Chapter 3

The Wheel of Urbanization and Geopolitics

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This chapter of the dissertation will deal with some methods, which have not conventionally been used in the writings of Indian history. The close study of the urban farrago of our study area can be explained through the **Central Place Theory** (CPT), which is unfamiliar in the archaeological context in Bengal. Central Place theory is an attempt to explain the spatial arrangement, size and number of settlements. The theory was originally published in 1933 by a German geographer Walter Christaller who studied the settlement pattern in southern Germany. (Christaller, 1966)By examining and defining the functions of the settlement structure and the size of the hinterland an attempt should be made to find a model or pattern of the settlements. The core area is called as central place, while the immediate surrounding as its threshold and its periphery as range.
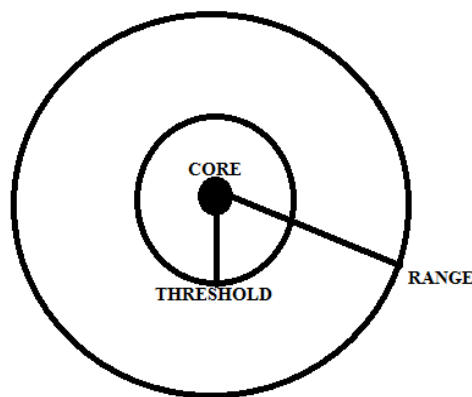
Diagram 3. Cetral Place Theory

To identify a central place, we should examine some condition of archaeological perspective, such as fortification, place of religious interest, place of education, amount of artefacts such as sculptures, potteries, metals etc; secondly a central place can be arranged on the basis of marketing, transportation and administrative principles; thirdly, the development of time or chronology is crucial in the identification of any central place. Because in analysing the urban character of a site

of our study area we have to deal with different spatial models of centralization of different time frame. The spatial effect of any central place can be different in chronological perspective, because the ancient ideal borders of the time of second and third urbanization of India are not same. A central place can overlap another central place's area of influence and can be shifted to other places with the passage of time or with the changing political scenario. It can also be sifted by the newly created security issues also.

The study area can surprise any reader, who is interested in the process of urbanization of any ancient sites, by its spatial factors, geopolitical effects and anti-incumbency factors of the subjects. The study area had numerous large and small urban centers, which catered the needs of the people of the time. It is not very common in the study of regional history that such number of large urban centers has been treated duly in close proximity. It would appear that a number of big cities of Bengal were built in our study area. These were Koṭivarṣa, Gauḍa, Rāmāvati, Pānduā, and Ṭānḍa. No less fascinating is the fact that several other large and small urban centres came up in the region during the ancient and medieval periods. Strategic importance of the region was due to its commercial and agricultural prosperity as well as its geographical location. At the outset, we should briefly describe the locations of the towns and its spatial effects on the minor surrounding urban focies in respect of geopolitics, agriculture, economy and communication. The study area, as like as the remaining part of Puṇḍravardhana *bhukti* was full of urban centers. Some of the settlements were quite big, viz, Bangarh, Asuragarh, Gauḍa, Maheṇḍra and Rāmāvati, which were also surrounded by numerous minor urban centres.

For the sake of better understanding, it is justified to discuss in brief the definitions of 'urbanization' and 'geopolitics'. 'Urbanization' according to Britanica Global Edition, 'the process by which large numbers of people become permanently concentrated in relatively small areas, forming cities.' (Hoiberg, 2016, p. 17202) 'Proper concern should not be with cities as such but with complex societies, in which cities and their hinterlands are interwoven into light political and economic webs.' (Bashan, 1974, p. 51) The available research on the ancient and early historic period of ancient India reveals two most distinct phases of urbanization, to which a third may now be added for the early medieval period. (Chattopadhyaya, 1974)

Reasons behind the urban growth on any settlement are, '(i) the holding of fairs; (ii) the emergence of religious centers; (iii) commercial activities centered around ports; (iv) the bestowal of urban status on rural settlements; (v) initiatives taken by the kings and ministers in the creation of urban centres and so on.' (Rao, 1975, p. 125) It is worth mentioning that the factors responsible for the growth of any urban centres - (i) the geographical location, (ii) trade, (iii) importance as a centre of political activities and (iv) religious importance – has been regarded as 'four major criteria'.

It is generally accepted by our historians that in ancient and early medieval India, there are three phases of urbanization. To begin with, the **'first urbanization'**, i.e. the Indus Valley urbanization, it is unnecessary to examine here about the Indus Valley civilization, which is far from our examination zone. (Pande & Ramachandran, 1971) It is additionally for the most part acknowledged that the primary phase of urbanization, i.e. the Indus Valley urbanization, left no inheritance past beyond the middle of the second thousand BCE. (Ghosh, 1973, p. 30) Also, the 'second urbanization', i.e. the early historical phase speaks of a long stretch of urban development extending from the 6th century BCE to the third century CE. R. Champakalakshmi framed the 'second urbanization' between sixth century BCE to the third century CE. (Champakalakshmi, 1999) But V.K. Thakur placed it in between 6th century B.C. to the 6th century CE. (Thakur, 1986, pp. 175-184) So, India needed to sit tight for her 'second urbanization' over a thousand years after the vanishing of the Indus cities – till the middle of the 6th century BCE. The second or the early historical stage speaks to a long stretch of urban development extending from the 6th century BCE to the third century CE. With its epicentre in the Ganges valley, it spread over the entire of North India by the third century BCE, and over Central India, Deccan and the Andhra region between the second century BCE and third century CE. It must be focused; nonetheless, that it is the latter part of this long chronological order that saw the most unmistakably obvious appearances of this urbanism. (Champakalakshmi, 1999, p. 25) This period of urbanization occurred in the whole north India, central India and in the Andhra region specifically.

The second period of urbanization related with a gradual maturation of the Iron Age. In other word, it can be rehashed that iron assumed a noteworthy part for the improvement of the Indian cities of the period. Iron revolutionized the economy of

the general population in regard of agriculture, exchange, transport, horticulture and so on in the way of urban life. The iron tools did up the basic needs for clearing of primeval forests, development of farming and for technical use. While depicting the use of iron and the second phase of urbanization in north India, A. Ghosh (1973, p.13) mentions,

> "The story in the rest of India is simple. To central India and the upper Deccan iron went from the north with the other equipment of the early historical culture. So also is the case with eastern India, where the local people do not seem to have exploited its rich iron-ore deposits, owing to lack of demand or technical knowledge; the exploitation must have started with the increase of demand from the more advanced regions that lay to the west, from which the technology itself may have been borrowed."

This statement of Ghosh evokes controversy. Because, if the people of eastern India did not have enough technical knowledge about the use of iron-ore, it would not been possible for Magadha to rise as an imperial power by defeating or managing the rest of the *Janapada*sin the sixth century BCE. As we know that, long before the rise of Magadha as an imperial power, it emerged as a 'super- *maha-janapada*s' along with Kosala, Vatsa and Avanti. Magadha was part and parcel of eastern India. The Asuras, who were a small tribe in eastern India did 'live almost entirely by iron melting' and the Asuras were 'the more civilized mining and temple building people' of whom traces are found throughout Chota Nagpur.(Risley, 1982, p. 25) The cities like Bangarh, (Goswami, 1949) Asuragarh, (Adhikary, 2015, pp. 110-117) Chandraketugarh, (De & De, 2006) and Mahasthangarh (Bhandarkar, 1932, pp. 123-126) rose into prominence at least notlater than the third century BCE. The people of Eastern India were well aware of iron melting much before the rise of Magadha as an imperial power. (Banerjee, 2005, pp. 153-168)This list will be broader if we take the possibility of identifying the Matsya *janapada* (details in the second chapter of the dissertation) in the territory between the river Kosi and the river Mahananda, and the modern Viratnagar (now in Nepal and Bihar border) as the capital city of Matsyadeśa.

The 'third urbanization', took place in the early medieval period; shows the growth of huge urban centers. Earlier researchers recognized only two distinct phases of urbanization, but during last few decades, many research works have been done on the third phase of urbanization of Indian history. According to B.D. Chattapadhyaya

the concept of 'third urbanization' has been applied to the late 10th to 13th century CE. (Chattapayaya, 1986, pp. 8-33) In opposite, V.K. Thakur margined this phase from post Gupta period to the 10th century CE. (Thakur, 1986, p. 184) Among the three phases of urbanization in Indian history, the third phase, i.e. 'third urbanization' has been an unsettled issue for a long time to the scholars. Most of them are trying to search either similarity or dissimilarity of the key facts or patterns of the rise and growth of the cities of early medieval India with the earlier phases of urbanization. However, on the whole, it may be stated that after the fall of mighty Gupta Empire or the so called last pan-Indian empire of ancient India, the culture, urban pattern, politics and society came to be fragmented and possibly from this time on, India had achieved its different regional identities.

Though, the dimension and nature of the settlements are different, they have some similarities in patterns, characters and typologies. The categories of the settlements, as revealed from the land grants and literary sources of that time, are those of *grāma, nigama, pura, nagara, mahānagara, puṭa bhedana, sthānīya* etc. *adhiṣṭāna*; another category of settlement signifies as an urban center in Gupta and post-Gupta times. (Bloch, 1906, p. 109) Furthermore, *agrahāra*,(Choudhury, 1971, pp. 42-49) can be treated as *grāma* with some administrative responsibilities bestowed on them.

The meaning of the word *pur*, in the Vedic literature, is 'rampart', 'fort', 'stronghold' derived from the word *pura*. The word *nagara*,(Williams, 1986, p. 525) meant a city, town. *Pattana*, in other word *Sthāniya*, literally 'a place to stay at', gave the birth of the modern word *thānā*, 'a staying-place', 'police station'.(Ghosh, 1973, p. 45) The word *puṭa-bhedana* means a market town, more explicitly 'opening place of parcels of salable commodities'. (Kangle, 1963, p. 70) The word *nigama* means a market town, a market place by nature a permanent settlement – not periodical. (Ghosh, 1973, p. 46) According to Kautilya 'a *sthāniya* was to be located in the midst of eight hundred villages; in times of emergency, when no *durga* was available; a *sthāniya* was to be the place of royal residence with the treasury. Perhaps the *durga* itself was a *sthāniya* with the distinction of being the capital. Besides, Kautilya envisages a *droṇa-mukha* at the centre of four hundred, a *Khārvaṭika* of two hundred and a *saṁgrahaṇa* of ten villages.' (cited in Ghosh, 1973, p. 47) On this context another suffix of the toponyms of the study area, i.e *garh* means rampart.

Durga literally means fort. But according to Kautilya, *durga* was more than a fort 'with the King's palace and his offices at the centre, roads, temples with Brahmanas, merchants, workmen and citizens – almost similar with a capital.(Kangle, 1963, p. 4)

The process of Aryanization was also catalysed the process of urbanization. Before the advent of the Aryan culture in the eastern India, this part of the Indian subcontinent was governed by the non-Aryan tribes like the Asuras, Kirātas and so on. In the 6th century BCE Magadha came to be incorporated into the Aryandom. It was about this time a few sections of Bengal likewise started to be Aryanised. (Bhandarkar, 1931, p. 105) The *Aitereya Brāhmaṇa* mentions, Viśvāmitra cursed his sons 'to live in the borders' of the Aryan country. The relatives of the descendants of Viśvāmitra, the *Brāhmaṇa* lets us know, shaped the more noteworthy greater part of the Dasyus and were differently known as Andhras, Puṇḍras, Sabaras, Puliṇḍas and Mūtibas.(Burges, 1984, p. 338) The disappointment shows from the lines of *Aitereya Āraṇyaka*, (II. 1. 1. 5) which mentions the people of the Vaṇgas, Vagadhas and Cerapādas as *vayāṃsi* or birds. The process of Sramanization, like Aryanization, played an important role to urbanized an area. The process of urbanization through Aryanization did not hampered by Sramanization, because the Buddhist and Jain faiths allowed their followers to perform their earlier practices. The *Kalpasūtra* notices a *śākhā* of the Godāsa-Gaṇa of Jaina monks as *Poṃḍavaddhaṇiyā*, called after Puṇḍravardhana in North Bengal. This is extremely the third *śākhā* of that Gaṇa, the first and the second being named after Koṭivarṣa and Tāmralipti respectively. Of these branches, Koṭivarṣa is same as Bangarh in the South Dinajpur District of West Bengal. There is nothing astonishing in this, in light of the fact that the *Divyāvadāna* discusses Asoka having killed various Nirgrantha (Jaina) religious ascetics at Puṇḍravardhana for having indicated lack of regard to an image of the Buddha. (*Puṇḍavardhananagare nirgranthopāsakena Buddhapratimā nirgranthasya pādayor nipatitā citrāpitā*) (Cowell & Nell, 1888, p. 427)

That the territories of Eastern India were Aryanised, which demonstrated likewise by a statement of the *Baudhāyana-Dharmasūtra*. It initially indicates the extent of Āryāvarta, at that point says the basic outskirt regions, which contained *saṃkīrṇa-yonis* or mixed castes, lastly ends up by naming the flanking regions outside the Āryāvarta not considered admirable for the travels of the Vedic Aryans. As for the limits of Āryāvarta we are informed that it was limited on the east by the Kālaka-

vana, on the south by the Pāriyātra range, on the west by Ādarśana and on the north by the Himālayas. The eastern most boundary of the Āryāvarta, i.e Kālaka-vana has been identified in the present day Jharkhand by Bhandarkar. (Bhandarkar, 1931, pp. 103-116) According to Baudhāyana, thus, there were many areas into the outer fringe of the Āryāvarta (Araṭṭas, Kāraskara, Puṇḍra, Sauvīra, Vaṅga, Kalinga etc.) were not yet been fully Brahmanized and the Aryans were prohibited from travelling to these regions, if otherwise; they should perform purificatory rites like *Punaṣṭoma* or *Sarvapṛṣṭhi*.

It is historically proven that the study area, much before the advent of the Aryans, was governed by the non-Aryan clans like the Asuras. In this regard, we have many references of the tribe who administered this region much before the advent of the Aryan culture. The traces of the sway of the Asura tribes can be found in the present Asuragarh, Barijangarh, Benugarh, Sikligarh, Bangarh and many places of North Bengal.

The style of Aryanization of this part of land can be searched with a critical analysis of the Vedic literatures and folklores of this region. **First**, the words '*mleccha*', '*vayāṃsi*' of the Vedic literature reflect a sense of hatred for the people, whom they were unable to conquer. In Vedic sources both *devas* and *asuras* are described as the descendants of Prajāpati and the *asuras* now and again are approached with deference however inevitably come to speak to malevolent, threatening powers. This basically etymological refinement in any case, between the Aryan and the *mleccha*, isolating the speakers of Indo-Aryan from others, goes up against a social undertone also, with *mleccha* meaning a brute or one outside the pale of Aryan land or culture and ritually sullied. (Thapar, 2013, pp. 130-131)

Secondly, after conquering of some new lands, they superimposed their stories into it and present them as an uncultured, uncivilized, relentless race of human beings, e.g. Paulomas, Kālakeyas, and they must be Aryanized. We have an oral tradition from Sikligarh, Bihar, which is not far away from our study area, about Hiraṇya Kāshyapa and Prahladha, a devotee of Viṣṇu. The story is getting momentum from a pillar of a very ancient time, lay on the site and said to had a lion sculpture surmounted at the top, which is now missing. King Hiraṇya Kāshyapa, it is claimed, lived in the connecting fortress of the pillar of Sikligarh and conveyed his child to be

bound to this column and put to death here, when on the prayer of Prahladha to his divinity Viṣṇu embodied him as Narasimha in the lion-figure surmounting the capital and spared his devotee. (Waddell, 1891, p. 245) The fort of Asuragarh (North Dinajpur district of West Bengal) is associated with the Asura king Kichak, brother-in-law of Rāja Virāṭa, an ally of the Pāṇḍava brothers in the great Mahābhārata war. Bhīma, the third Pāṇḍava, killed Kichack and took possession over it. Bangarh of Bānarāja, another fort of the non-Aryan tribe, also bears the memory of Asura tribes. The legends of Bānarājā have been recorded by Buchanan in his writing on Dinajpur district.(Hamilton, 1833, p. 18) The land of Bangarh was governed by Bāli, an Asura king, who opposed to worship the Aryan god followed by his descendent Bāna. Bāna was a devotee of Lord Śiva and refused to worship Lord Kṛṣna, an incarnation of Lord Viṣnu. Lord Kṛṣna defeated the Bāna king in the place called Narayanpur. The place Kardaha in the vicinity of this fort is said to recognize as the place where Lord Kṛṣna burned 998 hands of the Bāna king. The Kāla dighi and Dhala dighi in Bangarh are said to have been built by the Bāna king in love of his two wives. Here is another legend of *Ushāharaṇa*, i.e. the story of Aniruddhya (grandson of Kṛṣna) and Usha (daughter of Bānarāja). Bānarāja was a great worshiper of Lord Śiva as like as the other Asuras, like Rāvana, the Lankesh. The *Vāyu-Purāṇa* (Chap. XXIII) portrays a record of the twenty-eight incarnations of lord Śiva. The last in this list or twenty-eighth is Lakulīśa. However one incarnation which preceded him is called *daṇḍi* Munīsvara,and incarnated in Koṭivarṣa[4] which has been identified with Bangarh. If about the middle of the third century CE a town in the North Bengal could be so well known as to be the place of an incarnation of Śiva, the conclusion is inevitable that even the fringe part of Bengal was brahmanised at this time. (Bhandarkar, 1931, p. 111) This process can also be witnessed in the case of another great rampart or *garh* of North Bengal, i.e. Mahasthangarh (presently in the Bogra district of Bangladesh). The name 'Mahāsthān', literally translated, means the 'great rampart', which now becomes a place of religious importance for the Muslims. Buchnan Hamilton(1833, p. 18) mentions, the district was traditionally linked with the Hindus. It was under the administration of Paraśurāma, an effective ruler who inhabited at Mahāsthāngarh in Rajshahi and is stated to have been the sixth incarnation of the god Viṣṇu. The locality of Mahāsthān is surrounded by a considerable city and some minor sites. O'Donnell (1875, pp. 183-84) quotes

All around it, however, there are shrines, holy wells and embankments connected with the name of Bhīma, one of the Pandava brothers. The legend runs that at the end of their great contest with the Kauravas, they went into the forests of Kamrup to perform the penitential ceremony, called *banabās,* for a year, at the end of which time Bhīma settled in the country of the King Virāṭa, who ruled in Matsya Desha, or the land of the Fish, which included much of the present Bogra District,……. Bhīma is said to have made a large fortified town south of Mahāsthān, which is marked by great earthworks altogether about eight miles long, and still in places as much as twenty feet high. … These earthworks are called by the people *Bhīma-jangal.* After Bhīma a dynasty of Asuras is said to have reigned in the surrounding country, and to have the shrine at Mahāsthān one of its most holy places.

Surprisingly, this place, in ancient time, was a great centre of Śiva worship. The legend of *Bhīma-jangal*is very much popular in the entire Varēndra region, where such type of earthwork existed. Another legend, in this list, is *Shami Briksha* (*Prosopis cineraria*) of the *VirataParva* of the *Mahābhārata*(IV. 5. 12) is prevailed in Itahar (North Dinajpur, West Bengal). In*Mahābhārata*, it is said that the Pāndavas in incognito, took shield in the royal residence of King Virāṭa, remains of which can be seen at Bairhatta – a village in Harirampur PS (South Dinajpur). It is likewise said that here Kichaka, the brother-in-law of King Virāṭa was executed by Bhīma, the third Pāndava, when the former attempted to set up impermissible relations with Draupadi. A tank at Bairhatta is still called *Kichaka-kuṇḍa*. Dehābandh a region full of mounds, around 15 km from Bairhatta is said to be royal residence of Kichaka. An ancient Shami tree a rare kind species in this area, is observed at the passage of the village, in which Nakula is said to have kept the arms of the Pāndavas before entering the royal residence. A village in the area has been named Panchbhaya (five siblings) after the Pāndavas. Various villages like Karandighi, Karnajora, Karanji in the neighbouring zone remind their connection with the great warrior Karṅa of the Epic fame.

Second Urbanization

As the available archaeological sources suggest, the history of urbanization in North Bengal was started in the second phase. Excavations on several sites and discoveries of some copper plate inscriptions of Bengal highlight some cities of ancient Bengal, like Bangarh, Mahasthangarh, Asuragarh, Chandraketugarh, Dantan,

Panchanagari, Pichli etc. which proves undoubtedly its urban character. Geopolitics played an important role in the rise and growth of these urban sites. Furthermore, geopolitical importance prolonged life of the older cities and sustained the trend of formation of new urban centers. The most interesting feature of the second phase of urbanization is NBPW, (Sing, 2015, p. 260) which appeared in circa 500 BCE, the earlier part of its floruit coinciding with the later part of that of the Painted Grey Ware. (Ghosh, 1973, p. 14) This type of ware has already been found from Chandraketugarh, (Ghosh, 1973, p. 66; Mandal, 1987) Mahasthangarh, (Ahmed, 1981) Bangarh (Goswami, 1949) and so on in Eastern India.

The study area have two central places of the second urbanization period, viz, Bangarh and Panchbibi and four central places of third urbanization period, viz, Kandaran, Amati, Pichli, and Ekdala-Bairhatta.

Now we are going to search the pattern or typology of the urban sites of our study area and should follow the reasons of the rise and growth of them. First in the list is Asuragarh a site of the second phase of urbanization, explicitly of not later than 3rd century BCE. **Asuragarh** (87°51'20.72"E 25°57'31.59"N) is situated at the distance of 12 KM from Dalkhola, West Bengal. (Picture4) As the name suggests, this site is a settlement of the Asuras. It is in vogue in Indian history that the Asuras were very ancient clan of the Indian subcontinent. We get the reference of the Asuras right from the Ṛgveda. The land of northern Bengal is an old address of this Asura clan. (Ghosh, 2016, pp. 121-136) But a brief description of this fort can be find in the writings of the imperial masters. Buchanan (1928, pp. 42-43) writes

> … Matsya, of its sovereign Virat, and of his brother-in-law Kichak. Concerning this last personage some doubts have arisen in my mind, from what I have here seen. In Ronggopur I have mentioned a tribe of the same name, and here I shall also have occasion to recur to the same race, who seem at one time to have been very powerful in Kanpur, Matsya, and Mithila, and who are still very numerous in Nepal. It may be supposed that Virat married a sister of the Kichak Raja, and not of an individual of that name. As however the Kichak are an infidel (Asur) tribe, the Pandit of the mission will not allow that Virat could so far degrade himself. The ruin of the house of Kichak, which has been a very large building, is now shown, and is called Asurgar, or

the house of infidel, to whom however many of the neighbouring Hindus still
offer worship.

W.W. Hunter, in his surveys at the districts of Munghyr and Purniyah observes some striking information about Asuragarh and its antiquity. Erstwhile, Asuragarh was under the administrative control of Kishanganj subdivision of Purnea district. The three huge sites in the Krishnaganj Subdivision (now Kishanganj, Bihar) are Benugarh, Barijangarh, and Asuragarh. Parts of walls and establishments bear witness to the way that forts once existed, however their history is in nebulosity. Rocks and bits of columns with figures and engravings are to be seen lying about the locales. The story locally current with regards to the starting point of these strongholds is that there were five siblings, Benu, Barijan, Asura, Nanha and Kanha, who each constructed a *garh* or rampart, and named it after himself. The fortresses of Nānha and Kānha are brought up, yet are hardly traceable.

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Buchanan Hamilton(1933)expresses that these siblings were for the most part represented to be Domkata Brahmanas. There are tanks inside the fortified areas; and the most preposterous tales are current and believed by the villagers, regarding the tank at Barijan, known as Dak-pakhar. One the rundown extreme of these stories is that the earth of the tank, if taken to some other tank, has the energy of quickly drawing forward the fish it contains. The five siblings are said to have lived in the Vikramaditya period and the fortresses, it is included, were altogether worked in a night. At Thakurganj (Thakurgaon in Bangladesh) and west of Kaliaganj, stones with

inscriptions were uncovered by the Great Trigonometrical Surveyors quite a while prior. They were said to stamp the site of the 'chief residence' of a Rājā Virāṭ, whose domain lay along the river Kūsī, and incorporated the most of land of Rongpur and Dinajpur districts. Rājā Virāt offered safe house to Yudhistira, head of the Pāndavas, and his four siblings, during their fourteen years' exile, after they had been force out of Hastinapur by the Kauravas, 'the other branch of the Lunar Race'. (Hunter, 1877, pp. 267-68)

Here, in Asuragarh, we find an ancient settlement, which spread minimum in four square kms on the bank of the river Mahananda. It rises all on a sudden from the encompassing plain to a stature (earthen rampart) of 10 to 12 feet, and gives off an impression of being the earthen bulwark of a post. It's anything but a characteristic rise, in any case, yet is framed of the trash of numerous structures, the lower assemblies of which are still now and then found under the surface. The general population on the spot detail that somewhere in the range of hundreds of century prior the place was secured with trees; and that no Hindu would dare to live on it, keeping in mind that Asur Deo ought to be irritated. Finally a heavenly Musalman came, and, slaughtering a cow, collected, which his relatives hold. They have cleared and developed the entire place, and appreciate extensive reputation. Hindus come once in a while and influence offering to Asur Deo. The Muhammadans, then again, adore the courageous holy person by whom the rampart was cleared; and around 1500 of the unwavering gather, after the fair of Nekmard, in Dināijpur, to commend his memory.(Hunter, 1877, p. 268)

This rampart (*prākāra*) is encircled by a moat (*parikhā*), clearly visible from the bird's eye view, connected with the nearby river Mahananda. The height of the boundary wall from the moat is 10-15 feet; in some places it is much higher. In spite of the fact that the prolixity of the depictions rise a couple of actualities about the early urban areas – no less than a couple of highlights which they were required to have. The most diligent elementsare the *parikhā* (moat), at least one, and *prākāra* (rampart) with towers and gateways. That the moat and bulwark were the after effect of a similar task, to be specific the piling up of the material scooped out to form the moat, has been perceived at all uncovered site where the bulwark can be recognized, with the exception of those where the safeguards are of brick or masonry. (Field Survey, Asuragarh, 15.03.2012)

Inasmuch, it is a newly discovered site and the archaeological remains are inadequate, notwithstanding where archaeological remains are silent, the topology of the settlement may helpsin conceptualizing the exact arrangement. This mound is now an open field for the land-tiller and almost half portion of it is already vanished.

At the centre of the settlement there is clear sign of a deep water tank (Picture5) called Rajpukur. It is encircled with masonry work. The water tank with its shore measured 90 mtrs in north to south and 120 mtrs from east to west. But now, the interior land of the *garh* brought by local people under cultivation, has destroyed several ancient buildings and antiquities. At many places the plough-share has played havoc among the constructions and rain water helped the exposition and loss of the minor antiquities. The whole area is filled up with architectural devastations scattered here and there. (Field Survey, Asuragarh, 04.02.2016)

Some interesting artefacts like terracotta figurine, potteries, beads, bricks etc. have been collected from the site. (Field Survey, Asuragarh, 05.02.2016) The accessible earthenware of various sorts demonstrate its history of long time. From the site, the most intriguing finding is an unidentified terracotta head (Picture6) of 60 cm long. The face is in good state. The face has two big earrings and the eyes are exceptionally striking. Thick lips and nostrils are additionally conspicuous. The eyebrows are intertwining toward the end; the nose is short and snub. The head is red in colour and sparklingly polished. The second terracotta object is of a Shivalinga (Picture7), little in size, and measuring two inches. It has no additional colour offered to it. The third terracotta figure is another Sivalinga of black colour with a snake (Picture 8). This pottery is sumptuously polished. These terracotta figurines are by all accounts possibly comparable with NBP ware. We don't know how precisely the gleaming surface was accomplished? May be some ferruginous compound was applied to the potteries before they were fired, and that the black colour after effect of firing the pottery in diminishing condition. Upinder Sing's perspective about the reflexive surface of NBP ware is that the gleaming surface was accomplished by applying some material, for example, oil or plant juice, on the potteries after they were fired, while they were still hot. (Sing, 2006, p. 260) Among the potsherds (Picture9) found from the *garh* is of great interest. Two of them are black in colour with glossy surface.

If anyone attempt to examine in the array of these forts will find, each one of them have practically identical kind of archeological features. At first, they are established on the river side; secondly, a spill channel from the canal formed a trench; thirdly, a water tank on the fort included by brick work with pucca bathing ghats; fourthly, the artefacts like monolithic columns, blocks, beads, pottery pieces etc. are of same kind; lastly a legend have been related with every ramparts. In this length, somewhere else of same interest is Sikligarh, 'the chain of fortress', organized at an ariel detachment of 82 km from Asuragarh, revealed a monolithic column surmounted by a lion shaft of Asoka's time (?) and in a split second under this segment was found a gold coin of Indo-Scythic character of 'the lord of rulers Vasudeva the lord'. (Buchanan, 1928; Wadell, 1891; Roy Choudhury, 1963) Surprisingly, this part of land has numerous forts of very ancient time; most of them are connected with the legends of the great Indian ancient literature. As like as, Asuragarh, Barijangarh, and Benugarh have borrow the legend of Bhima, (Buchanan, 1928) the second Pāndava brother and Rāja Virāṭ of the *Mahābhārata* fame and Sikligarh with the legend of the *Narśimha avatāra*. (Wadell, 1891) All of the ramparts might have been originated at the same time and later on most of them were abandoned.
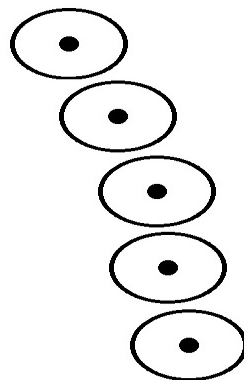

Diagram 4: CPT Pattern of Asuragarh Region

It is difficult to find out the central place in the orbit of these fortified centers of these five Asura siblings. All these forts were built up on a river bank with a distance of 10-11 km. It is hard to conclude any decision about their settlement pattern unless further research is undertaken. Among the five forts three have already been identified, viz, Benugarh, Barijangarh and Asuragarh, but two other forts, i.e. Nanhagarh and Kanhagarh are completely untraceable. But if we make a tentative assumption on the

basis of distance between these forts on the right direction some places like Masirgarh (26°7'25.35"N 87°52'14.04"E), Charaiyya (26°7'17.40"N 87°52'18.07"E) and Bāhādurgaṅj (26°15'48.32"N 87°49'58.61"E) of Bihar state can put under the research scanner. All these sites have an evenly distributed threshold areas.

The second site in the list of urban centers of the period of second urbanization is the famous mound of **Bangarh**, (25°24'47.60"N 88°31'46.62"E) situated on the bank of the river Punarbhaba in the Gangarampur PS of South Dinajpur district. (Picture10) The archaeological pattern of the rampart of Bangarh is almost similar with the fort of Asuragarh. It was an important center of eastern India in respect of politics, economy, art and so on. The mound of Bangarh is encircled by a moat or ditch (*parikhā*) (Picture 10a) on north, east and southern side and the western side is occupied by the river Punarbhava. The high mound or citadel area of the mound is spread in an area of approximately two square km. (Picture 10b)The area of Bangarh is a network of mounds of different sizes. In the centre of the rampart, the highest mound called by the local people as royal palace or *Rājbāri*. On the eastern side of the mound there is a gate and a causeway about 200 ft. long leading across the ditch into the city. About the ditch, Buchananmentions that it has been 'obliterated or destroyed by the Punarbhava'. The first excavation was carried out by K.G. Goswami of Calcutta University in 1940s. Goswami (1948, pp. 4-5) states

> The main mound or the citadel has the appearance of a table land dotted with mounds of different sizes here and there. Of these the mound of the Rajbari or the royal palace is the largest and highest. It occupies almost the central position and is about 15 ft high at places from the surrounding land, which again was about 4 ft high from the border level, and 11 to 12 ft higher than the road level. The main mound is more or less rectangular in shape, but not exactly in orientation with the cardinal points. Its length appears to be from north east to south west and breadth from south east to north-west. The whole Main Mound is now roughly parallel to the present and probably old course of the Punarbhaba. The ancient city of Kativarsha was apparently planned to accord with the course of the river just as modern architects build roads and houses and plan cities by the side of the rivers.

The excavation report reveals three phases of cultural history in the time frame of 'second urbanization', i.e. phase I corresponds from the Maurya to the early Suṅga

period, phase II the heyday of Gupta Empire and phase III is from the later Gupta to post Gupta epoch. The excavation report shows that this site was an important one during Maurya, Suṅga, Kuṣāna and Gupta periods and never been abandoned. It was in the centre of political, economic and cultural activities in the early medieval period also.

Some epigraphs also mentioned the city of Bangarh as an important political centre. The Damodarpur copperplates of the Gupta era mentions Koṭivarṣa as an *adhisṭhāna*. The first epigraphic reference of Koṭivarṣa has been found in the first Damodarpur grant of Kumāra -Gupta I of 124 GE (443-44 CE), (Basak, 1919-20, pp. 113-145) where the Koṭivarṣa , placed as a *viṣaya* (district) of the Puṇḍravardha *bhukti*, mentioned as 'ever-prospering' (*anubahamāna*) district under the administration of *Uparika* Chirātadatta ofPuṇḍravardha *bhukti*. This word *anubahamāna* proves that it was already a fully developed city much before their reign. In the fifth Damodarpur grant of Bhānu(?)-Gupta of 214 GE (533-34), (Basak, 1919-20, pp. 141-45)this city again has been described with more illustration as *kōṭivarshsh-ādhishṭhān-ādhi[karaṇa]sya*. Probable reason behind the increasing importance of the city was during the time of the Gupta, the occupation of Bengal seems to have shifted its political focus from the Bhagirathi basin to the alluvium of Varendra. Stretching from the north, reaches to the flood plain of the Ganges to the alluvial plain of the Nepal foot-hills, Varendra show the growth of Koṭivarṣa as an important administrative city during the Gupta period. (Ghosh, 1990, p. 157)

As the epigraphs suggest, this metro-polis had been surrounded by many towns and catered to the political, cultural and economic needs of these towns. The Damodarpur plates (Basak, 1919-20, pp. 12-32) indicate names of many towns and villages. In the first plate of 124 GE (443-44 CE), a plot of one *kulyavāpa* on the north-west region of Ḍōṅgā was given to Brāhmaṇa Karppatika within the Koṭivarṣa *viṣaya* for *Agnihotrā* rites. The second Damodarpur CPI(Basak, 1919-20, pp. 132-34) of Kumāra -Gupta I of 129 GE (448-49 CE), rendered a plot of five *drōnavapa*s (8 *drōna*s=1 *kulya*) on the west of Airāvata (?) to a brahmana (name undecipherable) in the Koṭivarṣa *viṣaya* to perform *Pañcha-mahāyajña*. In the fourth Damodarpur CPI(Basak, 1919-20, pp. 137-41) of Budha-Gupta of 214 GE (533-34 CE) a plot of eleven *kulyavāpa*s in the Ḍōṅgā-grāma in Himāvacchhikharē was sold to Ṛbhupāla, Guild President of the town of Koṭivarṣa for building of two temples (four*kulyavāpa*s

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for Kōkāmukha-svāmin and seven *kulyavāpa*s for Śvētavarāha-svāmin) with two store rooms and other religious rites. In the fifth Damodarpur CPI (Basak, 1919-20, pp. 141-45)of Bhānu-Gupta of 214 GE (533-34 CE) five *kulyavāpa*s of land was sold to Amṛitadatta, a noble man from Ayōdhyā. Two *kulyavāpa*s in both Svachchhandapāṭaka and Lavaṅgasikā, one *kulyavāpa* in Sātuvanāśramaka, one *kulyavāpa* to the north of Pancha-kulyavāpa and the east of Jambunadi[5] and one *kulyavāpa* to the east of Paraspāṭikā in Pūraṇavṛīndakahari. Unfortunately, the present locations of most of the toponyms of these inscriptions have not yet been found.

The plot Ḍōṅgā of plate #1, probably, has been repeated in the plate #4 with an addition of suffix *grāma* (Ḍōṅgā-grāma in Himavacchhikhare). The temple of Kōkāmukha-svāmin of Ḍōṅgā-grāma in Himavacchhikhare (lit. summit of the Himālaya) is placed by the scholars in the Himālayan region in Nepal and identified with Vārāhakshetra on the confluence of the Kokā and Kauśikī. (Sinha, 1977, p. 43) In this case, it would be quite interesting to mention that the applicant of the plate #4 was Ṛbhupāla, Guild President (*nagara-śrēshṭhin*). Then the question may arise, why should he buy any plot to build two temples in such a distance from his jurisdiction? In the plate #5, five *kulyavāpa*s of land was allotted for the repairing workof these two temples. What was the legitimate reason for such type of grant? Whereas, we find a number of villages in the vicinity of Bangarh having names like Dānga, Dāngi, Dōngi etc. with ancient relics. The word *Himavachhikhare*, during that time, might be used as a metaphor for a high mound of the area. In spite of such debate, one conclusion can be done, in the matter of Ḍōṅgā, that it was an important urban site of Koṭivarṣa *viṣaya*[6] with an immense religious value. In the plate #2, the plot was on the west of Airāvata (?) with *haṭṭa* and *pānaka*. This type of evidence is rare in North Bengal where a plot of a market place (*haṭṭa*) has been granted. The mention of *haṭṭa* is a clear evidence of that the place Airāvata (?) was definitely an urban centre. Any market place (*haṭṭa*) which might be generating or growing is a firm indication of an emerging urbanization of a settlement. (Niyogi, 1962, p. 120) The word *pānaka*, Basak says, means drinking-places having Persian Wheels (*arahaṭṭa*?). (Basak, 1919-20, p. 134) In the Sanskrit lexicons the word *pānaka* means 'drink' or 'beverage'. Plate #5 is quite different from the others. It gives five *kulyavāpa*s of land from five different places, which indicates the scarcity of available land due to population density. Similar type of instance we can find in the Paharpur grant of 159 GE, where

one *kulyavāpa* and four *drōṇavapa*s of land were purchased from four different villages. (Dixshit, 1929-30, pp. 59-64)

The analysis of epigraphs of the Gupta emperors has revealed the fact that this area gained much importance with the passage of time. The growing influence of the Koṭivarṣa *viṣaya* in the Gupta administration can be assumed from the use of titles in these Damodarpur grants. The plate #1, #2 and #4 mentioned the Koṭivarṣa with *anubahamāna* while the plate #5 mentioned with a grandiloquent title of *Kōṭivarshsh-ādhishṭhānādhi[karaṇa]sya*. The plate #4 described the *bhuktipati* Jayadatta as the *Uparika-mahārāja,* but in plate #1 and #2 the *bhuktipati* Chiratadatta is mentioned as the *Uparika* only. In the fifth plate, this post was given to a *rajputra* (king's son) namely Dēvabhaṭṭaraka.

Another important *viṣaya,* on the neighbourhood of Koṭivarṣa, is Paňchanagarī*viṣaya*, which was a newly formed district at the time, to cater the growing density in population of the then Koṭivarṣa. The **Panchbibi** (25°11'11.56"N 89° 1'13.25"E) is identified as the present location of the core urban area of the then Paňchanagarī *viṣaya.* The Baigrama CPI(Basak, 1931-32, pp. 78-83) of Kumar-Gupta I of 128 GE (447-48 CE)mentions, Kulavṛiddhi, *Kumārāmātya* of Paňchanagarī *viṣaya,* sold three*kulyavāpa*sand two *drōnavapa*sof land to two Brāhmaṇa, Bhōyila and Bhāskara two sons of Śivanandin, for the repairing work of the temple of Gōvindasvāmin built by their father in the region of Trivṛita, Śrīgōhālī. Interestingly, the plate #3 of Damodarpur is quite different from the rest of the four plates. Here, the standard prevalent rate of the land is two *kulyavāpa*s, which was the rate of Paňchanagarī *viṣaya*, while the standard prevalent rate for land in Koṭivarṣa *viṣaya* is three *dināra*s per *kulyavāpa*s. Second, the process of measuring land is same in these two grants (Baigram grant and plate #3 of Damodarpur), i.e. 'measuring 8x9 reeds'. Third, the mention of Vāyi-grāma as a boundary of the sold land is indicating the fact that the plate #3 is a subject of this *viṣaya*. Palāśavṛindaka, as Basak suggested, is the head quarter of this *viṣaya*(Basak, 1919-20, p. 114.) The place name (*Palāśa+vṛinda+ka*), the suffix -*ka* and -*vṛinda* revealed of the fact that it is 'doubled in conjuncture'. So, two or more places have been emerged into a one urban unit in that place. Chaṇḍa-grāma and Vāyi-grāma, two other toponyms of the plate, was probably important urban centers. The description of Chaṇḍa-grāma and its citizens in

the grant make this place as an important one.[7]It is clear, from the epigraphic records that the Vāyi-grāma continued as a significant centre of human activity at least for 35 years, from Kumāra-gupta 1 to Budha-gupta's reign. The place of Paňchanagarī, itself, was another urban centre in this region. As the name suggests, it is a compilation of five towns into one unit, like a modern day metropolis. It was situated on the eastern side of Koṭivarsa *viṣaya*.

Next in this list of our study area, the **Kuddalākhata***viṣaya*,[8] is full of urban sites. The tentative location of this *visaya* was on the south of the Koṭivarṣa *viṣaya*, on the south-west of Paňchanagarī *viṣaya* and on the east of Āmraṣaṇḍika *viṣaya*. The toponyms, as reflected from the Mahatī-Raktamālā plate (Griffiths, 2015, p.15-38) of Budha-Gupta of 159 GE (478 CE)are Mahatī-Raktamālā, Khuḍḍī- Raktamālā, Govardhanaka, Dugdhotikā and Madhyamaṣaṇḍika. The plate was issued from the *agrahāra* of Mahatī-Raktamālā, which can be regarded as the urban or semi-urban centre of the *viṣaya* on the basis of its importance as depicted in the plate and also for Brāhmaṇa settlement. The demand of its urban identity becomes stronger with the presence of the *adhikarana* (*adhikaranaň*) of the *kumārāmātya* Yūthapati. The name of the counter part of this site, i.e, Khuḍḍī- Raktamālikā (*Khuḍḍī* means small) proves that is was quite a large settlement. The next site, Govardhanaka, from where two *kulyavāpa*s of plot was donated to the Brāhmaṇas by this grant, have religious importance. The memorial pillars with surmounted sculpture are known as *govardhana* or *govardhandhvaja*. (Chattopadhyaya, 2012, p. 125) This place might have some kind of theory or story behind its name. Next site is Dugdhotikā; the residing Brāhmaṇas of this village get the grant might be an urban place. It is unfortunate that the current locations of this plate have not been found yet.

If we go through the names or the personalities, mentioned in these grants, it will give us an idea of some powerful personalities and the powerful families. First in the list is the surname of *datta*. Chirātadatta of the plate #1 and Plate #2, Brahmadatta of plate #3 and Jayadatta of plate #4, the *uparika/uparika mahārāja*s of Pundravardhana suggest that they are 'probably belonged to the same family'. (Sharma, 2013, p. 16) Out of three record keepers of plate #1 and plate #2, mentioned two names having the same suffix of *datta*, i.e. Ṛsidatta and Vibhudatta. Not only in Koṭivarṣa but also in the Baigrama grant of Paňchanagarī *viṣaya* one of the record

keepers (*Pustapāla*) is Durgādatta. Furthermore, the *mahāmātra* of the Mahatī-Raktamālā plate of Budha-Gupta is Suvarcasadatta. Though we have not enough knowledge to draw any conclusion, but, we have a list of members of powerful Pāla family/s (?) from these grants. The Guild President (*nagara-śrēshthin*) Dhṛtipāla of plate #1 and plate #2, Ṛbhupāla, in plate #3, who became so powerful in polity and economy that he managed the central government through the local government of Kōṭivarṣa to get eleven *kulyavāpa*s of land to erect two temples of Kōkāmukha-svāmin and Śvētavarāha-svāmin by spending thirty three *dināra*s for acquiring religious merit. The genealogy of this Pāla family will be more certain after mentioning the name of the Guild President of plate #4 of Damodarpur i.e. Aryya Ṛbhupāla. The list of the Pāla name is quite lengthy. The Chief Scribes of these grants are Sāmbapāla, plate #1 and plate #2, Viprapāla, plate #4 and Skandapāla, plate #5. The plate #3 is not mentioned any local body, but the grant is received from the hand of three persons and one of them is Sthāya(ṇa?)pāla.

The Baigrama inscription demonstrates a nearer individual connection between a *viṣayapati* (*kumārāmātya*) Kulavṛiddhi in Bengal and the Gupta Emperor Kumāra Gupta I, and it is recommended that the *kumārāmātya* of Paňchanagarī, who is portrayed as *bhaṭṭāraka-pād-ānudhyātaḥ* (devoted to the feet of the ruler), was installed directly by Kumāra Gupta I. In any case, his three prior Bengal inscriptions he is portrayed as *parama-daivata, parama-bhaṭṭāraka, mahārājādhirāja prithvīpatī*. This is likewise found in two different inscriptions in which the Gupta ruler Budha Gupta is depicted in exactly similar terms. Hence the critical section suggests that the *kumārāmātya* of Paňchnagarī was devoted to his immediate lord who may have been the leader of the Puṇḍravardhana *bhukti*. (Sharma, 2013, p. 14) The situation of the *kumārāmātya* Kulavṛiddhi here must be precisely the same as that of the *kumārāmātya* Vētravarmana of Koṭivarṣa appointed to his post by the *uparika* Chirātadatta, who himself appreciated the favour of the supreme ruler Kumāra-gupta I, as said in plate #1 and #2 of Damodarpur grants separately. Kulavṛddhi enjoyed similar power in Paňchnagarī *viṣaya* as like as Chirātadatta enjoyed power in Koṭivarṣa. The awarded grant is so powerful that, it is mentioned in the grant that can also prove its close tie with the king. (Basak, 1931-32, p. 83)

The Mahatī-Raktamālā plate, like Baigrama plate, mentions *kumārāmātya* of Kuddālakhāta as *parama-bhaṭṭāraka-pād-ānuddhyātaḥ* (devoted to the feet of the ruler) was also directly appointed by Budha-Gupta, who is designated as *paramabhaṭṭāraka* and *paramadeva*. Despite the absence of explicit mention of the name Budha-Gupta, this king's role in the present inscription is more prominent than that of any king in any other Gupta-period inscription of Puṇḍravardhana, none of which are concerned with direct royal intervention in local affairs. The present inscription for the first time provides evidence of a royal land grant in the area, and for the first time it gives an impression of how the interests of individual citizens could become caught between policies of local and central administration. (Griffiths, 2015, pp. 16-27) Here, in this grant, for the first time found from this region, a secondary seal of the *kumārāmātya* Yūthapati ([yū](tha)pate[ḥ]) (Griffiths, 2015, p. 19) has been used along with the royal seal. Use of secondary seal found in the Kotalipada plate, the Tripperah plate of Lokanātha, the Kailan plate of Śrīdhāraṇa Rāta, the Kalapur plate of Maruṇḍanātha and Mastakaśvabhra copper-plate of Pradyumnabandhu.

One of the main weaknesses of constructing early history of the area is paucity of coins. The excavations of Bangarh have unearthed a small quantity of coins. Goswami (1948, pp. 30-31) mentions

> …two varieties of coins, viz, punch-marked and cast, have been found at Bangarh, both coming from a lower level (about 8½ to 21 ft.). The punch-marked coins are generally of silver and the cast coins are of copper. Of the former square, oblong, hexagonal and round shapes are found while of the latter the shape is more or less square and oblong. At Bangarh, Tr. 5 has brought out almost all the coins except one punch-marked silver coin of irregular shape which was found in Tr. 8 at 8.90 ft. below the datum line. Majority of the coins come from a level 14 ft. to 21 ft. (B.D.L.) and they were scattered over a wide area. So it may be presumed that these coins were in currency at the time to which this level would be attributed. Punch-marked and cast coin are usually believed to be the currency of the Maurya and Sunga periods. From our study of the other antiquities of this level, we came to the conclusion that this level should be attributed to the Sunga period. The evidence of coins also confirms this to a great extent.

It is interesting to note that a copper object (No. 1432) of almost square shape bears three symbols one of which is a complete wheel and the other, part of the wheel (broken) and the third is like. [PL. XXIV (a) 16] Apparently it looks like a coin and is in a fragmentary condition. The punch marks are very deep. It was discovered in Tr. 5, 9.26ft. (B.D.L.) and was probably used as a seal.

Thus, after the discussion of the urban sites of the study area it can be concluded that the study area had an urban character of its own from very ancient time. The discovery of the Neolithic tools from the excavations at Bangarh indicates its antiquity far behind. The area had an equal participation in the second phase of urbanization of India by the rise of such number of urban sites like Asuragarh, Bangarh and Mahasthangarh. The use of iron-ore technology did not come from the west, it was well known to the people of eastern India. A heuristic relation can be found among three major urban sites of North Bengal, viz, about the Mahasthangarh, (Picture11) Asuragarh and Bangarh, of that time. All of these sites were well connected through the network of rivers of the area. In all the *garh* the use of rivers for both communication and security purposes were same. Mahasthangarh is on the bank of the river Karatoya, Koṭivarṣa on the Punarbhava and Asuragarh on the Mahananda. However, with the passage of time the rivers lost their mighty glory. But during their heyday, the forts were surrounded by spill channels from the rivers. The traces of the spill channels are very clear till today. Another point is that, the distance between these three sites are quite reasonable. The distance (as the crow flies) between Asuragarh to Bangarh is 90 mile, while 94 mile between Bangarh to Mahasthangarh. (Picture 12) It is unfortunate that we have not yet find any inscriptions or seals from Asuragarh, but on the basis of antiquities found in surface exploration and geography, a primary assumption can be made that Asuragarh is also a Mauryan site and contemporary of Bangarh and Mahasthangarh.

Map 4: <u>Mauryan sites.</u>
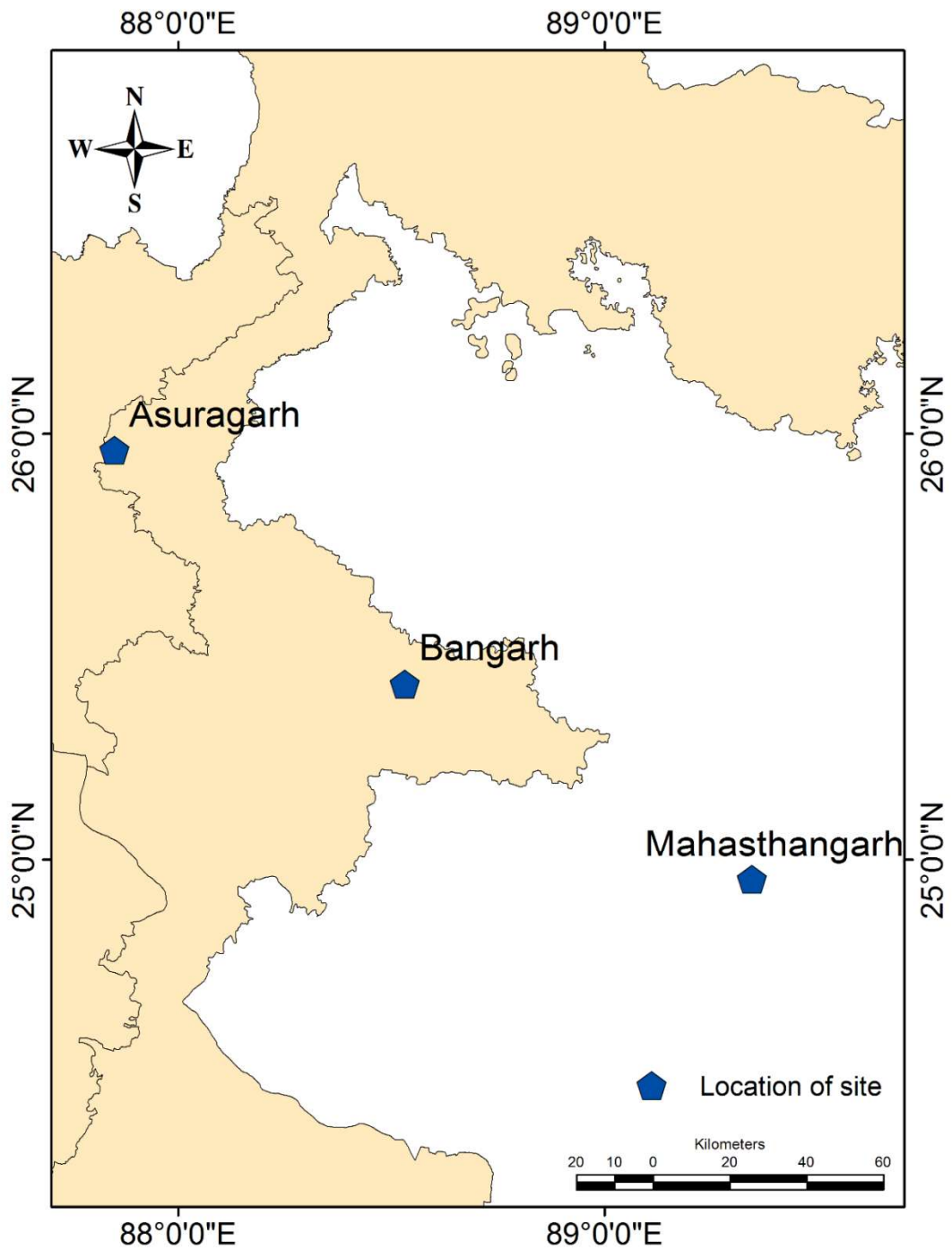
The word *anubahamāna* (ever–prospering) in the Damodarpur copper plate proves that the head quarter of Koṭivarṣa, i.e. Bangarh was a developed city much before the Gupta regime. From the archaeological explorations, it has already been established that this site was well developed during the Mauryas and Suṅgas. The

fourth stratum, i.e., Maurya-Suṅga period, of Bangarh shows distinct sign of the prosperous condition of the city. (Goswami, 1948, p. 11) If we have a close look at the Allahabad pillar inscription (Fleet, 1888, pp. 1-17) will find that North Bengal was core area for the Guptas. So the city of Koṭivarṣa was a central place for long time to the people of this area. The heyday of this site was possibly in the Gupta period. But the abstract excavation report reveals stark contrast of the fact.

> "The buildings of this stratum (III) can be supposed to belong to the Gupta age in consideration of the associated objects. The structural evidence so far discovered does not vouch for a high class architecture at this time in these parts of the site. So far as the construction is concerned the buildings of the fourth (Maurya and Sunga age) and the second (Pala) strata are far superior to those of the first (Turko-Afgan period) and the third (Gupta)."(Goswami, 1948, 35)

The weakness of the excavation report of Bangarh is that, it was done only on some places of the mound. So we have to wait for a full scale excavation to conclude the debate. During Gupta period, as the facts come out from inscriptions, this site gained much political power and its jurisdiction was much wider. This place also had immense religious value because of so many temples erected and also repaired the older temples. Bangarh was famous for its temples, as quoted by Sandhyakarnandi in the *Rāmacaritam*. (III, 9)

Bramha kulodbhavām skandanagareṇa murchchhitāmitapachiti (m)
Tairati gurutpa(lā)vāsair asvapnair-bhari(ta) śoṇitapurāṁcha.

-(Varendrī) which was the birth place of Brāhmaṇa families, which flourish on account of its town Skanda-nagara, and (as such) was held in high esteem and which contained in it the city of Śoṇitapura crowded by the (images of) Gods, installed in temples, (which looked quite gay) with lotuses of very large sizes. Goswami (1948, p.35) reported''The extensive area covered by the floor probably marks the site of a large quadrangle by the side of some temple where people perhaps used to assemble for the purpose of religious, social or commercial activities.'' Some Kuṣāna artefacts, viz, a female figure with nimbus around along with two female figurines on both side and some other terracotta found which show characteristics of Kuṣāna period but no building of that time is found yet. (Goswami, 1948, p. 37) The copper coin from Bangsihari bears on the obverse a standing figure of the king, whose left hand is holding the sword that hangs down from his waist and making an offering by his right hand on an altar near which another trident with *damaroo* is posted. The attire is also same as that of

Māldācoin. *Nandipada* like symbol is visible under the kings left arm. A legend along the edge of the coin in Kharashthi script says 'Maharajes Rajadhiraj Sarvalog Eswares Mahasivares Bhima Kadfises' and the Greek legend 'Basileus Basileuon Soter Megas Ooema Kadphises' means 'king of kings Vima Kadphises the great savior.' (Adhikary, 2013, pp. 151-64) As we have already mentioned that the study area is well blessed by rivers and water bodies. These rivers played a key role in the development of the cities of North Bengal. As like Ganges in the development of the cities of North India, Punarbhaba did the same in the development of Bangarh in respect of irrigation as well as trade network. The other nearby rivers, viz, Tangan, Atrai and Jamuna might also have contributed in the development of Bangarh as an important trading center between Northern India and Eastern India in relation with the river system. This city was connected with Gangatic valley as well as the North Indian culture. Because the excavations revealed punch marked coins, NBP ware, terracotta of Suṅga and Kuṣāna periods, beads etc, which is typical sign of cultural influence of North India. This theory is vouchsafed by the plate #5 of Damodarpur plates, where Amṛitadēva, a noble man (*kulaputra*) from Ayōdhyā, approached the local Government of Koṭivarṣa *viṣaya*.(Basak, 1919-20, p. 115) Bangarh city might have some inland trade routes among its depending towns, villages and hamlets.

Another central place, i.e., Palāśavṛindaka of Pañchanagarī*viṣaya* was under political, administrative, economic sway of the Koṭivarṣa. The Pañchanagarī*viṣaya* had at least two metropolises, i.e., Palāśavṛindaka and Pañchanagarī, and four towns, Vāyi-grāma, Chanda grāma, Trivṛita and Śrīgōhālī. These towns were probably connected with each other through inland routes and with the metropolises also.

Third Urbanization

In the third urbanization period, Northern Bengal witnessed the rise of many urban centers as well as metropolises. Most of the urban sites of the second urbanization period continued their development in this period also. Here, for the better understanding of the timeframe of these two phases, end of mighty Gupta Empire is taken as the watershed between these phases. So, in this part of the dissertation, the process of urbanization between the end of the Gupta power and to the rise of the Turko-Afgan rulers, is treated as the period of third urbanization.

The Mastakaśvabhra copper-plate of Pradyumnabandhu, a recent discovery added in the list of the inscriptions found from north Bengal, is a new addition in research of the history of north Bengal. The grant bears primary and secondary seals of which the former one mentions '*ghoṇādvīpakaviṣaye adhikaraṇasya*', i.e. was issued from the *adhikaraṇa* (council) of Ghoṇādvīpaka *viṣaya* and the secondary seal is undecipherable but Griffiths (2015, p. 29) makes a hypothetical reading of it as *pradyumnabandhoḥ*. The village of Mastakaśvabhra, along with its citron grove is given to the Brāhmaṇa Jayadeva through the hand of *mahāpratīhāra* Avadhuta after it has been purchased from the Brāhmaṇas by *mahāpratīhāra* Avadhūta.

The inscription has revealed names of toponyms and water bodies of this time. The grant was issued from the Ghoṇādvīpaka district council (*ghoṇādvīpaka viṣaya adhikaraṇasya*), which has been mentioned twice in the primary seal and in the first line of the plate as a *viṣaya* of Puṇḍravardhana *bhukti*. (*puṇḍravardhanabhuktau vyavaharati tatsamvaddhaghoṇadvipaka-viṣaye*). Its importance can be assumed from the fact that, 'it had been obtained as fief' (Griffiths, 2015, p. 31) by the *mahāpratīhāra* Avadhūta. The plate mentions names of twenty-fourbrāhmaṇas along with their places. (Table 2) But some of them, the most influential personalities (*mahāmahattarā*) Ādityadeva, Jayadeva and Śivabhadra, are not mentioned with their place. Probably they belong to this *adhikaraṇa* and for that reason their native places in not mentioned in the grant. The *mahāmahattarā* Jayadeva is the receiver of the plot of Mastakaśvabhra *grāma* of the grant.

Next important urban centre is the Mastakaśvabhra *grāma*, which has been donated along with its citron-grove. The boundaries of the donated Mastakaśvabhra *grāma* are, (*yatra*) in the East and Northern side is the river Trighaṭṭikā and cremation ground, in the Western side the Optra (?) canal, in the Southern side the Śṛṅgāṭaka ('Crossroad') pond and the Bṛhacchaṅkajoṭā ('Great-Conch-Jota') and the rest by the stream near the silk cotton tree of Kapalati. (Line 16-18). The present location of these places and water bodies not yet identified. An attempt to search for their present location can be done in the present Malda district or its vicinity. Their names are similar with the geography, toponyms and water bodies of the Khālimpur copper-plate of Dharmapāla. Griffiths suggests the present locations can be found in the places of the east of few miles of the citadel of Gaur (Malda). (Griffiths, 2015, p. 31) The important of these places will be discussed below. Other toponyms are hamlets

(*pāṭakas*) Varṣagrima (?), Bhilota and *grāma* Ṣaṇḍadvipa, Pravaradvipa, Navadevakula, Pippalivanikā, Pāttravāṭa, Śaṅkarapallika, Śivanagara, Khātaka, Varahakoṭṭaka, khataka, Ardrala, Audumvarika, Kapalati.

According to Griffiths, the name of the ruler *ma(hā)rājādhirā* 'Pradyumna' is a synonym of Kṛṣṇa and suffix 'bandhu' means a friend/associate of him, (Griffith, 2015, p. 32) which may be a result of growing popularity of lord Kṛṣṇa in this region, started from the rivalry between Śaiva and Vaisnva forces in Bangarh. Noteworthy to mention here, Vijayasena, the Sena king, established a temple of Pradyumneśvara at the Varendrī region in the eleventh century CE. (Majumdar, 1929, pp. 42-56; Kielhorn, 1892, pp. 305-15) Here the image of Pradyumneśwara is a combine image of lord Viṣṇu and Śiva. (Bhattacharya, 1987, pp. 297-307) The Mastakaśvabhra grant was issued in the fifth year of his *vijayādhirājya*(Sircar, 1966, p. 7) mentions his victory and declaration of independence over a certain power (may be over the weak Gupta power). All of the above, the use of title *mahārājādhirā*, clearly mentions him as the suzerain of great kings. In this context, we should remember that the might of the Gupta Empire was faded or completely demolished from this region after 544 CE. We have some clear indications of that this was probably a newly established empire under the stewardship of Pradyumnabandhu with the help of others. **First**, the grant was issued just after five year of the victory (*vvijayādhirājyasamvatsar[e] pañcama āśvayujamāsasya dvāviṁśatime divase*) of the suzerain of great kings Śrī Pradyumnabandhu. **Second**, the plots of old grants have been purchased from many Brāhmaṇas with the help of state machinery, which is a probable an indication of anti-incumbency sentiments of the people of this region. **Third**, as we know, this region was core centre of the Gupta Empire. So, it was not possible for two powers to rule at the same place. The growing influence of the personalities of *datta* surname from the Gupta plates have mentioned heretofore. Their importance was still remaining during the time of Pradyumnabandhu. Only three members (*viṣayādhikaraṇika*) of the district council (*viṣayādhikaraṇa*) of Ghoṇādvīpaka *viṣaya* is mentioned in the plate and they had *datta* surname, i.e. Śambhudatta, Kṛṣṇadatta and Paurudatta. Probably the scribe Śambhudatta and the record keeper (*pustapāla*) Kṛṣṇadatta is same of the district councilors of same name. Another scribe of this plate has surname of *datta*, i.e. Naradatta. The dutta family or personalities might have played an effective role in the rise of Pradyumnabandhu. Date of this plate in impossible to define until more

discoveries. Griffiths, after analysingpalaeographic perspective, placed its date later than 650 CE. (Griffiths, 2015, 33) But, if the indications are correct then this inscription should surely be placed later than 550 CE.

Next powerful personality is the great chamberlain **Avadhūta**, his designation of *mahāpratīhāra* is a clear indication of the rise of infeudatory ('fief') in this region. His power and responsibility can be seen from the lines 13-14 of the grant, where he is the responsible person for the purchase and accumulation of the lands from the brāhmaṇas, who might get lands from earlier grants. The unique feature of this grant is, here twenty-four brāhmaṇas along with the district councillors (*viṣayaadhikaraṇikaṇikas*) and the scribes (*kaṇikas*) 'after having spoken together' considered that the lands, which have been given by previous land grants, can be sale and 'once again' should be made an 'object of donation'. Because the land rendered no benefits whatsoever to the king as long as it is lying fallow.' It has also been informed by the plate that forty-five *kārṣāpaṇa*s additional taxes (*uparikara*) will be collected annually. The additional income from the land should be 'divided and borne' by the Brāhmaṇas through the 'humble act' of the great chamberlain Avadhūta. (Griffiths, 2015)Though the sources of additional income are not mentioned in the grant, but while we analyse the donated land and its boundary, some hypothetical facts will arise. Additional taxes or income of the brāhmaṇas may be collected from the water ferries, water resources (like fish, conch shell etc.) of the streams, rivers, cannels and roads of village Mastakaśvabhra. Ghoṇādvīpaka played the character of central place in the development of this urban set up. Importance of the Mastakaśvabhra justified its urban character and can be characterized as town. The grant mentions the means of transportation. So, all the mentioned places of this inscription were well connected with each other by roads and water ferries.

Pichli (25°3'29.46"N 88°2'53.97"E), a town situated on the banks of the river Kalindi 12 km east of English Bazar, is in fact the most established site of the city of ancient Gauḍa. It was well developed by the rich resources of the river Mahananda–Phulahar-Kalindi system and the Chhota Bhagirathi–Umri Nala–Pagla system. The archaeological remains of Pichli are scattered over a huge zone and incorporate the towns of Amriti, Fulbaria, Pichli, Gangarampur and so on disclosure of relics datable to the later Gupta period lead us to hold that sifting of the Ganga toward the south bit by bit caused the decay of the decline of the antiquated town. Two Buddha images

(now in the Malda District Museum) of later Gupta period were recovered from Pichli. (Bhattacharyya, 1982, number BGB1 and BGB2) It can be identified as the site of ancient Gauḍa. (Chakrabarty, 1982, p. 52) This place is named as *KānthālI*.The word *Kānthāl* means possibly a forested high land or a site with abandoned ancient buildings. We find two places with *Kāthāl* suffix in the close proximity, viz, *PichhlīKānthāl* and *ĀmātiKānthāl*. Though *Kāthāl* in Bengali means jackfruit but here it cannot be taken as jackfruit. But to the local people of Pichli called *Kānthāl*because of its archaeological artefacts. Another village named Nahatta in the vicinity of Pichli might get her name from a derived form of Navahaṭṭa (New market place). Amid the Pāla period, Pichli was perhaps the most overcrowded part of the city and toward the end of the Pāla rule and the start of the Sena's lead the town area sifted to the zone immediate south, which is known to the local people as Ballalbati. Legend says that Ballalbati was the residence of Ballāla Sena, the Sena king. With the progression of time, it shifted to the territories further south referred to the Turko-Afgan conquerors as Lucknowty or Lakṣmaṇāvatī. At last in the late sixteenth century the city was forsaken by the Mughals. Then a little town named Tāndā came up on the shores of the Ganga around ten km toward the south which filled in as the capital of the Karrānī tradition, the last line of the Turko-Afgan leaders of Bengal. (Chakrabarty, 1982, pp. 257, 265) The excavations revealed five cultural phases between seventh and nineteenth centuries. (Panja, Nag and Bandyopadhyay, 2005, p. 91)

In this examination, we would limit our investigation to Pichli and the urban areas in its neighbourhood i.e. the stretch of land between Pichli proper on the confluence of the Mahananda and the Kalindi and Amriti-Fulbaria in the east. The Kalindi, a tributary of the river Mahananda was known even in the eleventh century. Sandhyākaranandi (*Rāmacaritam* IV, 27) informed us about a pitched battle on the shores of the stream by Madanapāla against his adversaries who had potentially progressed on the city of Gauḍa strategically situated on the Kalindi.

Two Dhyānī Buddha images, dated ninth and tenth century respectively housed in the Malda Museum are noteworthy. A four-sided column with four ornamented specialties on four niches, each demonstrating a sitting picture curved within it is unparalleled of its kind. The sand stone column, potentially a compositional section is impressively destroyed. This object, recouped from Fulbaria has some important features. The column being settled to the wall of the house of a

villager who recuperated it from the bed of the river it is not conceivable to inspect it from each of the four sides. (Bhattachariyya, 2008)

Kandaran(25°16'59.68"N 87°59'50.35"E) is another urban site of the study area located at Shamsi, Malda. While commenting on the 'division of Kharwa', Francis Buchanan Hamilton states 'the whole is reckoned in Matsya, and it is said belonged to Kichak, the brother-in-law of Virat'. (Hamilton, 1928, p. 90) Modern historian like D. K. Chakrabarty, (Chakrabarti, 2001, pp. 73-74) M. S. Bhattachariya (Bhattacharyya, 1995, pp. 64-69) already shed some lights on this site with an antiquity of not later than the Kuṣāna period. It has chain of large and small mounds with full of archaeological remains, which already faced much destructions by the construction of railway line, modern buildings and agricultural activities. The mounds are Kandaran, Sambhunagar, Caitanpati, Anandaganj, Govindapur, Gourhaṇḍa, Vangapal, Damanviti, Virasthali, Dakshinsahar and Sanjib. Kandaran is the southernmost *mouzā* of the enormous site while the *mouzā* of Sanjib forms its northernmost tip. The distance between Kandaran and Sanjib is over ten km. Rajanikanta Chakrabarty in his celebrated work the *Gouder Itihas* mentions, Kandaran and its neighbouring settlements like Gourhaṇḍa, Alihanda, Vandar, Kusidha, Bhaluka etc. once formed part of the ancient kingdom of Kauśikī Kachcha and were eventually incorporated into the larger kingdom of Puṇḍravardhana. The ruins of Kandaran gave him the impression that a large Buddhist *stūpa* lay buried in its mounds. (Chakrabarty, 1982, p. 32) In the list of ancient monuments and settlement sites of Varendrī prepared by the Varendra Research Society, Kandaran figures owing to its mounds. (Maitreya, 1949)

An investigation of this immense settlement site was taken up for the first time by the Malda Museum in 1981. The site has in excess of twelve mounds. Four of these are very huge, each having a height of in excess of 50 ft. At the highest point of a large mound, somewhat away toward the west of the Samsi rail station, a bungalow was worked by the railroad experts around a couple of decades back while another mound toward the north of the bungalow mound was picked as the site for the Samsi Degree College. Going further north we run over another mound on which a little temple has been raised. The fourth extensive mound named as the Daksinsahar mound by the investigation group after the *mouzā* of Dakṣinsahar. These mounds are arranged on the bank of a dead channel of the stream Mahananda, locally known as

Mara-mahananda. In Major Rennel's guide this channel figures as the primary channel of the Mahananda. Potsherds strewn everywhere throughout the surface of the mounds persuades that the region was once thickly populated. In fact, antiquated relics can be followed on the surface of the mounds which are discovered scattered over the length and expansiveness of this wide tract. From the college mound sections of an expansive urn have been recouped. The thickness of the sections proposes its pre-established root. Couple of wonderfully cast terracotta male heads has been found. The terracotta male head was recouped from 15 feet under the mound. Each of these, around 8 cms long, has an alluring hairdo with a raised best bunch befitting an austere. These articles have a pointed lower part, which recommends that the heads were balanced with middles independently arranged. It has been likely recommended that these terracotta objects have a place with the second or third century CE. (Bhattacharyya, 1995, 64-65)(Picture3)

A black basalt image was discovered from a spot close to the bungalow mound in 1982. Near the bungalow mound was unearthed a beautifully carved sandstone image of Garura, the vehicle of Viṣṇu. (Bhattacharyya, 1995, 67) The pedestal of the image has four holes on its edge which suggest that this was placed on a pillar possibly in front of a lord Viṣṇu in the temples of the God. The Vaiṣṇavas of India followed the ancient custom of erection of pillars in honour of lord Viṣṇu temple. The beautiful carving, high relief and sparse decoration suggest that the image in question is the product of a period when the plastic art of Bengal had reached its apex. Other findings include a slab made of black stone containing a figure (measuring 20 cms x 36 cms) of a four armed figure of Ganeśa (*AIS*, RGN-3) carved on it, fragment (56 cms x 36 cms) bearing the image of Umā Maheśvara (*AIS*, RUMH-7), a Viṣṇu image measuring 30 x 15 cms. (*AIS*, RVS-42) of black stone, a *dvāra pāla*, an arch made of black stone measuring 90 cms x 60 cms, a Bṛhaspati image (*AIS*, RBR-1) and so on. It can be assumed that the mounds of Kandaran-Sanjib have underneath of their surface the relics of the early centuries of the first millennium CE.

An effort was made by the department of history, North Bengal University, under the supervision of Prof. Mandira Bhattacharya to discover and surveyed some sites in the Malda district in 1999 CE. In this report Bhattacharya made a surface collection in the Kandaran region. Apart from the heretofore sites, she explored some

other sites like Bangapala, Damanbhita, Kaimar and Madhubana, and some water reservoirs called Kajaldighi, Ranidighi, Bauldighi, Laldighi and Ballabhasagar. (Bhattacharya, 1999)

The settlement has continued to flourish for many centuries thereafter. **Suryapur** of old Malda is another urban area of the study area. Rajanikanta Chakrabarti mentions, in the middle of the forest of Suryapur we can see a place called Yogibhavan. Here traces of a ruined temple existed, which as the legend had that it was the seat of the Jain monk Gorakshanātha. The local people worshipped this temple as that of Maa Gōlaknāth (mother Gōlaknāth). Chakrabarti again mentions Ganipur and Chate, two other urban sites in its vicinity. The Jain monastery has been mentioned as Gani in the Jain scriptures. This might be the reason behind the name of Ganipur. The word *Chate* is a corrupt form of the word *chaitya*. Chakrabarti hinted that once there was a colossal *chaitya*. Probably it was destroyed and the ruins were reused in the building of Adina mosque. (Chakrabarty, 1982)

Next, in the **Ekdala-Bairhatta** region in South Dinajpur a well-planned township can easily be traced between the dried rivers Chiramati and Baliya and enclosed on north and south by east and west canals joining two rivers.

Map 5: <u>Plan of the ruined city of Bairhatta (Ekdala), Courtesy: Stapleton, 1932, Plate 4.</u>

This urban area was first noticed by the Colonial historian H. E. Stapleton and Pandit Sarasi Kumar Saraswati. (Saraswati, 1932a, pp. 173-183; 1932b, pp. 185-195; 1938, pp. 9-20)In the *Notes on a Third Tour in the District of Dinajpur- chiefly along the Chiramati River* Saraswati indicates sites like Daharol, Kachra, Eshnail, Aminpur, Katashan, Dehabaṇḍh, Patiraj, Adhyakhanda, Mahatur, Jagdalla, Maheṇḍra, Surohor, and Harirampur, for their rich archaeological treasure and gives a clear indication of the existence of a fully flourished urban society and culture of the past. Though the Ekdala had become a place of political stretch between Firoz Shah, the Sultan of Delhi and the Sultans of Bengal (Ilyās Shah and Sikandar Shah) in the 14th century as informed by the principal Muhammadan authorities like Ziya Barani, Shams-i-Sirāj

Afīf and Gulam Husain. But it was a fully flourished township much before the advent of the Muslim rule in this part of the world. Stapleton in his account of Dinajpur refers the local traditions of the 'country residence' of Virāt Rājā in the region. Stapleton collected a rare seating Surya image with inscription during his tour in 1930 CE, which was dated as one of the early images of eighth century by N. Chakrabarty and S. K. Saraswati. (Chakrabarty and Saraswati, 1932, pp. 147-151) M. S. Bhattacharyya, curator made an extensive survey of Bairhatta-Badarpur area in the then West Dinajpur between 1977 and 1981 and recovered more than twenty sculptures of the Pāla-Sena period and presented to Akshay Kumar Maitra Museum, North Bengal University and Malda Museum. (Bhattacharyya, 1982, p. 4) The uniform brick size of the Ekdala-Bairhatta region, at least at the basement level, is 30 x 24 x 6-7 cm. (Field Survey, June 2014)

Bairhatta-Badarpur has a huge number of water bodies. Some of them are quite big in size. Biggest of them is Malyan dighi, measuring 1262 mtr north to south and 306 mtr east to west. The second one is Gordighi, measuring 1262 mtr east to west and 358 mtr in north to south. The third largest is Altadighi measuring 1258 mtr north to south and 300 mtr east to west. Of these three, Gordighi is a Hindu work and Malyandighi and Altadighi are Mahammadan works. (Buchanan, 1833) Worthy to note, S. Panja recently reported an image of Candi of 10th century, a silver *tanka* of Sher Shah Suri, a seal of 17th century and an image of Shivacarya of very remote time. (Panja, 2018, pp. 27-62)

The biggest mound in this area is **Mahendra** locally known as *Gadādhūm* or *Kadhūm* on the bank of the river Chirāmatī (corrupted form of Śrīmatī). The mound is 200 feet wide, 180 feet long and 30 feet high. Here a legend is current about this mound, i.e. a hugely built hero namely *Gadā* once fishing in the river Chirāmatī seated atop the mound with palm tree as his fishing rod and an ox as his bait, saw *Behulā* with the dead body of her husband *Laxmindar* (the famous *Behula Laxmindar legendary*) sailing through the River. Gadā overwhelmed by the beauty of Behulā, stopped her on her way and tried to catch her. From the name of the hero Gadā, this mound got its name *Gadādhūm*. Tentative observation about the name of the mound (*Maheṇḍra*) it might have come from the name of the prince *Maheṇḍra*, son of Raja Ganesh of the first half of the 15th century. After conquering the throne, Raja Ganesh placed his son *Maheṇḍra* as Governor of the moat city of Ekdala-Bairhatta.

(Stapleton, 1932, pp. 151-171) This mound is looks like a hillock from the plain. Here we also find the same type of bricks. Some pillars are found of black stone. Many of them are lavishly curved with bow and arrow design. First one is of 163 cm x 32 cm, with two bows curving of the same size of 12 cm. (Picture 13) The second one is of 110 cm x 50 cm in size. (Picture14) Just near *Gadādhūm*another mound is also situated (53 feet x 110 feet). It has also thrown up same type of architectural fragments, like bricks, potsherd and stone pillars. Two of the pillars are of same in size, i.e., circumference of 93 cm and height of 160 cm with beautiful curving. (Picture 15)

Next to **Gadadhum** mound, the Jagaddala mound is situated just on the other bank of the river. The distance of Gadadhum from Jagaddala is less than 1 km. The name of the mound (Jagaddalā) is intriguing in relation to the debate on the identification of Jagaddala monastery. As the crow flies, this Jagaddalā Village is not very far from the famous city of Rāmāvatī (presently Amati village of Itahar PS) with an approximate distance is 15 km. This site was well connected through rivers with Rāmāvatī during that time. One can sail to Rāmāvatī from Jagaddala through Chiramati and then onto the Mahānandā.

At **Jagaddala**, a mile to the south of Māhātur, there are further evidences of ancient settlement. Just close to the road a North South tank called *Bāghā Muzra Dighi*is situated*,* which has traces of a pucca bathing Ghat on each of its four sides. The high embankments are strewn with bricks, and there are three small mounds to the east of the tank known to the people as *Deul* (temple). Bricks may be had in abundance in the mounds, and in one mound can be seen several huge architectural stones, most probably still in their respective places. Saraswati witnessed a sandstone image of Chāmundā dancing on Mahākāla. (Saraswati, 1932b, p. 190)

The mound of **Dehabandh**, which lies on the Durgapur-Kaliaganj road, is of two tierat least visible from the plain. (Picture 83) Though the mound is almost destroyed by the locals but the principal mound is in good condition. S. K. Saraswati recovered a sand stone Liṅgam of very rare iconographic character, two exquisitely decorative colossal images of Viṣṇu of 12th century CE and a pedestal with an inscription of Ardhanārīśvara. (Saraswati, 1932b, p.189) The present scholar finds a large gargoyle, (Picture87) two decorative doorjambs with a temple curving,

(Picture86) pedestals and many more unidentified images. Most important feature of this mound is its construction pattern. Here, in this mound, the use of stone chips in between the bricks is rare example of architectural pattern, at least in this area.

Rāmāvatī, the last Pāla capital, was founded by the great Rāmapāla in the twelfth century CE. He established a new capital city on the bank of river Mahananda after reoccupying Bengal from the Kaivartya rulers. After a long debate, the present location of the last Pāla capital, i.e., Rāmāvatī has been settled. The Amati village in the Itahar PS has been identified as the location of Rāmāvatī. (Sarkar, 2009) The name of the village, i.e., Amati is a corrupt form of the word Rāmāvatī. Rāmāvatī became Rāmāuti in Muslim pronunciation just like Lakshmanavati was being written as Lakhnauti in Arabic script by the Muslims. And Rāmāuti became Rāmāti and finally Āmāti in the local dialect.

Rāmāvatī > Rāmāuti > Rāmāti > Āmāti

But another village called Amṛti located in the immediate vicinity of the older site of the city of Gauḍa at Pichlī-Gaṅgārāmpur does not seem to be acceptable as a capital city. Renaming a part of the old city after himself and making it his capital would not seem to be logical proposition for Rāmapāla since in all probability his predecessor and older brother Mahīpāla II was evicted from this city by the Kaivarta rebels. It would be expedient for him to build a new city giving due consideration to the question of security. Further, Rāmapāla had instructed some of his trusted men to select a suitable location for a new capital city to be built.

Amati and its surroundings, protected by the river Mahananda on the west and the smaller streams like the Srimati and the Balia within its limits and the Ṭangan, a larger tributary of the Mahananda on the eastern periphery was geopolitically an excellent choice. This concern for security is also expressed in the *Rāmacaritam*. (Chapter III, V. 48) Where the return of Rāmapāla to Rāmavatī a 'secured' city is expressly mentioned. At a much later date the invincible Ekdālā fort was built by the Turko-Afgan rulers in the same area. The Amati settlement has several sites full of archaeological artefacts, viz, Koṭbāri, Paňchadevati, Paramesvaravātī, Ghṛtatala, Malaňchi, Madhuban, Kāligaňj, Baragrām, Joṭ Narattam, Betnābaj, Pūrbahaṭ,

Uttarhaṭ, Madaihaṭ, Kāṭābāri, Golhāṭ, Jāgdal, Chhaghāṭi, Joyhāṭ, Aminhāṭ, Koṭbāri, Shāsan, Bāhādol and Pāthar Bhiṭā.
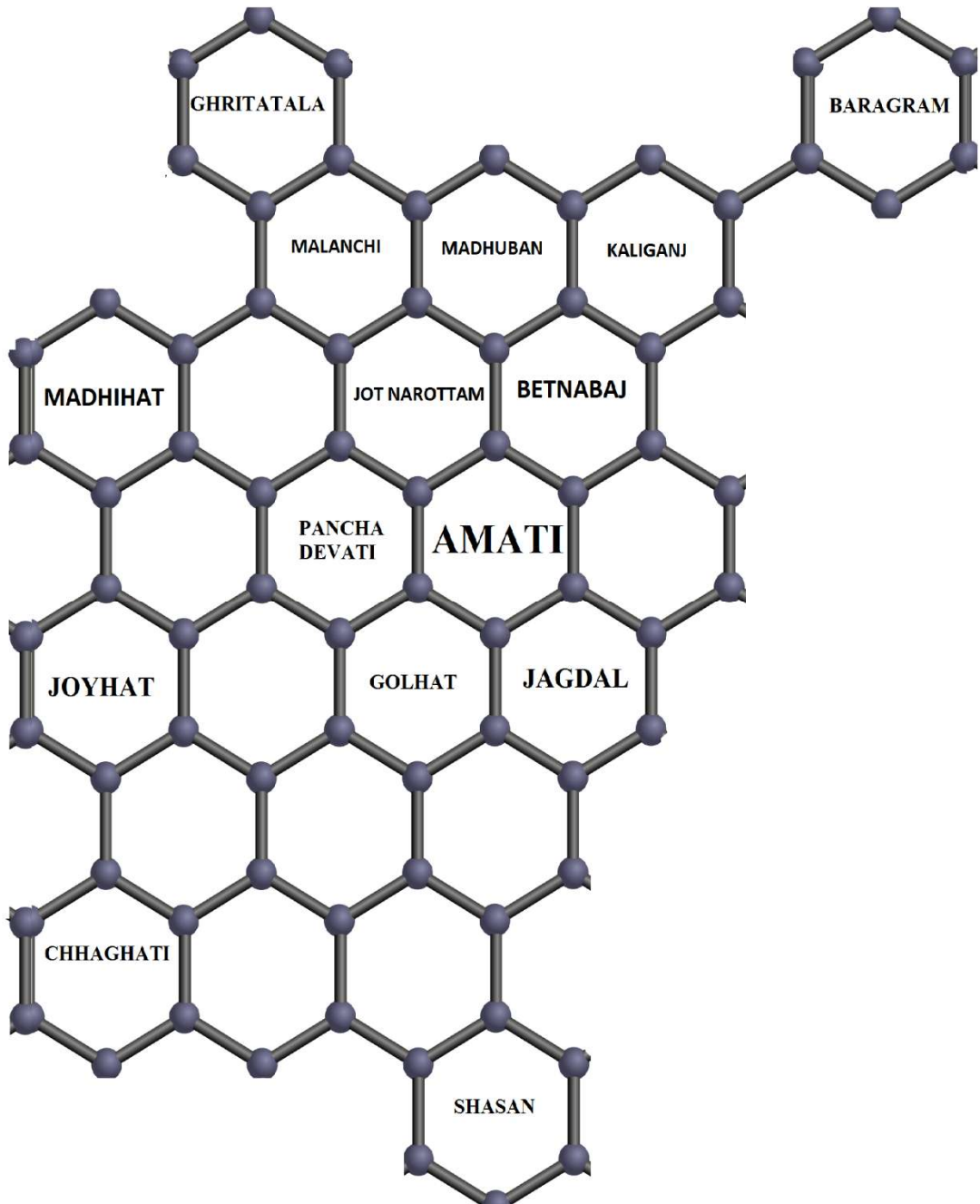

Diagram 5: CPT of Amati

In a medieval text, namely the *Sekośubhodaya*, recovered from Paṇḍua, three villages as well as market places (*haṭṭa*) have been mentioned along with the famed city of Rāmāvatī. These are Pūrbahaṭṭa, Uttarhaṭṭa and Madaihaṭṭa. Interestingly these

have been identified with three villages named Purbahat, Uttarhat and Madhaihat, all in the neighbourhood of Amati. No less fascinating is the fact that some more villages in its vicinity are named with suffix *hāṭ*, viz, namely Golhaṭ, Joyhaṭ and Aminhaṭ within a km or so. These villages, no longer known as market places are of fairly ancient origin and the suffix *hāṭ* applied to them denote their status as market places in some remote past.

Kotbari village at the centre of Amati complex settlement probably was the royal palace of the great city of Rāmāvatī. The term *koṭṭa* or *koṭa* means fort and it might be the royal encloser of the city with some other major buildings that lie buried in this area. The Kotbari moundstrewn with bricks of 19 x 6 cm size. One traceable brick wall is 30 mtr long at the southern site. Pancadevati and Paramesvaravati in its close proximity have yielded numerous stone and terracotta artefacts and probably had some of temples. Most of the artefacts have already been looted or destroyed by the local inhabitants but some stringed of this grant treasure can be traceable till date. A gigantic stone with three male figureslay on roadside in this area. Another ornamented back slab (122 x 51 cm) of a black stone shows the head of a deity while the torso is missing. A black stone pillar of 150 cm, a pot-bellied deity (24 x 18 cm) and huge mutilated pieces of sculptures have been found from this area. (Picture 32)

Jagdal mound (Picture 34) is situated just one km east of Amati. The name of this mound, i.e., 'Jāgdal' are again evoked the debate of identification of the present location of the Jagaddala monastery, which will be discussed later. The mound of this village is about 100 x 80 mtr in measure. During a visit in winter of 2014, author found a part of colossal gargoyle (Picture 35) with *Makarmukha* design. Sandhyākarnandi in the *Rāmacaritam* highlights Varendrīas the fatherland of the Pāla emperors and mentions the importance of Jagaddala Mahāvihāra. (*Ramacaritam*I,38;ii,28;iv,3) In 2015, in another visit was found an approximately 12 feet wide road (Picture 36) with approaches towards Amati in the north and *Chhoghati* (largest water tank in this area) in the south.

Interestingly enough, like the ruins of Pichli, the ruins of Amati is also called the Amati Kanthal. Still now the word is pronounced in the same way in both the areas. *Kānthāl* may be a corrupted form of *Katakhal*, i.e. excavated water course or canal for inland navigation or irrigation. (Unique Oxford Dictionary Bengali to

English, 2007, p. 255) Anther suggestion of the word *Kānthāl* is that, it is a corrupted form of *Ghāṭāl* or *Ghāṭ* meaning jetty. (Bhattacharyya, 2008, p. 90) As we have already mentioned the Amati settlement is well blessed by the rivers and water bodies. But if we have a close eye at the water ferry system of this settlement, we can trace a dried spill channel, which starts from Amati and ends up in the confluence of the river Mahananda and Chiramati (Śrīmatī). More interestingly, the meeting place of the channel is named as Pahari Bhita, which also has also yielded a good number of artefacts. This place was probably the jetty of that time. This spill channel probably was the lifeline of trade and commerce of then Rāmāvatī Township.

Map 6: <u>Maritime network of Amati settlement</u>

It would be interesting to note here that battles were fought in the region between armies of rival king. Sandhyākarnandin mentions a pitched battle fought on the bank of the river Kalindri near the ancient site of Gauḍa i.e. Pichli Gangarampur. This emphasizes the geopolitical importance of the region. On the strength of the

above finding we would safely presume that Amati, so rich in archaeological assets was appropriately chosen as the capital city of the Pāla Empire.

To analyse theCPT of Amati we have to define a plausible regional boundary by invoking both of cultural and political arguments. To sketch a normative study area the rivers of the area explicitly mark the boundary. The metropolis of Rāmāvati was located at the confluence of the river Mahananda and Chiramati. The western boundary of the Rāmāvati was well marked by the river Mahananda, while eastern and southern boundary by the river Chiramati. In the northern boundary was possibly Baragram, which had cultural similarity with the Rāmāvati. The central place or core area of this urban farrago was Rāmāvati, which was surrounded by a huge number of urban sites and many market places (*haṭṭa*). The site of Jagdal in the threshold area of Amati deserves some more attention. Rāmapāla built the great Jagaddala monastery in the vicinity of the capital city of Rāmāvati, as quoted by Sandhyākarnandin in the *Rāmacaritam*. So, this site of Jagdal can be taken as an educational centre of that time. The dependent sites like Ghṛtatalā and Madhuban possibly get their names from their specialty in producing *Gṛta* and *madhu* (honey). The artefacts revealed from the Baragram characterized it as a workshop of sculpture. (Field Survey, 26.03.2015) The rivers like Mahananda, Chiaramati, Baliya and Tangan were perfect means of security and trade network. We have already mentioned about the inland routes among these towns.

Bangarh was evenly important in the early medieval and medieval period as revealed from the archaeological sources. The Bangarh copper plate inscription of Mahipāla I of c. late tenth or early eleventh century was discovered from Bangarh mound. It was issued from the royal camp of Vilāsa-pura, which donated Kuraṭa-pallikā with the exception of Chuṭa-pallikā of the Gōkalikā *maṇḍala* of Kōṭivarśa *viṣaya*. Another toponym is also mentioned here, Pōshalī, the residence of Mahīdhara, the inscriber of the grant. Unfortunately, the current locations of the toponyms have not been located.

Two copper plates respectively of Gopāla IV and Madanapāla were recovered from Rajibpur of Gangarampur PS, which have been issued from the royal head quarter of Rāmāvatī. These plates recorded sites like Vudhavaḍākhāma *grāma* in the Halāvartta *maṇḍala* of Kōṭivarṣa *viṣaya*. The Vudhavaḍākhāma *grāma* has been

identified with the village of Budhura, now known as Raghabpur in Tapas PS. (Sanyal, 2010, p. 112) In the plate #1 the village of Vudhavaḍākhāma *grāma* is mentioned as 'production of three hundred by standard of ploughed land and house', (plate #1,vv. 37-38) which indicates that the production of the village is measured at three hundred is some unit according to size of cultivated tracts and number of households. (Furui, 2015, p. 57) From this type of description of the place Vudhavaḍākhāma *grāma* it seems to be very clear that this place can be treated as an important and possibly an urban center. The toponyms of the plate #2 are Vaṭhuṇḍavallī, Kusumuṇḍā, Piśacakuleya, Vivudhapallī, Vaṅgaḍī and Vāṭṭaḍavattī. (plate #2, vv. 33-35) Identifications of these places have not yet been possible. But there is a police station called Kushmandi in South Dinajpur can be identified as the location of Kusumuṇḍā.

It can be concluded from the above discussion that the study area had yielded numerous urban sites in several time slices and it cannot be treated as a separate pearl from the necklace of the second and the third urbanization of India. The urban sites of the study area not only served with their specialized services like administrative, judiciary, education etc. and simple basic services like market place, grocery stores etc. of the people of its threshold. They also left its spatial effects to its range areas and peripheries. The study area revealed cities like Bangarh, Pichli, Amati, Ekdala-Bairhatta etc., which played a key role in the development of its threshold and influenced the minor urban areas in administrative, economic, social and cultural respect. Some minor urban sites like Asuragarh, Madanavati, Dwipnagar etc., stand alone for a time while and were became a place of attraction for the people of that time.

The State of the Society in the Study Area During 3rd Century BCE and 12th Century CE

Sometime in the first millennium BCE small settlements on the shores of the big rivers gradually evolved into cities in our area of study. The process might have taken a few hundred years or less than that. But in the Mauryan period there were as many as three large cities dominating the trade and commerce as well as society of the region. These cities were Koṭivarṣa, Puṇḍravardhana and Asuragarh.The last named in our opinion had a different name obscured with the passage of time and came to be

known as the fortress(*garh*) of the demons(*asura*) as per the choice of the local people.

Interestingly, these cities survived for more than a millennium and joined by several other big and small urban centres scattered over the length and breadth of our area of study. Most prominent among them was Gauḍa(Gour),Skandanagara (Kandaran), Rāmāvati etc. A host of others like Kumarpura, Madnavati, Mahendra(pura), Laksmaṇavati also flourished at about the same time. Among those mentioned last the city of Gauḍa was built in the Gupta period as supported by several evidence while the rest flourished in the Pala-Sena era.

Now these large and small urban centres contributed to the growth of urbanised societies which were essentially different from the rural ones comprising farmers, small artisans and other classes like potters, blacksmiths, weavers, cattle rearers, boat drivers etc. occasionally joined by itinerant traders and monks obliged to travel through even the remotest of the villages.

The society in the urban centres was completely different. As we learn from various literary sources like *Kāmasūtra* of Vatsyana, (Sastri, 1929) *Daśakumācharita* of Dandi, (Parab, 1889) *Rāmacaritam* of Sandhyākarnandin, (Sastri, 2012)*Pavanadūtaṃ* of Dhoyi (Chakravarti, 1926) and a host of others. Mention may also be made here of the account of several foreign travellers like Xuan Zang, (Beal, 1914) I-Tsing (Chavannes, 1894) et al. A number of Gupta and Pāla inscriptions in particular richly contribute to our knowledge of the urban society in ancient and early medieval periods. The archaeological finds even the stone, metal and terracotta sculptures and artefacts reflect interesting facets of the society, both urban and rural, of the ancient and medieval periods. The terracotta plaques and stone sculptures recovered from the monasteries of Paharpur and Jagajjivanpur reveal slices of contemporary urban and rural life.

The cities naturally had their share of the affluent professional classes residing in them. Royal personages, traders or *sresthis*, high military and civil officials, artists, architects, entertainers like the dancers and musicians thronged the cities. The artisans were gainfully employed either by the state, the monastic establishment or the affluent people. As their benefactors lived in cities, the artisans preferred to live in cities also. The *Rāmacaritam* and the *Kāmasūtra*present varied descriptions of the urban life, its

amusements, the entertainers especially skilled in their trades and the leisurely lifestyle of the rich. The stone and terracotta artefacts corroborate the accounts found in the literary sources.

The *Sekasubhodaya* on the other hand reveals the attitude of some adulterous member of the Royalty and sufferings of the common people due to their acts. The king as a fountain of justice punishes the offender who happens to be his brother-in-Law.

The society, particularly the urban had the presence of various grades of priests of the Brahmanical faith and a large body of Buddhist monks living in the monasteries. These classes were engaged in academic exercises which included study and practice of medicine and surgery, researches in the fields of philosophy, astronomy etc. Even technique of art was studied sincerely and books were authored on such subjects. So, the intellectual environment of cities was contributed by poets, authors, artists, theologists etc. earning their livelihood from cities.

There were rich traders influencing the economy of the state at times coming into conflict with the autocratic kings. They however, wanted security from the monarch at the time of war while the monarch sought their help while confronting an enemy. So, the relationship between the king and the trader was one of mutual dependence. When the dependence was broken, both sides had to suffer as Rajanikanta Chakborty mentioned in his *GouderItihasa.* (Chakrabarty, 1982)

With the passage of time, the bureaucracy grew in size. The Pāla inscriptions describe a huge number of officials, both civil and military, serving the king and essentially living in the capitals and big or small towns. They were an important component of the urban society.

So, to conclude we can say the society during the period was multi–layered and prosperous depending on the villages for the supply of much of their need. The villages were primarily dependent on agriculture.

Notes

1. A. Ghosh, mentions only three categories for the development of an urban centres, viz, 'political and administrative centre', 'centre of trade and commerce', and 'religious centre'. Forth factor, i.e. 'the importance of geographical location' has been added by R. Champakalashmi. (1979, pp. 1-29) and B.D. Chattapadhyaya (2012).

2. The writer believes that, the Matsya *janapada* of 6th century BCE was placed in eastern India, notin present Joypur region of Rajasthan. This hypothesis is based on the archaeological sources, literary evidences and local legends.

3. As for the limits of Āryāvarta we are informed that it was limited on the east by the Kālaka-vana, on the south by the Pāriyātra range, on the west by Ādarśana and on the north by the Himālayas. The eastern most boundary of the Āryāvarta, i.e Kālaka-vana has been identified in the present day Jharkhand by Bhandarkar. (Bhandarkar, 1931, pp. 103-116)

4. 'The *Vāyu-Purāṇa*, Chapter XXIII, vv. 196-97. Translation of Verse 196-97: 'When the twentyfifth revolution arrives in due course, and Śakti, son of Vasiṣṭha becomes the Vyāsa, I will be born as the lord Muṇḍīśvara with a staff in the city Koṭivarṣa honoured by devas.' (Tagore, 1987, p. 149).

5. The Jambunadi river has not yet been identified. Possibly it was a spelling mistake by the inscriber of the plate. A tentative identification is that, it can be identified with the Jamuna river on the east of Bangarh.

6. … among the multitude of settlement names mentioned and very infrequently described in any detail in epigraphs, it is hazardous, without applying further tests, to try and locate urban centres and comprehend their structure. (Chattopadhyaya, 2012, p. 169)

7. 'This has nothing to do with the mention of a place as a *grāma* or a *nagara* ; it is the relevance of how much is described in the context of what is being recorded that will finally count in assessing the character of each settlement.' (Chattopadhyaya, 2012, p. 171)

8. This *viṣaya* is also mentioned in some copper plate grants of the Pāla-Sena age, like Nandadirghika inscription of Mahendrapāladeva, Jajilpara Inscriptions of Gopal III.

9. Use of secondary seal found in the Kotalipada plate, the Tripperah plate of Lokanātha, the Kailan plate of Śrīdhāraṇa Rāta, the Kalapur plate of Maruṇḍanātha and Mastakaśvabhra copper-plate of Pradyumnabandhu.

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