Varendrī* within *Puṇḍravardhana*. (Sen, 1942, p. 111) As was usual in old days, this tract was probably bounded by natural barriers like mountains or large rivers. The capital city of *Puṇḍravardhana bhukti* is identified with the ruin of fortified city at Mahasthangarh (presently 8 mile north to Bogra, Bangladesh) on the bank of the river *Karatoya*, whose antiquity has been established by the ancient text of *Karatoyā-mahātma*. The north-eastern boundary of *Puṇḍravardhana bhukti* was the river *Karatoya*, which according to the *Yoginī-Tantra* was also the western boundary of *Prāgjyotiṣa*. The river *Brahmaputra*, which should for all purposes, would be taken as the eastern boundary of *Puṇḍravardhana bhukti*. A line drawn straight eastwards from modern Rangpur to meet the *Brahmaputra* would be an excellent imaginary boundary between this portion of *Prāgjyotiṣa* and

Puṇḍravardhana *bhukti*. It will be presently shown that the districts of Dacca, Faridpur and Bākargañj were included in Puṇḍravardhana *bhukti*. (Bhattashali, 1935, pp. 73-114)

The northern boundary of the *bhukti* was formed by the Himalayas. The word *Himavachchhikhara* of Damodarpur plate #4 verifies this point. (?) Previous scholars framed the southern boundary of the *bhukti* was extended up to the sea on the basis of wrong identification of Vyāgrataṭi *maṇḍala* with the Sundarban region. But the problem is with the western boundary. The Tīra *bhukti* and Śrīnagara *bhukti* were placed on the western side of the Puṇḍravardhana *bhukti*. So the problem is to find out the boundary between the Tīra *bhukti* and Puṇḍravardhana *bhukti* on the north of the river Ganges. (Bhattashali, 1935, pp. 75-76) Here is some support for the point.

i) The Kauśikī, modern Kosi river, is always regarded by the inhabitants of Tirhut as forming the eastern boundary of their country, as the following couplet of Chaṇḍa Jhā, a modern poet of Mithilā, would show:-

“Gangā Bahathi Janika Dakṣṇadeśi Pūrvva Kauśikīdhārā ।

Paścima Bahathi Gaṇḍakī Uttara Himavat Valavistārā ॥” (*Vidyāpatir Padāvali*)

Translation:-

“(Mithilā is that country) on whose south flows the Ganges, on the east the waters of the Kauśikī, on whose west flows the Gaṇḍakī, and on whose north the Himālayas spread in might.”

ii) The late Mr. Manomohan Cakravarti also gives the same boundary for Mithilā. (Chakravarti, 1915, pp. 407-8)

iii) Francis Buchanan, writing about 1807, observes:-

‘It must, however, be observed that the Kosi is more usually alleged to have formerly been the boundary (between north Bengal and Mithilā).’ (Martin, 1838, p. 37)

iv) If to this is added the probability of the Vyāgrataṭī *maṇḍala*, included in Puṇḍravardhana *bhukti*, lying in the district of Purnea, it will be clear that the Kosi is to be regarded as the boundary between Tira *bhukti* and Puṇḍravardhana *bhukti*.

We have much archaeological evidence that the entire course of the River Bhagirathi formed the boundary between Puṇḍravardhana *bhukti* and Vardhamāna *bhukti*. So the land between the river Karatoya, Brahmaputra, Ganges, Bhagirathi, Kosi and Himalaya would be identified with the area of Puṇḍravardhana *bhukti*. This *bhukti* was also divided in several *viṣayas* and *viṣayas* into *maṇḍalas*.

1.1. Vyāgrataṭī *maṇḍala*

The location of Vyāgrataṭī *maṇḍala* is wrongly identified so far. Here we will try to identify the present jurisdiction of Vyāgrataṭī *maṇḍala*. *Vyāghra* is a Sanskrit word, means tiger. So as the name suggests Vyāgrataṭī *maṇḍala* was a land of tigers. We come to know about this piece of land from two Pāla and one Sena inscriptions. Niharranjan Roy gives an etymological description of the word ‘Vyāgrataṭī’ and allude the Sundarban region (India and Bangladesh) as the present location of Vyāgrataṭī *maṇḍala* with *Bāgḍi* as the center point. (Roy, 1414 BS, p. 85) Now this place is identified with the tiger infested *Bāgḍi* of Sundarban region. R. C. Majumdar has some doubt regarding the identification of Vyāgrataṭī *maṇḍala*. The theory that equates the Vyāgrataṭī *maṇḍala* with *Bāgḍi* is not based upon any convincing evidence (Majumdar, 1943, p. 24) According to the previous research works, all the places mentioned in KhalimpurCPI (Kielhorn, 1896-97, pp. 243-254) are identified with the places of northern part of Bengal. But only Vyāgrataṭī *maṇḍala* is placed in the far south at *Bāgḍi*. So, the question is where it was. We find another mention of Vyāgrataṭī *maṇḍala* in Nālandā CPI (Shastri, 1923-24, pp. 310-327) of Dēvapāla. Here we also find the mention of Vyāgrataṭī *maṇḍala* and its ruler Balavarmana, who acted as *dūtaka* on behalf of Magadhan king. Generally, *dūtaka* of an inscription has to be a *Yuvarāja*. The *dūtaka* of Khalimpur CPI is *Yuvarāja* Tribhuvanapāla; (Kielhorn, 1896-97, p. 245) the *dūtaka* of the Mungir plate of Dēvapāladēva also was a *Yuvarāj* Rājyapāla. (Kielhorn, 1892a, pp. 253-258) The Nalanda plate highlights the importance of the ruler of Vyāgrataṭī *maṇḍala* in its v. 22 and v.23. (Shastri, 1923-24, pp. 310-327)

V.22. The illustrious Balavarman who was the right hand of the king, as it were, and who never depended on (others') help for crushing hostile forces, acted as messenger in this religious function.

V.23. In this religious undertaking Balavarman, the illustrious ruler of the Vyāgrataṭī *maṇḍala*, acted as a messenger of the illustrious (Emperor) Dēvapāladēva.

During the reign of Dēvapāladēva, Vyāgrataṭī *maṇḍala* was governed by a district ruler called Balavarmana. The way he is praised in this epigraph, as the right arm of the Emperor, would show that he had a higher rank even though he was one of the feudatories of *Dēvapāladēva*. (Kielhorn, 1896-97, pp. 243-254) He was so important personality that he had his importance not only to his own territory, but to his neighbour's territories also. He also acted as a *dutaka* in the Rajauna image inscription of Śūrapāla. (Sircar, 1950, p. 139)

All the places mentioned in the plate are identified with some villages of the district of Nalanda, Rajgrha and Gaya districts of Bihar. It would appear from this plate that the Vyāgrataṭī *maṇḍala*, not a big area of itself, was an important piece of land from a political point of view and probably lay on the frontier. The Khālimpur CPI records that the king Dharmapāladēva, at the request of his *Mahāsāmantādhipati* Nārāyaṇavarmana, granted four villages to a temple of the God Nunna-Nārāyaṇa, which had been founded by Nārāyaṇavarmana at Śubhasthālī. This inscription of Dharmapāladēva mentions Vyāgrataṭī *maṇḍala* before Mahantaparakash *viṣaya*.

V.31. *śri-Puṇḍravardhanabhukty-antaḥpāti- Vyāgrataṭī Maṇḍal-
samva(mba)ddha-Mahantāprakāsa viśa(sha)yē Krauñchaśvabhra-nāma-
grāmō*

Trans: in the Mahantāprakāsa district (*viṣaya*), which belongs to the Vyāgrataṭī *maṇḍala*¹ within the prosperous Puṇḍravardhana *bhukti*, is the village named Krauñchaśvabhra. Here a *maṇḍala* (Vyāgrataṭī) is responsible for a *viṣaya* (Mahantāprakāsa), which is not familiar in the Pāla administration. The Vyāgrataṭī *maṇḍala* might be placed on the frontier of Mahantāprakāsa *viṣaya*. It would be possible that during that time Vyāgrataṭī *maṇḍala* played a great role on behalf of the central government like present Chandigarh city. After studying these two Pāla inscriptions, it can be concluded that Vyāgrataṭī *maṇḍala* was placed on the east of

Nālandā *viṣaya* and on the west of Mahantāprakāsa *viṣaya*. The head quarter of this *maṇḍala* was probably laid in the undivided Purnea district. So from the discussion it is clear that the Khāri *viṣaya* or *maṇḍala* and the Vyāghratati *maṇḍala* were separate geographical entities in early medieval Bengal. Otherwise, their names would not be figured separately in the inscriptions. Therefore, the tiger infested eastern part of the district of Purnea, lying between the two great ancient rivers, the Kosi and the Mahananda, was in all probability known as the Vyāghratati *maṇḍala*.

The district of Purnea also fulfils the reason of the name of the *maṇḍala*, i.e. Vyāgrataṭī. If we go through the district gazetteer of Purnea, can find that

“The tiger is the best known of the large animals of Purnea, and is found in all parts of the district, but particularly along the banks and among the sandy islands of the river Kūsi, where it finds shelter in the high grass jungle with which the country is covered. Another tract much frequented by tigers in the scrub jungle that runs along the north of the district. A few also come from near Gaur in Malda, and from the *Sal* forest of the north Bārendra in Dinājpur.” (Hunter, 1976, p. 236)

Depredation² of tigers was so severe that the authority had declared prize money to kill those tigers.

“... in 1788, the collector, in reporting on the reveges committed by this animals in *pargana Kadba*, stated that £ 600 was annually paid out of his office for tigers killed in Purneah, at the rate of £ 1 per head...of late years, also, the rewards given for the destruction of tigers and leopards have been large.”(Hunter, 1976, p. 236)

Leopards are very common along the Dinajpur frontier, and are killed in the same manner as tigers. In the same tract, and near the Terai, tiger cats (*Felisviverrina*), leopard cats (*F. Bengalensis*), and wild cats (*F. Chaus*) are abundant. The Hyaena is occasionally seen in the north of the district.

The main river of Vyāgrataṭī *maṇḍala* was the river Kosi. The Kosi River changes her course frequently with the time and left huge fertile river beds for crops and high grass, which is ideal for a civilization and for the tiger also. So it can easily be assumed the reason behind the name of the *maṇḍala*.

Anuliya CPI of Lakshmaṇasena also mentions about Vyāgrataṭī *maṇḍala* and its some places, viz., *Māthraṇḍiyā*, *Mālāmancha-vāṭī*, *Jalapilla* and *Sāntigōpī-śāsana*. The identification of these places will not be possible until proper identification of Vyāgrataṭī *maṇḍala*. However, an effort should be made in this dissertation to identify these toponyms. This grant mentions,

(Line 34-46): “Be it approved by you that a plot of land (of the village of) Māthraṇḍiyā within Vyāgrataṭī, which is situated in the Puṇḍavardhana *bhukti*, having for its four boundaries of follows, viz., the banyan tree as its boundary on the east, Jalapilla as its boundary on the south, Sāntigōpī-śāsana as its boundary on the west of and Mālāmancha-vāṭī on the north.”
(Majumdar, 1929, pp. 81-91)

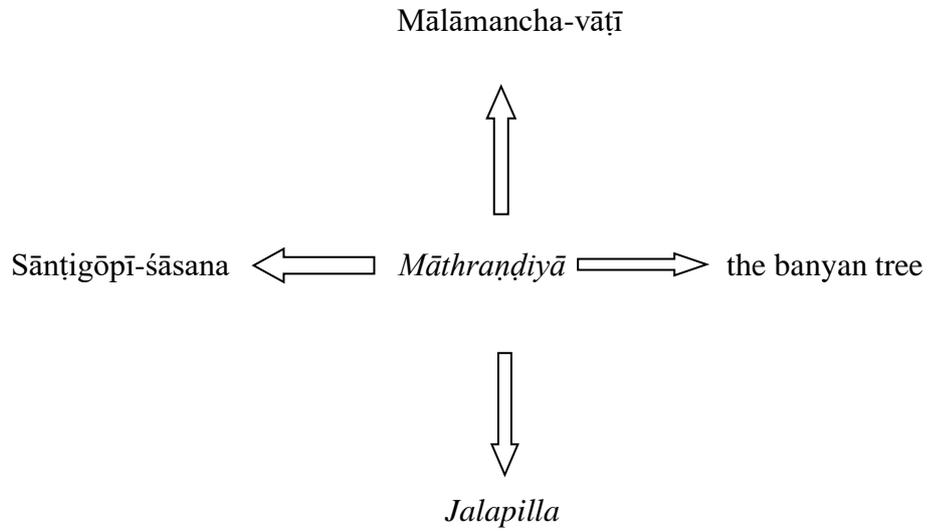


Diagram 1: Plot donated through Anulia CPI

It was discovered from the Anuliya village near Ranaghat in Nadia district of West Bengal. The places of the inscription are not yet identified. The donated village Māthraṇḍiyā can be identified with the Mēthrāni village of Gajol subdivision of Malda district of West Bengal on the basis of archaeological remains and corrupted names of its and its surrounding villages. It can easily be assumed that the word *Mēthrāni* is a corrupted form of *Māthraṇḍiyā*. The place yielded many artefacts of Pāla-Sena period. There is a pond, now called by the villagers as *Pirpukur* have pucca bathing *ghats*, (Picture 1) facing four directions, with a temple like structure on the east. (Picture 2) On the southeast of Mēthrāni, a village namely Jājilpārā³ is situated,

which also have huge antiquities of that time. This Jājilpārā village might be the Jalapilla village of the inscription. On the north of Mēthrāni, two villages, viz., Mālanipur, Manchāmpur are situated, which altogether could be the Mālāmancha-vāṭī of the inscription. The place of Sāntigōpī-sāsana in the west has not yet been found. If we agree with that identification, then we should realize the reason behind placing the Āmrasandika *viṣaya* under Vyāgrataṭī *maṇḍal* in Khalimpur CPI. The ariel distance between the Amshol, which bears the legacy of the name of Āmrasaṇḍikā, and Mathrāni is 10.10 km.

The Vyāgrataṭī *maṇḍal* had close tie with the family of the *Varmana*. From the inscriptions of eighth and ninth centuries, we find two powerful personalities having same surname of *Varmana*, i.e. Nārāyaṇavarmana of Khalimpur CPI of Dharmapāladēva and Balavarmana of Nalanda CPI of Devapāladēva. Probably they were of same family. As our study goes, it has already been proven that the Varmanas of that time was so powerful. This study suggest, as we know the study area, which was the fatherland ('Janakabhu' of *Rāmācaritam* of Sandhyakarnandi.) of the mighty Pāla emperors, had a powerful and effective role in the rise and consolidation of the Pāla Empire. This Varmana family might have a great role in that process. They achieved the important position in the administration and the land of their jurisdiction had also enjoyed great power. It is not possible to ascertain the lineage of this family but later on, we find another powerful personality with similar surname. Niharranjan Roy mentions about Kalyāṇavarma, author of an astrology book *Sārābalī*, which have also been quoted in the writings of Mallināth (*Śiśupālabadha Tīkā*), Utpal and Al-Biruni. Kalyāṇavarma describe himself in his manuscript as *Vyāghrataṭīswara*. Roy undoubtedly identified this Vyāghrataṭī with the Vyāghrataṭī *maṇḍala* of Khalimpur CPI. (Roy, 1414 BS, p. 699.) The title *Vyāghrataṭīswara* tentatively proves that this Kalyāṇavarma of this astrology book was a descendent of the family of Nārāyanavarmana and Balavarmana. This family enjoyed a great power during Pāla period for a long time. And the entire Varmana caste of this region had played crucial role against the scathing attack of the Delhi Sultans.

1.2. Mahantāprakāśa *viṣaya*

KhālimpurCPI of Dharmapāladēva mentions:

In the Mahantāprakāśa district (*vishaya*), which belong to Vyāghrataṭī *maṇḍala* within the prosperous Puṇḍavardhana *bhukti*, is the village named Krauñchaśvabhra. Its boundary on the west is Gaṅginikā; on the north it is the small temple of Kādambarī and a date tree; on the north-east the dike made by the Rājaputra Dēvaṭa; it goes to and enters a citron grove (?); on the east it is the dike of Viṭaka, Also the village named Mādhāsāmmalī. On the north its boundary is Gaṅginikā; from there, on the east; from there again, on the south is the small island Kāṇā; on the east the river Koṅṭhiā; on the north Gaṅginikā; on the west Jēnandāyikā. On the island the funeral rites of this village are performed (?). Of the village Gōpippalī, which is within the Āmrasaṇḍikā *maṇḍala* belonging to the Sthālīkkaṭa district (*vishaya*), the boundaries are, on the east the western boundary of the Udragrāma *maṇḍala*, on the south a jālaka (?), on the west the Khāṭikā (?) named Vēsānikā, on the north the cattle-path running on the borders of the Udragrāma *maṇḍala*. (Kielhorn, 1896-97, pp. 243-254)

From this inscription, we come to know about many place names, water bodies and flora of the study area. Comparatively Mahantāprakāśa was a small *viṣaya* in the Pāla Empire. It was situated on the southern side of the Sthālīkkaṭa *viṣaya*. The northern boundary of Sthālīkkaṭa *viṣaya* was possibly northern portion of the Gajol PS. So, the search for Mahantāprakāśa *viṣaya* can be done on the southern part of the Gajol PS. Possibly Old Malda on the bank of the river Mahananda is the present site of this *viṣaya* of Dharmapāla's time. This *viṣaya* consisted of present Malda PS and southern part of the Gajol PS. We have not yet found mention of any *maṇḍala* or sub-division of this particular *viṣaya* from any sources. Inasmuch it was a small *viṣaya*, so the administrative control of this *viṣaya* was under the powerful Vyāghrataṭī *maṇḍala*.

The Krauñchaśvabhra village of Khalimpur CPI of Dharmapāladēva can be identified with the Bṛddhi Kāmach mauza of Gajol, Malda, West Bengal. In the settlement survey of 1929-30, the present Kāmach mouza was created adding two mauzas, viz, Ārazī Kālwarī and **Kāuch**. This view is also supported by renowned historian Rajanikanta Chakravarti, who identified the Kāuch village as the Krauñchaśvabhra village of Dharmapāla's time. (Chakravarti, 1405 BS, p. 139) As we can see, according to the Khalimpur CPI of Dharmapāladēva, the village Krauñchaśvabhra had its boundary formed by many Gaṅginikās. We find many villages in its vicinity named as Gaṅginak, Gābtalī Gaṅginak, Gongra, all of which

bear the memory of the name of Gaṅginikā of the inscription. A huge number of stone fragments can be seen on the mentioned places. On the south of Krauñchaśvabhra the **Rañjubil** can be identified as the *Grāma* Bilba of the inscription. The northern boundary of the Krauñchaśvabhra village is demarcated by the temple of Kādambarī. Though it is not possible to find out the temple at present day, but on the north of Bṛddhi Kāmach mauza a village named **Kāluarī** is situated, which may be a corruption of the name of *Kādambarī*. In the inscription, we find mention of Khātaka-yānikā[ṛ]. On the east of Bṛddhi Kāmach mauza, a marsh land named Khāṭiā-kānā exists and farther east of it, **Khātiakān** village is situated. On the south-east of Bṛddhi Kāmach mauza we also find a marsh land named **Nalbōnā** of Nalkhāgra mauza, which has resemblance with Nalacharmmaṭat of the inscription.

We have another village in this inscription, i.e. Mādhāsāmmalī of Mahantāprakāśa *viṣaya*. This village can be identified with the **Mādhavpur** mauza of Gajol PS, which is situated a few km away from Bṛddhi Kāmach mauza. In the settlement survey of 1929-30, former Mādhavpara, Gopālbāti and Śilimpur mauza were incorporated into a single mauza of Mādhavpāra.

1.3. Sthalikkata-*viṣaya*

The Khālimpur CPI mentions Sthālīkkaṭa, another *viṣaya* of Dharmapāla's time. (*Sthālīkkaṭavishaya-samva(mba)ddh-Āmrashaṇḍikāmaṇḍala-Āntaḥpāti-Gōpipālī-grāmasya*) (Kielhorn, 1896-97, p. 249) The present location of this *viṣaya* can be identified with the **Thīlikat** village of Itahar PS. This village possibly catered to the administrative need as a centre place of this *viṣaya*.

1.3.1. Āmrashaṇḍikā-*maṇḍala*

Āmrashaṇḍikā was a *maṇḍala* under Sthālīkkaṭa *viṣaya* during Pāla period. The **Amshol** village of Gajol PS of Malda district can be taken as the present location of Āmrashaṇḍikā *maṇḍala* of the Khalimpur CPI of Dharmapāladēva. This village is situated on the bank of the river Chiramati and has yielded ample artefacts of the Pāla period. The name of the village Amshol has clearly a corrupted form of the word *Āmrashaṇḍikā*. In the Khalimpur CPI, another village of Gōpipālī of Āmrashaṇḍikā *maṇḍala* belonging to the Sthālīkkaṭa *viṣaya* had also been donated. It can be identified with the village named **Piplān**, situated on the southeast of Raiganj PS

with the **Gopālpur** village in its vicinity. Both these villages together can be identified as the Gōpippalī village of the inscription. The boundary of this village has been described in the inscription. The Pipplān is situated at a distance of 20 km from Amshol. So, if we take the Amshol village as the centre of Āmrasaṅḍikā *maṇḍala*, the Pipplān village was surely under its jurisdiction. From the description of Khalimpur CPI and identification of the above mentioned place, it can easily be taken that the area of Āmrasaṅḍikā *maṇḍala* was spread within north-western side of present Gajol PS, the entire Itahar PS and southern portion of Raiganj PS.

1.3.2 Udragrāma- *maṇḍala*

Of the village Gōpippalī, which was within the Āmrasaṅḍikā *maṇḍala* belonging to the Sthālīkkaṭa district (*viṣaya*), the boundaries are, on the east the western boundary of the Udragrāma *maṇḍala*, on the south a *jālaka* (?), on the west the Khāṭikā (?) named Vēsānikā, on the north the cattle-path running on the borders of the Udragrāma *maṇḍala*.

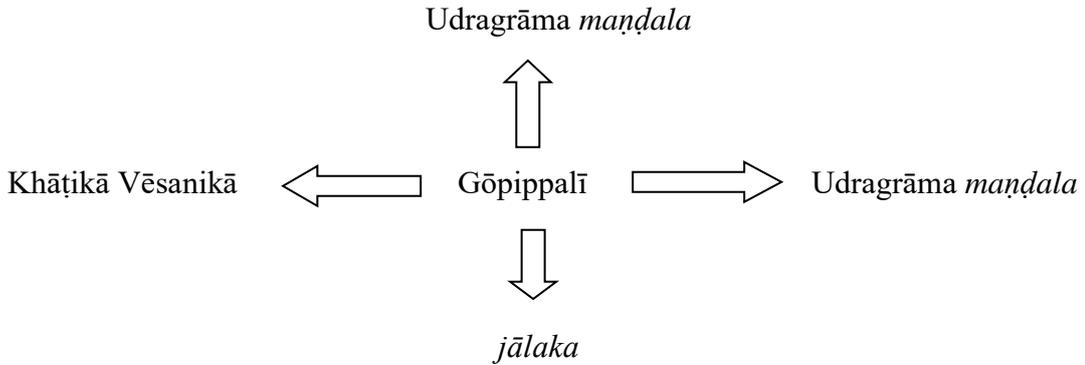


Diagram 2. Boundaries of Gōpippalī

While describing the boundary of Gōpippalī village, mention has been made about the Udragrāma *maṇḍala* as the northern and eastern boundary of Gōpippalī village. A village namely **Udgram**, now under Kaliyaganj PS, is situated at a distance of 33 km from the Pipplān village (Gōpippalī) and can be identified as the Udragrāma *maṇḍala* of the Khalimpur CPI. This village is full of archaeological remains of the Pāla period. This place might be the headquarters of Udragrāma *maṇḍala*. The name of the village Udgram is clearly a contortion of the name Udragrāma.

1.4. Pañchanagarī viṣaya

In the inscriptions of the Gupta period found from North Bengal, we find mention of three *Viṣayas* of Puṇḍravardhana *bhukti*, likely the Kōṭivarṣa of the Damodarpur grants, the Khāḍā(rā)pāra of the Dhanaidaha plate and Pañchanagarī of the Baigrama inscription as the important *viṣayas* of the *bhukti*. The Baigrama CPI mentions about Pañchanagarī *viṣaya*. The central place of this *viṣaya* can be located at **Panchbibi** village of Bangladesh. (Firdousi, et al., 2012, pp. 1-15) This village is full of archaeological fragments, scattered here and there. Hamilton (1833, p. 57) described the antiquity of this place which was then a part of Lalbazar subdivision. He talked about the monument of Nimay Shah as the principal place of Muslim worship. He observed that the stone pieces lying on the land around the monument and other places were taken from a Hindu building. (Hamilton, 1833, p. 57.) Reference of this site can be found in the survey report of E. V. Westmacott. (Westmacott, 1875, p. 190) He mentioned the difficulties in reaching Patharghata owing to dense jungle. However, he identified the shrine of Nimai Shah as situated on the buried remains of a Buddhist stupa. What is common in the descriptions of these two colonial surveyors is the mention of this place with numerous monumental remains of ancient period. (Westmacott, 1875, pp. 190-91; Sen, 2012, pp. 1-15)

While identifying the correct location of Vāyigrāma place of the inscription, Radhagovinda Basak (1931-32, pp. 79-80) comments, “I cannot say for certain if the village named here as Vāyigrāma is the village of the same name that is mentioned in No. 4 of Damodarpur grants. If they are identical, the village must have been situated somewhere on the boundary line between Kōṭivarṣa and Pañchanagarī. That Baigram, where this plate was unearthed, is the ancient Vāyigrāma mentioned in this plate (1.2) cannot be doubted. Consequently, it may reasonably be assumed that the localities mentioned in the inscription were situated somewhere near Hili in Bogra (the then). The name Śrīgōhālī, however, reminds us of the names Vaṭa-Gōhālī and Nitva-Gōhālī of the Pāhārpur inscription.” The places mentioned in the Baigrama CPI are Chaṇḍagrāma and Palāśvṛindaka. At a distance of half km to the north of Baigrama there are two Mauzas lying side by side named **Bara Changram** and **Chhota Changram** both in Nawabganj PS of present Bangladesh. These two villages were once definitely a single village and may be identified as Chaṇḍagrāma of the Gupta Era. **Palasbari** village, situated at a distance of six km. to the north of Changram, may be taken as the Palāśvṛindaka of the

inscription. About the identification of correct locations of Śrīgōhālī and Trivṛitā, Sarkar has some hypothetical observations. The Baigram plate mentions two places of Pañchanagarī *viṣaya* named as Śrīgōhālī and Trivṛitā which were contiguous to the Vāyigrāma. **Hili** is a town situated on the eastern edge of South Dinajpur district and is very close to Baigram. The corruption of Śrīgōhālī may be happened this way:

Śrīgōhālī > Śīualī > Hiualī > Hili.

Tripura is situated at a distance at a distance of one km from Hili in Panchbibi PS of Bogra district (Bangladesh). **Tripura** may be derived from Trivṛitā in this way:

Trivṛitā > Trivīrā > Tripirā > Tripurā

The headquarters of this *viṣaya* may be located at the Panchbibi village of Bangladesh. (Sarkar, 2009, pp. 14-15.)

The Nandapur plate (Majumdar, 1940, pp. 52-56) of Surajgarh, Munghyr, Bihar have some similarities with Baigram plate in respect of script, phraseology and the standard measuring reed, which proves that both the places mentioned in this two plates are about same *viṣaya*. So the hypothesis is that, the places have been mentioned in the Nandapur CPI must be found in Pañchanagarī *viṣaya*. The Nandapur plate mentions two places, viz; Āmbilagrāma and Jangoyika. Āmbilagrāma can be located in **Āmail** village, situated at a distance of five km south-west of Panchbibi PS. We find another village named **Jangoi** in the Nawabganj PS of Dinajpur PS (Bangladesh), which can be identified as the Jangoyika village of the inscription. The Belwa CPI (Sircar, 1957, p. 4) also mentions about Pañchanagarī *viṣaya* and three other plots of donated land. Gaṇēśwara, one among the three gift lands, can be identified with present village of **Ganeshpur**, situated at a distance of three km west of Panchbibi PS. (Sarkar, 2009, pp. 14-15.)

1.5. The Kuddālakḥātaka *viṣaya*

The Kuddālakḥātaka *viṣaya* of the Puṇḍravardhana *bhukti* was an important unit of ancient North Bengal and an important *jayaskandāvāra* (victory camp) of the Pāla Empire. The Jagajjivanpur CPI, the Jajilpara CPI and Raktamāla CPI mention some spatial facts about this *viṣaya*.

The Jagajjivanpur (Tulavita) plate (Roy, 2002, pp. 551-611) records the grant of some land in a ‘locality marked with/abounding in water bodies’ (*udraṅga*) called Nandadīrghikā in the Kuddālakḥātaka *viṣaya* within the Puṇḍravardhana *bhukti* to a Buddhist monastery belonging to the Avaivarttika subsect of the Mahāyāna school named after the tank (i.e. Nandadīrghikā) in the same name locality’. It was issued in the seventh year of Mahendrapāla’s reign. Subsequent digging at the provenance has provided clinching evidence, in the form of a brick-built Buddhist monastery named Nandadīrghikā *vihāra*, towards authenticity of the statement.

The Jagajjivanpur (Tulavita) plate of the time of Mahendrapāla was issued from *Nandadīrghikodraṅge* in the Dardaraṇḍī *maṇḍala* of the Kuddālakḥātaka *viṣaye* in Puṇḍravardhana *bhukti*. (*śrī-Puṇḍravardhana-bhuktau Kundā[la]khātaka-vishayē Na[n]dadīrghik-ōdrangē*) The boundary of the granted land described as

...sīmā | Tatra pūrvvena Taṅgila-nady=ardha-śrotaḥ parichchinnā
dakṣhiṇēn=āpi Kuvja-ghaṭik-ārddha-śrotikayā Kasiggara-Vammaka-
madhyena Nārāyaṇa-vāsīya-pūrvva-sīm-avadhiḥ | Paśchimēn=āpi Gōlaṭi-
nirjjharēṇ-Āja[ga]ra-vasak-āvakhātēna vālmika-stūpēn=āśvattha-
vrikshēṇavijjagavandha kam paśchima-Shaṇḍāl-āntar-āmalakī-vriksha-
paryantaḥ Uttarēṇ=āpy=ataḥ pūrvvamukhō=’ttarakuṇḍā dakṣhiṇēna
Nandāsurālpā... (Roy, 2012, p. 21)

Translation:- “The boundaries (of the town) are on the east – the river Taṅgila; on the south the half way of the stream of the sameflowing hear Kubjajoṭikā; on the east, Nārāyaṇavāsīya (the abode of a certain Nārāyaṇa, or the shrine of God Nārāyaṇa ?) lying near the middle of the embankment of Kāsiggara; on the west, the water-fall of Golaṭi, the ant-hill and the aśvatthva tree in Jambhavāsaka (mud house); on the western part of the Nandā-tank, at a little distance, the *vilva* tree, the Vijjaga embankment and *āmlaki* tree on the western part of the Nandā lake and up to the half-stream of the Tangila.” (Mukherjee, 1997, pp. 58-70) It is tempting to identify this river with modern Tāngan. The **Nandagarh** or **Nādgarrh** bill (Nandadirghī) of Jagajjivanpur, Malda has been identified as the Nandadīrghikā Lake and modern **KāsiDighi** as Kāsiggara-bandhaka of the plate. (Mukherjee, 1997, pp. 68-70)

The Jajilpara CPI of Gopāla IV was issued from Vaṭa-Parvatikā *jayaskandhāvāra* of Kuddālakḥātaka *viṣaya*. The toponyms of the plate are Kāstagrha, Mahārājā of Ānandapur *agrahāra* and Sīha *grāma* along with Muktvāvstu *grāma*.

According to Misra and Majumdar, (1951, p. 139) “There is a village named ‘Sihali’ or ‘Sihole’ on the Gajol-Dinajpur road, in Banshihari police station, Dinajpur district. At present, it is a very small hamlet, but according to the local tradition it was formerly a big village inhabited by large number of learned Brāhmaṇas. Even now, some Varendra Brāhmaṇas reside in a village called **Mahāgrāma**, about less than a mile from this village. It is situated on the south-eastern bank of the Tangan river and, as a result of the erosion of the river, foundations of many brick-built houses have been exposed to view. Its distance from the find-place of the present copper-plate is about 7 or 8 miles. It is probable that the site of this village represents the old ‘Siha’ village.”

The Raktamāla CPI of the 159 GE was salvaged from a scrap metal shop in Dhaka and was said to have been found in Bogra district of present Bangladesh. It had first come into light through the pen of D.P. Dubey and S. K. Acharya in 2014. (Dubay & Acharya, 2014) (Griffiths, 2015, pp. 15-38) This inscription mentions Kuddālakḥāta *viṣaya* under the jurisdiction of Puṇḍravardhana *bhukti* (II. 21-22: *śrīpuṇḍravardhanabhuktau kuddālkḥātaviṣayasambaddha*). The place from which a grant was issued from the Kuddālakḥāta *viṣaya* (II. 28-29 *kuddālakḥātakasamāvāsitaśrīmajjayaskandhāvārāt*) of Puṇḍravardhana *bhukti*. The Kuddālakḥāta (*kuddālakḥātadhivāsābhyanantara*) of this grant must correspond with Kuddālakḥātaka in the Jagajjivanpur plate of Mahendrapāla. (II. 30-31, *śrīpuṇḍravardhanabhuktau kuddālakḥātakaviṣaye*) It is also mentioned as a *viṣaya* in the Jajilpara plate of Gopāla IV (*śrīpuṇḍravardhanabhuktau kuddālakḥātakaviṣayambaddha*) (Majumdar, 1951, pp. 137-44). In the Raktamala grant mention has been made of villages of Kuddālakḥāta *viṣaya*, viz. Mahatī-Raktamālā, Khuḍḍī-Raktamālikā, Govardhanaka, Dugdhotikā and Madhyamaṣaṇḍikā. The toponym of Madhyamaṣaṇḍikā of this grant is phonetically similar with the Āmraṣaṇḍikā toponym of the Khalimpur grant. This grant was issued from *agrahāra* named Mahatī-Raktamālā like the Nandapur plate, which was also issued from a *agrahāra* named Āmvilagrāma. Though the correct location of these places is not yet ascertained, but understanding the similarities of this grant with other grants, one can further search somewhere east of the present Malda district in West Bengal, south of the present Panchbibi PS and west of the river Jamuna of Bangladesh.

1.6. Koṭivarṣa viṣaya

Of the five Damodarpur CPIs, four make specific mention of the Kōṭivarṣa viṣaya. The Kōṭivarṣa has been doubtlessly identified with present Bangarh in the Gangarampur PS of South Dinajpur district. The jurisdiction of Kōṭivarṣa is identified with the tract of country, consisting the northern part of the modern district of Rajshahi (presently in Bangladesh), South Dinajpur in West Bengal, including perhaps a portion of Bogra (presently in Bangladesh) and some parts of Malda district in West Bengal. The Bangarh CPI of Mahipāla I of late tenth or early eleventh century, recovered from the famous remnants of Bāṅgarh in the Gangarampur PS of South Dinajpur district. It was issued from the administrative headquarters of Vilaspura, recorded the gift of a plot of land in the village of Kurāṭapallikā with the exception of Cūṭa pallikā with low ground, within the Gokālika maṇḍala of the Koṭivarṣa viṣaya in the Puṇḍravardhana bhukti.

*Śrī-Puṇḍravardhana-bhuktau | Kōṭivarṣa-vishayē | Gōkālīkā-maṇḍala-
āntaḥpāti-sva-samva(mba)ddha-āvachchhinnatal-ōpēta-chūṭa-pallikā-
varjita-Kuraṭa-pallikā grāmē.* (Bannerji, 1982, pp. 324-30)

No detailed boundary of the granted land is specified in the epigraph. Another important toponym is found from this grant, i.e. Poṣalī from where hailed the artisan and engraver of this grant named Mahīdhara.

Two plates of Madanapāla's time (second and twenty second/thirty second ruling year) (Mukherjee, 1990-91, pp. 27-37; Sanyal, 2010, pp. 107-34) were recovered from Shibbari village near Rajibpur in the Gangarampur PS of South Dinajpur district. Both these grants were issued from the royal headquarters located at Rāmāvatī. The plate #1 of ruling year two records the donation of land at the Buddhavaḍā grāma in Halāvartta maṇḍala of Koṭivarṣa viṣaya in the Puṇḍravardhana bhukti, while the second plate records donation of the same land Buddhavaḍā though by then it came to be known as a pallī attached to the Koṣṭhāgāra of Devikoṭa in the same administrative area. No detailed boundary of the village Buddhavaḍā is specified in the first plate, but a brief narrative provided in the second plate in connection with the location of this village. Two neighbouring localities called Vareṇḍa pallī attached to Vaṅgaḍī and Viduṣa ballī (pallī) are mentioned in the inscription. The Buddhavaḍā grāma of the inscription has been identified with

Budhura village (now more popular as Raghobpur), in the Tapan PS. (Sanyal, 2010, p. 112)

It is quite fascinating for the study of the inscription of Bengal, because in most of the Pāla inscriptions found from Bengal, the grant receiver and his successors has the right of donated plot as the Sun and the moon lasts. Even it was also cursed to reside in hell. But here the same Buddhavaḍā *grāma* was first issued to Muraripu Rāta in the plate #1 and this same village was also granted to his son Mahādeva Rāta with an addition of the suffix *pallī*.

The Tarpan Dighi CPI (Banerji, 1913-14, pp. 6-10) of the third year of the reign of Lakshmanasena lights on some obscure sides of the history of the study area. The plate was unearthed in course of re-excavating an old tank during the scarcity of 1873-74, to the north of Tarpan Dighi, which is the largest tank in the Gangarampur PS of South Dinajpur district. It was issued from the illustrious ‘camp of victory’ situated in Vikramapura.

That the land belonging to the village of Velahistī in Varendrī within the Puṇḍravardhana *bhukti*, having for its four boundaries (as follows): To the east, the eastern boundary wall of (one) *āḍhāvāpa* of rent-free plain land (?) belonging to the deity of the Buddhist monastery, particulars of which are contained in the words *Vuddha-viharī-dēvatā-nikara-dēyāmmaṇa-bhūmyāḍhāvāpaparvālīḥ*. (Majumdar, 1929, p. 104) The Southern boundary was the tank named Nichaḍahāra; to the west, the Nandiharipākuṇḍī and the Northern boundary was the ditch known as Mollānakhāḍī. (Banerji, 1913-14, pp. 6-10)

However, it is tempting to identify, though tentatively, the Velahisti of the Tarpan Dighi grant with the present village named Belasthali, not far from the provenance of the plate, to the east of Bangarh and northeast of Tapan in the Gangarampur PS of the district of South Dinajpur. Belasthali is reported to have possessed numerous bronzes and stone images of the early medieval period besides pottery and structures of later periods. It may also be rewarding to inquire in terms of an intensive field survey, if the area around the village possesses any trace of a structural ruin/associated archaeological material that might be taken as a monastic mound or part/s thereof. In that case, it will be a solid corroboration of the epigraphic

statement that lands belonging to the organization of a Buddhist monastery formed one of the boundaries of the granted land. (Sanyal, 2010, p. 112)

The Manahali CPI of Madanapāla (Maitreya, 1319 BS, pp. 147-58) records the gift of a village, situated in the Halāvartta *maṇḍala* of the Koṭivarṣa *viṣaya* in the Puṇḍravardhana *bhukti*.

The Amgachhi grant of Vighrahapāla III issued from the victorious camp of Haradhāma, was discovered from the Amgachhi village of Dinajpur district, which records the grant of part of the village of Vishamapura together with Daṇḍatrahēśvara in the Vrā(brā)hmanī-grāma *maṇḍala* of the Koṭivarṣa *viṣaya* in the Puṇḍravardhana *bhukti*.

Śrī-Puṇḍravardhana-bhuktau Kōṭivarṣa-vishay-āntaḥpāti-Vrā(brā)hmanī-grāma-maṇḍala [-āntaḥpāti-sva] ... Danda(?)trah-ēśvara-samēta-Vishamapur-āmśē (v.24-26) (Banerji, 1919-20, p. 292)

2. Matsyadeśa

The historical geography of our study area presents some ticklish problems. In ancient and medieval times, the sub-regions of our study area had different names, now erased out of public memory in the modern times. To start with we can refer to Matsyadeśa a sub-region that roughly corresponds with the territory lying between the river Mahananda on the west and Jamuna⁴ on the east before joining the Padma in its lower reaches. The smaller Jamuna was known as the lower channels of the Tista like the Punarbhaba and the Atreyi. The relics of the famous monastery of Somapura (Paharpur) stand on its bank in the undivided Rajshahi district of Bangladesh. The Matsyadeśa consists of large part of the Purnea district of Bihar, almost entire part of North Dinajpur and South Dinajpur and northern part of Malda district that includes the police stations of Kharba and Harishchandrapur. The district of Dinajpur in Bangladesh and parts of northern Rajshahi possibly formed part of the Matsyadeśa.

Several authorities and surveyors had mentioned some local legends, which identified this territory as the Matsyadeśa. Francis Buchanan Hamilton, (1833, pp. 19-20) in his Dinajpur District Gazetteer, mentions

... Virat Raja, king of Motsyodes, a name which is still retained by the whole of this district, except a small portion east from the proper Korotoya, for that river separated Motsyo from Kamrup, which was then governed by a prince named Bhogodotto. The boundaries of Motsyo, towards the south and west, I have not yet exactly learned, as they certainly included, at least, portions of Rajshahi and Purniya, which I have not visited. In the war which took place between Yudhishtir and Duryodhon for the throne of Hostinapur, and the supremacy of India, Virat raja assisted the former or successful side, while his neighbour, as usual, joined with the opposite party. The mother of Virat raja happened to be impregnated by means of a fish. The circumstances being very indecent, shall not be mentioned; but it is on this account, that this vicinity has been called Motsyodes, or the country of the fish.

F.W. Strong (1912, p. 18) has echoed the view of Francis Buchanon Hamilton.

This monarch (Virat Raja) was a contemporary of Bhagadatta, king of Kamrupa, and the Karatoya formed the boundary between the two kingdoms. In his days Dinajpur was called Matsya Desha, or the fish country. He is said to helped Judhisthir, the eldest of the Pandavas, in his fight for the supremacy of India. There is considerable doubt as to whether this monarch proceeded or followed Ban Raja. Traces of Virat Raja are to be found at Kantanagar in the Birganj thana, where the remains of an old fort are pointed out as the place where he kept his cattle, while Ghoraghat, in the south-west corner of the district, derives its name from the fact that Virat Raja kept his horses there. Some nine miles south-west of Ghoraghat are the ruins of his palace. Bhim the warrior hero of the solar race, and brother of Judisthir, appears to have visited the district in Virat's reign and some stone implements of agriculture attributed to him are still preserved near Parvatipur.

Authorities like B. C. Law has raised some doubts about the conventional identification of Matsyadeśa with Jaipur in Rajasthan. Referring to the *Rāmāyana* (*Kiskindhyākānda*), Law mentions, when Sugrīva sent his monkeys in search of Sītā, those under Angada are said to have made their enquiries throughout the countries of the Matsyas and the Kalingas. (*Kiskindhyākānda*, 43, II) Thus according to Law, the search for the missing heroine of the epic could not logically be directed to two isolated regions far off from each other. Kalinga is undisputedly identified with parts of modern Orissa and Angada's search for Sītā could only be led to a contiguous and

neighbouring region. And in our opinion this neighbouring territory could possibly be the *Matsya* country that formed part of modern Bengal and Bihar not far from Kalinga.

Historians agree that the *Matsya* was an ancient caste and tribe of the Indian subcontinent. It had come into light much before the rise of the great Māgadha Empire. We find mention of *Matsyas* in the *R̥gveda*. Thurvaśa, a famous king of Vedic times attacked the *Matsyas* for wealth (probably for the cows).

*Puroyo itturvaśo yakkharāsīdrāye Matsyāyo niśitā apīva, śruṣṭim cakrubhṛgava
druhyavaśca sakhā sakhāyamataraviṣūdoḥ.*(*R̥gveda*, vii. 18 6.)

It was a wealthy country during that time. *R̥gveda* also mentions two other tribes of western India, like Druhyas and the Bhṛgus, side by side with the *Matsyas*. In the *Ādiparva*, (chap. 63) mention has been made of birth of a king called *Matsya* from the womb of a fish along with Matsyagandhā Satyavatī of the epic fame. The *Vāyu Purāna* (chap. 99) also refers to this king *Matsya* born of Uparicara Vasu and a fish. In the epic age, king Suśarmā of the Tr̥garttas says addressing Duryodhana, ‘we have been defeated before more than once by the *Matsyas* and *Sālvas*.’ (*Matsya Sālveyakaith*)

*Atha rājā Trigarttānam suśarmā rathayūthapaḥ, |
prāpatakālamidaṁ vakyamuvāca tvarito valī, ||
asakrinnikritāḥ pūrvam Matsyaśvālveyakaith prabha, |
sūtenaiva ca Matsyasya Kīcakena punaḥ punaḥ ||*

(*Mahābhārata, Virataparva, 30, 1-2.*)

According to the *Manusamhitā*, the *Matsyas*, it appears, occupied a pre-eminent position both by the purity of their conduct and customs as well as by their bravery and prowess on the battlefield. According to this text, the *Matsya* country formed part of the *Brahmar̥ṣi-deśa*, a country of the holy sages. Nowhere in the *Rāmāyana*, the *Matsyas* were described as important people possibly due to their diminishing importance after the Vedic age.

It is also established fact that Matsyendranath was associated with Nepal and considered there as an incarnation of Avolokiteśvara in Buddhist circles, as the presiding deity of the country. (Sensharma, 1994, p. 29) The Dpag bsam Gon bzams, a Tibetan work, mentions Lui pā (na-eto-pa), a Buddhist sage hailed from fisherman

caste. The sanskrit meaning of Na-eto-pa is *matsyodara* and possibly identified with Matsyendranath. (Sensharma, 1994, pp. 27-29)

Mention may now be made of the fact that in many Indian lexicons *Matsya* has synonyms like *Machchha* (which is only a corruption of formal *Matsya*) i.e. fish. Undoubtedly, the land known as *Matsya* is supposed to have some connection with fish. Interestingly, the Jaipur sub-region of Rajasthan had never been known as a country where fishes were in plenty. Instead, the sub-region known as *Matsya* in eastern India, that includes parts of Purnea, Dinajpur and Malda are known for their rich yield of fishes. The ancient rivers like the Kosi (*Kauśiki*), Mahananda, Punarbhaba, Tangan, Jamuna, Chiramati (*Śrīmatī*), Nāgar, Kulik etc. always yielded great amount of fish. It may be of interest to note that several fisher communities lived in this sub-region from time immemorial. Many of these communities are extinct till now. But in the early nineteenth century, Buchanon Hamilton had listed scores of such communities eking out their livelihood catching and selling fish. No less interesting is the fact that boatmen communities were also numerous in the region. (Hamilton, 1928, pp. 230-257) Contrarily such communities had never inhabited the Jaipur region of Rajasthan. (Table 4)

The practice of the people of using a metaphor to express something, it is believed, is always a part of their livelihood or their experiences. The condition of anarchy, which was prevailed in Bengal before the election of Gopāla by the *Prakritibhir*, had been described as *matsyanyaya*. (Kielhorn, 1896-97, pp. 243-53) Whereas, in the *Rājtarāṅgiṇī*, we find mention of similar type of election of Jalauka as king by a group of seven officials called *Prakritis*. (Stein, 1900, I. 113-151; Majumdar, 1943, p. 98) It will not be out of place to refer here to the rebellion of Kaivarta community in this region, which resulted in their capturing of political power dethroning the reigning Pāla emperor Mahipāla III. The Kaivartas were basically a tribe of fishers and boatmen from very ancient times.

Legend has it that the principal city of the Matsyadeśa was *Virāṭanagara* of which the king was Virāṭa of the *Mahābhārata* fame. One is tempted to identify this Virāṭanagara with the present day town of Biratnagar situated in southern Nepal, a little to the north of the border of the Purnea district with Nepal. The people of Biratnagar still now consider the town as the site of the ancient capital of king Virāṭa

of the epic. The people of southern Nepal, particularly those living in the Terai plains, are called *Madhesi*. Legend has it that the name *Madhesi* was derived the name from the word *Matsyadesi* (inhabitants of the Matsyadeśa).

Matsyadesi > Machchhadesi > Madesi > Madhesi

Interestingly, according to some legends, *Upaplavya* was known as the second city of the kingdom ruled by Virāṭa, and one is tempted to identify a village named Piprithān with the Upaplavya of the local legends, which is not far from modern Biratnagar (Nepal). Piprithan is famous for its mounds. The biggest mound is called by the local inhabitants as the ‘Bhīm-Bālis’. (Field Survey, 08/02/2019)

The controversy about the identification of Matsyadeśa very likely generated from Cunningham (1871, pp. 344-345) statements.

Its precise boundaries cannot be determined; but they may be fixed approximately as extending on the north from Jhunjnu to Kot Kāsim, 70 miles; on the west from Jhunjnu to Ajmer, 120 miles; on the south from Ajmer to the junction of the Bānas and Chambal, 150 miles and on the east from the junction of Kot Kāsim, 150 miles; or altogether 490 miles.

Nundo Lal Dey (1899, p. 55) also commented

“... the country around Jeypur. It was the kingdom of Rājā Virāta of the Mahābhārata, in whose court at Vairāt Yudhishtira and his brothers resided *incognito* for one year during last of their banishment. Vairāt or Bairāt is in the Alwar state of Rajputana-Machheri, which is a corruption of Matsya, is the present town of Alwar, which formerly appertained to the territory of Jeypur.”

Having thus describing the Matsyadeśa and the problems related to its identification we may proceed to the ancient land called *Varendra* which has territories that overlap Matsya country to a considerable extent. Varendra is conventionally described as the land between the Mahananda in the west and the Karatoya in the east, while the Ganges forms its southern boundary. In no ancient text, however Varendra includes the upper part of the present northern Bengal consisting of the modern districts of Jalpaiguri and Coochbehar and the Terai region of the Darjeeling district. So this ancient land included the district of Malda, Pabna,

Dinajpur, Rajshahi, Bogra and Rangpur. But the territory to the west of Mahananda in Malda district is known as *Tāl*.⁵ While the eastern part of the river in the same district is locally known as *Barind* which is a corruption of Varendra. So it would be logical not to include the territories lying west of the Mahananda within Varendra or even Matsya.

3. Varendra(ī)

In the early medieval period the land of Puṇḍra came to known as Varendra, particularly the land between the river Karatoya in the east and the river Mahananda on the west. Varendra is assigned as one of the *maṇḍalas* under Puṇḍravardhana *bhukti*. The earlier form of the name was Varendrī, as found from the epigraphical sources; the form of Varendra seems to have been a later innovation, used mainly in the genealogical with our inscriptional documents. (Sen, 1942, p. 112) The Tarpandighi inscription of Lakshmaṇasena assigns Varendrī to Puṇḍravardhana *bhukti*. (Majumdar, 1929, p. 102) The Madhainagar inscription of Lakshmaṇasena (Banerjee, 1913-14, pp. 6-10) mentions *Śrī-Puṇḍravardhana-bhukty-antaḥpāti-Varendryām*. (II. 39-40) The Kamauli grant of Vaidyadeva (Venis, 1894, pp. 347-358; Sharma, 1978, pp. 273-290) records a grant to a brāhmaṇa family hailing from Varendrī. (v. 22) The Deopara inscription of Vijayasena mentions of a guild of artists, which flourished in Varendra. (*Vārendraka-Śilpigoshṭhi*) (Majumdar, 1929, pp. 42-56)

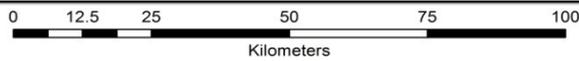
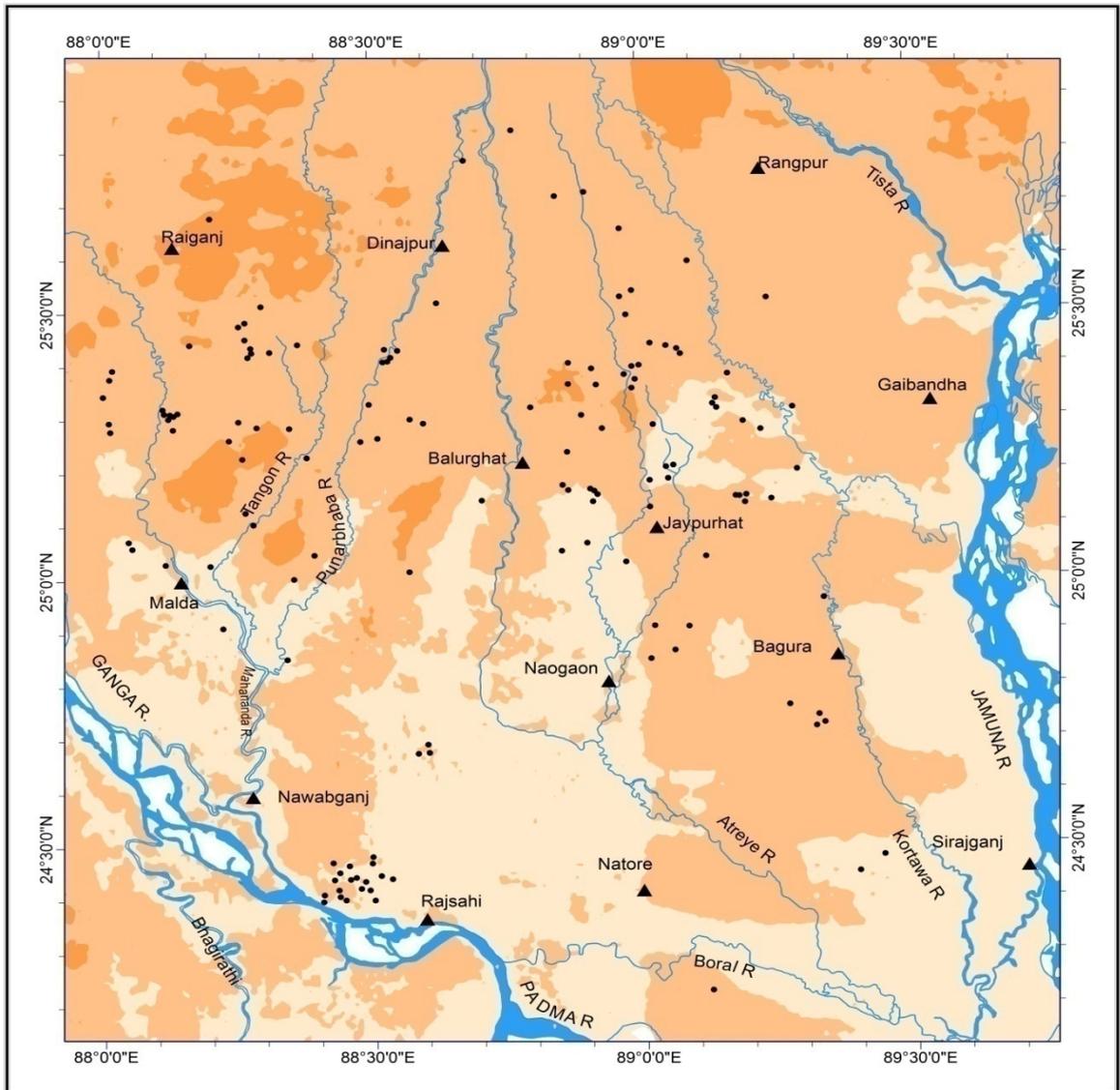
Although, Varendrī was a name of a metropolitan district of the Puṇḍravardhana *bhukti* territory, but eventually a large portion of this *bhukti* came to be known as Varendra in the early medieval period. The stretch of the area of Varendra from the river Ganges and Mahananda to the Karatoya on the east, which encompasses the districts of undivided Dinajpur, Malda, Rajshahi, Bogra and Rangpur. (Monahan, 1914, pp. 97-105) Practically, it was identical with the area of ancient land of Puṇḍra or Puṇḍravardhana. The Madhainagar inscription provides few toponyms of Varendra like Kāntāpura-āvṛitti, Dpaṇiyā-pāṭaka, Rāvaṇa-sarasi, Chaḍaspāsā-pāṭaka, Gayanagara, Guṇḍisthirā-pāṭaka and Guṇḍī-Dāpaṇiya. The toponyms mentioned in the Tarpandighi grant are Velahishṭī, Buddhavihārī-devatānikara, Nichadahāra tank, Nandiharipākuṇḍī and Mollāṇakhāḍī. The Silimpur stone-slab inscription of Jayapāla mentions Vāla(Bāla)-grāma as an important village

of Varendra along with Tarkāri and Sakaṭī river. (Basak, 1982, pp. 283-95) The Kamauli plate refers a village named Bhāvagrāma of Varendrī. (Venis, 1894, p. 352) The Deopara inscription of Vijayasena mentions Rāṇaka Śūlapāni as *Varendraka-śilpigosṭhi-chūḍāmaṇi*. (Kielhorn, 1892b, p. 305; Majumdar, 1929, p. 46)

The historical geography of our study area is quite fascinating since the region comprised of some sub-regions almost obscure in our times as their names suggest. It would not be unjust to say that the entire region known as northern Bengal now, was anciently known either as Puṇḍravardhana or Varendra. Puṇḍravardhana was a *bhukti* or province under the Gupta Empire. Later on the name Varendra was applied more frequently as the nomenclature without giving up the use of more ancient name Puṇḍra. Even in the post-Gupta period, Puṇḍra was commonly used in literary sources. Xuan Zang, the seventh century Chinese traveller used the name in his accounts, as widely known. In all probability Varendra was a later addition as it is found in the Pāla and Sena records. Curiously enough, a part of the region was also called as Gauḍa, tentatively identified with the Pichhli-Gangarampur area of the district of Malda.

The Mastakaśvabhra grant of Pradyumnabandhu of 159 GE (650 CE?) (Griffiths, 2015, pp. 15-38) is an important piece of information for the historical geography of the study area. This grant bridges the gap in the history of Puṇḍravardhana between the last Damodarpur plate (224 GE, i.e. 544 CE) and the first plate of Dharmapāla in the eighth century. It is the first specimen from North Bengal of a specific group of land-sale grants, datable to the sixth century and the beginning of the seventh, none of which however contains any internal absolute date, all being dated in regnal years of kings whom it is generally impossible to date with a degree of precision comparable to that of the land sale grants of the Gupta era. The plate which is on the whole very well preserved, measures 37 × 24 cm and is engraved lengthwise, on one side, with twenty-one lines of text. A seal, which measures 5–7 cm in diameter, is affixed to the left margin of the text, bears two lines of text and is stamped with a secondary seal. Almost the whole of the text is preserved. The script, which is identical on plate and seal, is a variety of Late Eastern Brāhmī that may paleographically be assigned to about the sixth century CE. It was issued by a later Gupta king (?) Pradyumnabandhu.

Map 2: River System



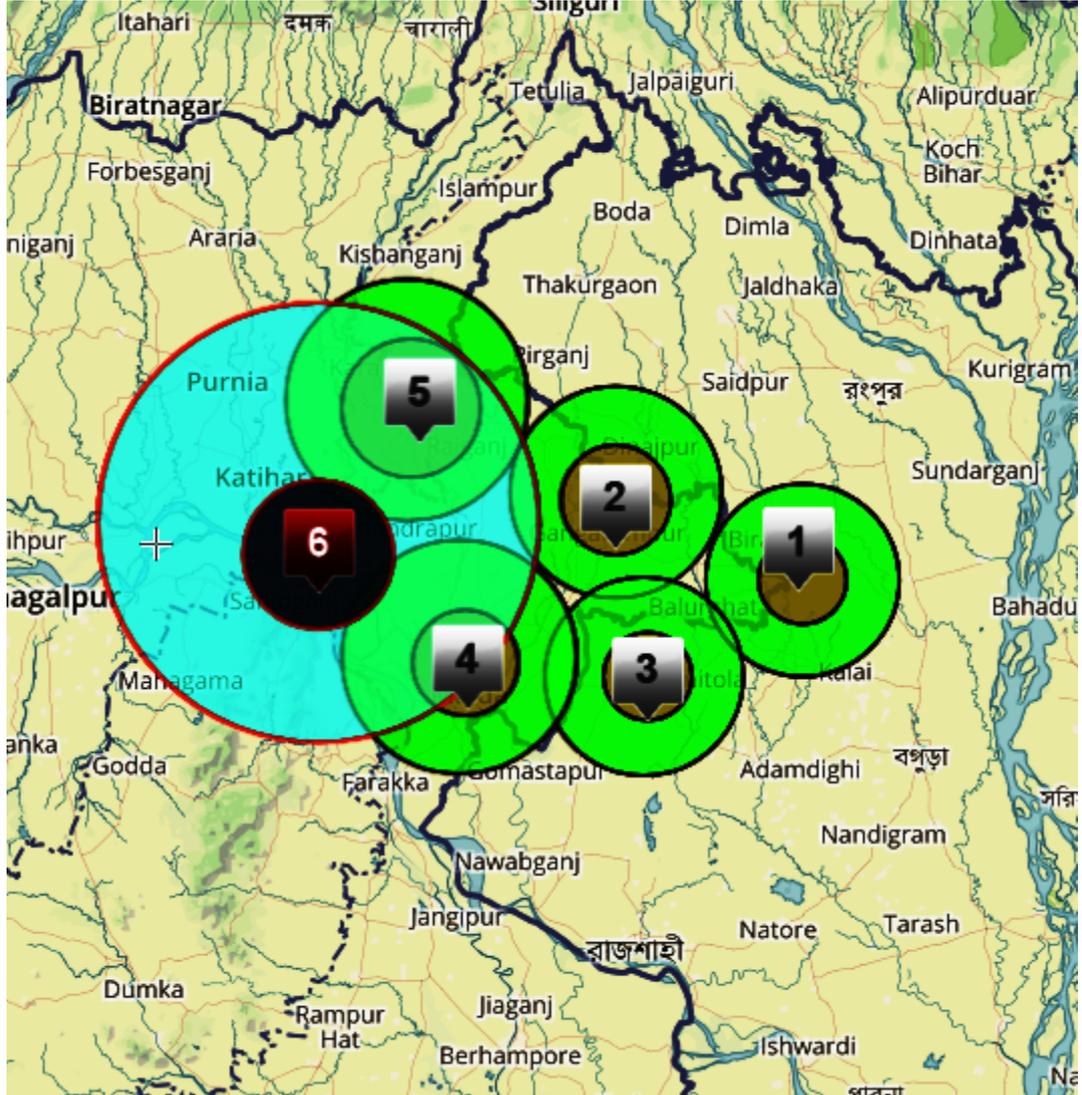
Elevation in meters

- Less than 18
- 18 - 35
- 36 - 52
- More than 52

Others

- Towns /Cities (Major)
- Location of Sites
- River
- River Deposits

Map 2: Territorial Division of the Study area



1. Pañchanagarīviṣaya
2. Koṭivarṣa viṣaya
3. Kuddālakḥāta viṣaya
4. Mahantāprakaśaviṣaya
5. Sthalikkata viṣaya
6. Vyāghrataṭi maṇḍala

Notes

1. Since a *maṇḍala* forms a part of *viṣaya*, as can be seen in the Dinajpur plate of Mahipāla the sequence is *bhukti, viṣaya, maṇḍala*.
2. Death, caused by wild beasts from 1863 to 1875 are turned by collector as fallow: - 12 in 1863, 39 in 1864, 8 in 1865, 13 in 1866, 9 in 1867, 30 in 1868, 7 in 1869, 11 in 1870, 13 in 1871, 23 in 1872, 10 in 1873, 15 in 1874 and 28 in 1875. Total for the thirteen years, 184, or an annual average of 14. (Hunter, 1976, p. 37).
3. Another copper plate grant of Lakshmaṇasena has been found from this place.
4. This Jamuna is not same with the much larger lower course of the mighty Brahmaputra River that flows through lower Assam and enters into eastern Bengal. (presently Bangladesh)
5. The river Mahananda divides the district of Malda into two parts. The eastern part is known as *Varind* (a derivative of Varendra) while the western part is called the *Tāl*.

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