

**"BENGALI - PEOPLE AND CULTURE -
A STUDY IN ORIGINS**

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INTRODUCTION

I N T R O D U C T I O N

History and culture of the Indian people have been treated from various perspectives, angles and view-points, quite independently of one another. The philologists, historians, ethnologists, archaeologists and sociologists have all partially dealt with the subject in accordance with norms of their respective disciplines. Accordingly, such treatments do hardly present a complete and coherent picture of the history and culture of the Indian people. No such a disciplinewise treatment is capable of presenting any composite image of the people of India, however, in depth a study may be. Besides, the sub-continent of India is a vast country containing diverse peoples and cultural traits and complexes. Any treatment dealing with the Indian people as a whole becomes in such a case partial, one-sided and incomplete. That is why the primary need of the day is the area-study. In other words, the study of the history and culture of the different component units of the country is a crying need of the day. India is indeed a veritable sub-continent with distinct geographical and cultural units or areas which today, at least in general, form the various states of the Indian Union. It is from a comprehensive study of the history and culture of the people of each and every component unit of India, that an overall composite image of the cultural history of the Indian people would emerge.

Unfortunately, for a long time past no serious attempt has been made to treat the cultural history of each of the component units of India. It is only in recent years that attempts have been made to concentrate on writing comprehensive history and culture of the different states of the Union of India. Each state or unit possesses a distinct culture of its own. But unfortunately, in all treatments made so far, very little attention has been paid to the study of the people of each area or state. Only one or two chapters have been devoted to the people of the land. Even that treatment is primarily anthropological, i.e., dealing substantially with the present people of the land. Hardly any ethno-historical treatment of the ancient and

modern peoples of any state has been attempted so far. In other words, such a study is bereft of its very base or fundamental bearings. The main concern of the study of the history and culture of any area or unit must be the man, i.e., the people of the region. Further, no comprehensive attempt has been made to trace the ethno-historical origins of the people of each region including their cultural traits. In other words, no intensive and comprehensive study of the people and culture of any region or unit of India has been made in regard to tracing their very base or origins. The importance of this type of study need not be emphasised. The primary reason for the absence of such a study is that any attempt of this kind is bound to be a multi-disciplinary one, primarily philological, archaeological, historical, ethnological, sociological, anthropological etc. Knowledge of all these scientific disciplines is a pre-requisite to such a study.

In the field of such a statewide or areawise study, Bengal has, however, played all throughout a pioneer role in studying the people of the state in accordance with the norms of various disciplines. It is only in recent years that attempts have been made to write comprehensive history and culture of the people of Bengal. The first laudible attempt in this regard has been completed under the editorship of Professor Majumdar in the Mag-num O-pus entitled 'History of Bengal', Vol.I published in 1943, which contains results of the study of the various aspects of the history and culture of the people of Bengal made by different savants of the respective disciplines. Following the publication of the 'History of Bengal', Professor Ray similarly brought out another Mag-num O-pus in Bengali language entitled 'Vāṅgālīr Itihās' (Ādiparva) published in (1356BS) which has been his own individual effort to project the various aspects of Bengal's history and culture. Both the works are indeed praiseworthy attempts of projecting the history and culture of the Bengali people in all perspectives. But unfortunately, little attention has been paid in both the works in regard to tracing the Origins of the Bengali People and Culture or in other words to determining the very roots of the Bengali people and culture. Only anthropological treatment of the people of the land has been made in one or more chapters of

these volumes. In fact, no serious attempt has been made to trace the autochthones of Bengal and the cultural base of the Bengali people. Nothing is also known as to how the Bengali people and their culture have been composed through centuries. In other words, no ethno-historical treatment has been made so far. In short, it can be said that no dissection of the people and cultural components of Bengal has been made so far. Accordingly, despite many writings on the history and culture of the Bengali people, no comprehensive and coherent image has yet emerged, and little is known about the very base or roots of the Bengali culture and how it has been formed.

With the primary purpose of partly removing the above glaring lacuna in the treatment of history and culture of the Bengali people, the present project entitled 'The People and Culture of Bengal : A Study in origins' has been undertaken. This is no doubt a highly ambitious project entailing multi-disciplinary treatment. Besides, the subject-matter itself is a complex and vast one. With a limited knowledge, every effort has been made to make a partial treatment of the subject with particular reference to the ethno-historical study of the Bengali people and culture. It has been found out that the people of Bengal originally belonged to various tribal communities possessing divergent ethnic and cultural characteristics. This has been purely an ethno-historical analysis. So long, the people of Bengal have been studied from an anthropological point of view only without any historical perspectives. Here, for the first time, an attempt has been made to correlate historical data with ethnological one. With the purpose of making such a treatment, the people of Bengal have been discussed under various categories as outlined in the contents of each chapter of the treatise, the essence of which has been given below. All available historical materials have been collated with regard to each of the major tribal communities of Bengal and properly analysed. From a systematic study of these tribal communities, it has been found out that many of them migrated from both in and outside India. But ultimately, all of them mingled. Later in time followed the infiltrations of the so-called Aryans from Upper India with new ethnic and cultural characteristics.

Their culture also underwent considerable changes along with their physical features because of intermingling with other ancient peoples of Bengal. Such a historical study of the different groups of people of Bengal has been also correlated with ethnological study as far as possible. Finally, it has been found out that from both historical and ethnological points of view, the Bengali people belonged/belong to diverse racial stocks. The same picture emerges also in respect of the study of the Bengali culture. The tribal culture has been studied with particular reference to their present day survivals and remnants. Different stages in the development of culture of Bengal as a whole have been also found out, and it has been shown that the Bengali culture as a whole is also the result of mingling of diverse cultural streams that flowed into Bengal. But the uniqueness of the Bengali people and culture is that in spite of mingling of diverse races and culture, there is an apparent tinge of Bengaliness in respect of both people and culture of Bengal. This has been the main proposition propounded in the present treatise.

Since the present study of the Bengali people and culture is primarily an ethno-historical one, the implication thereof is that it covers the entire period from the earliest known time to the present. For the purpose of historical study, this long period has been limited, that is, from earliest known times up to the invasion of the muslims in Bengal in the beginning of the 13th century A.D. But very often references have been made even to information obtained from source materials belonging to the medieval and modern times. In that respect, the present treatment may be considered as one, more or less complete. As to ethnological study, historical references to physical features and cultural traits of the different groups of people belonging to diverse tribal communities have been culled together and ethnological conclusions drawn therefrom. Ethnological study in general is primarily concerned with the present people of Bengal. It has, however, been possible to find out correlation between the results of the present day ethnological study and materials derived from historical sources. In that sense, the present study is primarily both historical and ethnological. Besides, for

the purpose of presenting perspectives to the study of the Bengali people and culture, an attempt has been made also to project the physical landscape of Bengal, settlements, villages and cities along with the life-patterns prevailing therein. This study has been made from both archaeological and historical source materials. While making this treatment every attempt has been made to point out as to what extent settlements and cultural patterns were related to different tribal communities moving into Bengal. On the whole, every effort has been made to present a somewhat complete and coherent picture of Bengal, her people and culture. But such a study can never be a complete and full-proof one. In the present dissertation, only a partial fulfilment of the great task relating to this multidisciplinary study has been made. The present treatment is the result of only a minimal study. However, every effort has been made to present a positively coherent image of the people and culture of Bengal.

The present study is a multidisciplinary one, primarily archaeological, historical, geographical, anthropological, ethnological and philological. All relevant archaeological materials have been derived from various archaeological exploration and excavation reports, inscriptions, coins etc. Regarding historical source-materials particular attention has been paid to the Brahmanical, Buddhists and Jaina literary records. Both early and late Brahmanical literary works, such as, the Vedas and Brāhmanas, the Epics, the Dharmasūtras and the Dharmaśāstras, the Purānas, etc., have been also consulted and relevant information collated. Of the Purānas again, two late Purānas (C.12th - 13th century A.D.), probably compiled in Bengal, contain valuable materials regarding prevailing social condition in Bengal. These two Purānas, namely, Bṛhaddharmapurāna and Brahmavaivarta-purāna, have been largely utilised for the treatment of the related subject-matters in the present treatise. Similarly, all the relevant early and late Buddhists and Jaina works have been also consulted and relevant information utilised. Not only that, even some of the early and late Bengali literary works have been also consulted for gathering materials relating to the subject.

For anthropological or ethnological data the primary sources consulted are the Census Reports, Anthropometric Reports, Ethnological and Anthropological Surveys and various modern works on anthropology and ethnology. Regarding philological materials information have been largely derived from Grierson's and other Linguists' primary works on languages spoken by the peoples of different parts of India.

Materials collated from the above mentioned primary sources have been further augmented by materials drawn from all secondary sources, i.e., works partly dealing with or referring to the present subject-matter. Practically speaking, all available and relevant modern works have been consulted, and information derived therefrom included in the present study. In reality, all relevant primary and secondary sources have been consulted and materials derived from them have been duly analysed and systematized and presented in the form contained in the treatise. The nature of information collected from all sources and the treatment made thereof become evident from an appraisal of the contents of the different chapters of the present dissertation.

The present discourse on the subject-matter has been presented in its Eleven Chapters, essential contents of each of which are given below as an introductory appreciation.

Chapter one contains a brief note on the origins, derivation and the present formation of the name of Bengal, and its subsequent partition in 1947 into two States, namely, West Bengal and East Pakistan, the latter becoming an independent state bearing the name of 'Bāṅglādeś' in 1971. The natural boundaries of Bengal before partition, i.e., of undivided Bengal have been also outlined to present the geographical position of Bengal in the sub-continent of India.

This introductory review is followed by a discussion on physical landscape of Bengal in Chapter Two. In this Chapter, hills and rocks, forest, delta and soil, climate and rainfall have been all summarally discussed with the purpose of presenting a general acquaintance with the

physical landscape of Bengal and thereby providing the very perspectives of the study of the Bengali people. While doing so, every attempt has been made to refer to the antiquity or early references to all those items in our ancient literary texts and other records. Besides, the river system of Bengal which played an important role in the historical and cultural setting of the country has been discussed in details with a particular reference to the more important rivers having cultural and historical bearings. In this context, an attempt has been also made to project the influence of the rivers on the life and activities of the people of Bengal. It has been also shown that from remote antiquity, Bengal's natural surroundings possessing abundant material resources along with her seasonal and climatic characteristics made the country the most coveted land and a largely sought after refuge for human settlement and also for the advancement of creative faculties and their enrichment by absorbing and synthesizing new ideas and ways of life that crept into and also by moulding them in her own fashion and thereby giving a distinct stamp of Bengali-ness on the cultural attainments of the people of Bengal.

Chapter Three deals with the human settlements and habitations in ancient Bengal including their various types, sizes, boundaries, constituent parts, etc. A discussion has been also made on the very nucleus of the human settlement and habitation, i.e., the village and its origins and growth. The village of ancient Bengal has been outlined with some details regarding its size, boundaries and constituent parts, thereby giving a picture of the village settlement pattern. In the second place, a discussion has been made on agronomy and agronomic products. In this context, it has been pointed out that agriculture was introduced in Bengal from the Neolithic times onwards and the primary shifting cultivation was carried out by the semi-nomadic people who perhaps pursued this primitive cultivation pattern. With the advancement of agricultural techniques, plough cultivation and growth of population there was a tremendous demand for more and more agricultural fields. The water-logged areas and forests were all accordingly exploited for cultivation and production of food grains. All these become evident from

both literary and epigraphic records of Bengal. Then follows an account of varieties of agricultural products like dhānya, betelnuts, betel-leaves and many other miscellaneous yields. Besides food-crops, there are also references to cultivation of cotton plants, the flowers of which supplied ingredients for weaving clothes. Flowers, plants and creepers, etc., were also cultivated next to these agricultural products. A detailed discussion has been also made on the ancient village crafts of Bengal with particular references to textile, sugar, salt, pottery-making, carpentry, stone, metal and ivory works and shell products, bamboo and cane objects, mask and scrolls, earthen wares, etc. In the third place, a treatment has been made of the centres of trade, commerce and communication, medium of exchange and currency, measurements of land, etc. Fourthly, a short discussion has been made on village administration including the village revenue and its realisation. Lastly, a picture of the social life and activities of the village people at large including their habitats, food articles, dress and ornaments, games and sports, etc., has been presented.

Besides the treatment of the village and its people, an attempt has been also made to trace the origins and growth of the urban centres or cities of ancient Bengal. The life-patterns of the urban people have been enumerated. A comparative study of the village and the city life patterns has been also made, and the impact of the urban cultural patterns on the simple rural people has been outlined. The main purpose of this Chapter has been to point out that the villages of ancient Bengal were self-contained and self-governed units. It is in these villages that the most ancient peoples of Bengal including the aborigines and the indigenes made their settlements and dwellings. These people were indeed the most ancient dwellers in these village settlements of Bengal. Accordingly, an account of these original inhabitants of Bengal has been given in the following chapters.

In Chapter Four it has been pointed out that for a long time past Bengal was considered an unholy or impure land by the people of upper India primarily because of its ancient inhabitants whose language, ways

of life and other cultural attainments were quite averse to those of the former. These peoples were indeed the aborigines of Bengal. Since it is an enormous task to delineate all the individual aboriginal tribes of Bengal prior to the Brahmanization of the land, an attempt has been made to make a selective treatment of a few aboriginal communities belonging to diverse ethnic and cultural groups.

In the first place, the present aboriginal tribes of Bengal before the infiltration of the Brahmanical culture have been categorized into various groups. Some of these aboriginals became also integrated into Brahmanical social order. A study of the selected caste orders can be made in this respect with a view to determine their original cultural identity. In this connection, a particular reference has been also made to the enumeration of the various aboriginal or tribal groups made in the Census Reports. Further, some of these tribal or aboriginal peoples have been also assimilated within the fold of Brahmanism and others are, however, still living in their original tribal setting possessing their respective aboriginal life-patterns. These are indeed the extant aboriginal tribes of Bengal.

Secondly, the extant aborigines of Bengal have been categorized into different groups. They have mostly immigrated from outside the geographical boundaries of Bengal. At least four distinct categories of these aboriginal tribes have been made on the basis of their various nuclei from which they infiltrated into Bengal. In this connection, an analysis of the extant aboriginal groups of Bengal has been made on the basis of the Census Reports. It has become evident that in Bengal there are many aboriginal tribes belonging to diverse ethnic and cultural groups, and an ethnological study of these diverse groups of aborigines reveals the presence of two distinct basic ethnic elements, namely, the Tibeto-Mongoloid and Australoid.

Thirdly, a categorywise portrayal of each of the four tribal groups has been made. This includes the hill tribes from the northern belt spreading over the Himalayan regions of Sikkim, Bhūtān, Nepāl,

etc. Such a review of these communities in bare outline is quite relevant to the present study of the composition of the Bengali people because they are found mostly distributed over different parts of North Bengal. The main purpose of presenting a brief appraisal of these communities of the Tibeto-Mongoloid origins is to focus on the point as to how Mongoloid ethnic element crept into the composition of the Bengali people and also to show their gradual transformation into the Brahmanical caste orders. Further, numerous aboriginal tribes also migrated into Bengal from Assam, and some of them have been dealt with. Most of these tribes originally belonged to Bodo linguistic family and the Austro-Asiatic group of languages, and they may be largely affiliated to the Mongoloid ethnic stock. Then again, many more tribes also infiltrated into Bengal from Burma, and they have been summarily described. Of these tribes, the most important role has been played by the Maghs of Southern and North-eastern Bengal.

All these tribal communities coming to Bengal from different directions are mostly found distributed over parts of North and South-east Bengal, and they mostly belong to the Mongoloid racial stock. Lastly, a discussion has been made on the aboriginal communities coming into Bengal from the Chhotanāgpur region of Bihār and Orissa. A detailed treatment of these aboriginal communities has been made, and they have been also mostly subjected to anthropological study as well. Some of these aboriginal communities are the Santals, the Munḍās, the Khariars, the Kharwars, the Birhors, the Bhūmijas, the Orāoṅs, the Mālpāhāriās, the Bediās, etc. All these aboriginal communities have been treated with all relevant details.

All these aboriginal tribal communities are found spread over all districts of Bengal. These aborigines ^e belong to various linguistic, ethnic and cultural groups. It is of course not known for certain as to when and how these peoples did migrate into Bengal and got themselves firmly settled. Some of these aborigines might have moved into Bengal even at a period subsequent to the infiltration of the Aryans and others. These aborigines contributed also largely to the composition of the present

Bengali people and culture. It is, however, to be noted that most of these original peoples who came and settled in Bengal from outside are hardly mentioned in ancient Brahmanical and other records, and hence they have been branded as aborigines.

Besides these aboriginal peoples of Bengal, there are other primitive tribal peoples spread over different parts of Bengal. They have been largely dealt with in the ancient Brahmanical and other records as well. These tribal communities spreading over different parts of Bengal largely confronted the Brahmanical immigrants who ultimately subdued them and many of them were brought within the fold of Brahmanism. As a result, most of these original tribal communities figure in the Brahmanical and other records which furnish some details about them. Some of these primitive peoples settled and wandered over certain parts of Bengal from indeterminable times, at least long before the infiltration of the Aryans. These primitive tribal peoples have been called the real indigenes or autochthones of Bengal and the most important ones of these peoples have been treated in some details in the next Chapter.

Chapter Five deals with the indigenes of Bengal in respect of their meanings, origins, distributions, cultural patterns, physical characters, identity and ethnic affiliations. These indigenes are to be differentiated from the tribal communities discussed in the preceding Chapters in regard to the very fact that the latter though sometimes referred to in the early literary texts yet they are out and out primitive tribal communities and most of them have retained their primitive characters and identity. On the other hand, the indigenes have been most elaborately described in the early literary and epigraphic records, and they have been largely integrated within the Brahmanical fold and the caste hierarchy with a low social status. Further, the primitive tribal communities have hardly been fully integrated and given a caste status excepting a very few. Moreover, the integration of the indigenes within the Brahmanical fold has been so successfully brought about that hardly their true remnants could be

traced in Bengal. This has been all due to the transformations through which they have passed. But in the case of the primitive communities, they have still now succeeded in retaining their separate identity.

Amongst several indigenes who are the real autochthones of Bengal only three principal communities, namely, the Nishādas, the Savaras and the Pulindas have been selected for a special study. Each of these communities has been discussed in their entirety and every attempt has been also made to determine their identity in Bengal. Their physical characters have been described from the early literary texts, and it has been found out that they appear mostly to have belonged to the Australoid ethnic stock. Even their language might have been affiliated to the Austric linguistic family. It has been tried to establish that these indigenes have actually formed the very base of the Bengali people and her culture.

This discussion on the indigenes of Bengal was followed by presenting an account on the most ancient peoples of Bengal as can be gleaned from the early literary and epigraphic records. This discussion on the ancient peoples of Bengal has been made in the following chapter.

Ancient Peoples of Bengal as distinguished from the 'Aborigines' and the 'Indigenes' described in Chapters Four and Five have been discussed with all available details in Chapter Six. The main difference between the Indigenes and Ancient Peoples as delineated in the present Chapter (Chapter Six) lies in the very fact that the latter sufficiently described in the earlier records played the most vital role in moulding and remoulding the history and culture of the people of Bengal as a whole. Accordingly, the present Chapter is entirely devoted to an analytical study of the ancient Peoples of Bengal in a more comprehensive manner. Excluding the minor and insignificant ancient groups of people, some major historically and culturally more potential communities of the ancient peoples of Bengal have been treated with all details relating to their names, early references, origins, settlements and movements, physical features and ethnic affiliations, culture and

life-patterns including their present identity and contributions. These major ancient communities of Bengal are the Vaṅgas, the Suhmas, the Rādhās, the Puṇḍras and the Gauḍas representing each of the different regions of ancient Bengal.

Most significantly, these communities represented four well-marked quarters of ancient Bengal, namely, Eastern and Southern, Western, Northern and Western. In fact, all these different quarters of ancient Bengal were also named after those very ancient peoples as Vaṅga, Rāḍha, Puṇḍra and Gauḍa. But these spatial horizons of political and cultural orbit of these peoples were not necessarily confined to their respective geographical boundary limits. Of these five communities two, namely, the Vaṅgas and the Gauḍas, played the most significant role in the ethnic and cultural settings of Bengal in such a way that the whole country came to be called after them. In reality, both the words Vaṅga and Gauḍa, became so popular and vital in history and culture of Bengal that these two names came to be applied to denote the whole of the country of Bengal, and even the very name of Bengal has been derived from the ancient nomenclature Vaṅga.

Of the two communities named the Vaṅgas and the Gauḍas, the former were the earliest settlers in Bengal, and they yielded great power and influence in the cultural history of the country as a whole. The Gauḍas, however, came into prominence in a later period, and their land came to be known as Gaudadeśa, and the expressions Gauḍa and Gandajana were also largely used to denote the whole of Bengal and her people. Two other groups of peoples Rāḍhā and Puṇḍra and their respective territories, Western and Northern, though sometimes crossed their geographical limits, were generally confined to these two regions. Even today, these two geographical regions are known after those very peoples who occupied the regions. Of these two again, Rāḍha and its peoples were the first to face the infiltrating Aryans from the Western side. Subsequently, the Puṇḍra region came to be known as Varendra, and Rāḍha has continued to hold its ancient name and its people as Rāḍhis and Rāḍhadeśa.

Of all the four tribal or semi-tribal communities of ancient Bengal, the most oldest and widely known was, however, the Vaṅgas after whom the whole country and her people have become known. Accordingly, a detailed discussion on the Vanga community and the region occupied by it has been made, more particularly in respect of the derivations of its name and meanings, early references, origins, settlements, the territories occupied, language and culture, ethnic affiliations, identity and contributions. It has been found out that the Vaṅgas were outside the pale of the Brahmanical culture, and their country lay beyond the outlined limits of Āryāvarta or Brahmavarta. It has been also shown that the Vaṅgas in ancient Bengal from very ancient times mingled with numerous other peoples of the land and thereby lost their original physical and cultural characteristics. Accordingly, it has not been possible to determine their identity at present. The ancient Vaṅgas might have, however, belonged to the Australoid ethnic stock and Austro-Asiatic linguistic family. Subsequently, they mixed with the Mediterraneans and Dravidian speaking peoples. It has been also pointed out that the ancient Vaṅgas though lost their racial, linguistic and cultural identity did certainly make basic contributions by giving their very name to the whole country now called Bengal and also to the composition of its people and culture as a whole.

Next to the Vaṅgas, a similar treatment has been made with regard to the Puṇḍras dealing with the derivations and meanings of the name, its early references, origins, settlements, and territories occupied by them, cultural patterns, ethnic affiliations and identity. It has been observed that the ancient Puṇḍras were perhaps Austric speakers belonging to the Australoid ethnic stock. In ancient times they were widely distributed over different parts of Bengal. Subsequently, they lost their position and became integrated into the Brahmanical cultural fold but relegated to a low social position living as serfs. It has been also shown that the Puṇḍras with the purpose of freeing themselves from the Brahmanical chain of servitude became converts to Islam in the medieval period. Even today the Puṇḍāris or the Puṇḍras or Pods or Puṇḍarikas are perhaps the surviving remnants of the ancient Puṇḍras of

Bengal.

Besides the Vaṅgas and the Puṇḍras, the Suhmas and the Rāḍhās have been also treated with all necessary details. While doing so, the Suhmas and the Rāḍhās have been treated separately in respect of all details. At the same time, it has been pointed out that the Suhmas in course of time became synonymous with the Rāḍhās. In fact, the name of Suhma came into disuse from the 12th century A.D. Accordingly, a detailed discussion has been made regarding the ancient Rāḍhās in respect of the different forms of the name and derivations including their meanings and identifications of the regions occupied by them, their early references, physical and cultural characteristics and identity. While doing so, a short discussion has also been made on Rāḍha - Varendrī, Rāḍha - Gaṅgā - rāshṭra, Prasi-Gaṅgārāḍi, etc. The surviving remnants of the ancient Suhmas and Rāḍhās have been also found out. It has been contended that the Suhmas and the Rāḍhās were originally Austro-Asiatic language speaking people affiliated to the Australoid ethnic stock, and the Suhma-deśa or the Rāḍha-deśa covered a wide geographical territory. In course of time, they mingled with many other peoples and lost their separate identity, but their remnants can be found amongst the present day aboriginal peoples like the Bhūmijas, the Lodhās, etc. It has been, however, observed that the Suhmas or Rāḍhās during the long process of their amalgam made veritable contributions to the composition of the Bengali people and culture.

Finally, a detailed treatment has been made on the Gauḍas and the Gauḍīyas with regard to the derivations and meanings of the name, its early references, movements and settlements, capital cities, the rise and fall, cultural characteristics, physical features, identity and contributions. It has been observed that the Gauḍas might have come to Bengal as mercenary soldiers of the ruling monarchs along with other foreign peoples and got themselves firmly settled, and the territory occupied by them came to be known after them. It has been also pointed out that the Gauḍas may be made allied to the Gonds, a tribal community, but gradually they elevated themselves by assimilating the

Indo-Aryan language and culture to the extent of becoming the torch-bearers of the Brahmanical religion. In Bengal, the Gauḍas next to the Vaṅgas made fundamental contributions in respect of heightening the basic norms of the Bengali culture, particularly, in the fields of writing and language and also in general behaviour patterns. In reality, the Gauḍas became so much mingled with other peoples and attained to such a great celebrity in all fields that the Bengali people and culture as a whole came to be earmarked as Gaudajana and Gaudasamskriti.

It has been found out that the ancient peoples of Bengal originally belonged to primitive tribal communities, and that it was only after their coming and settlement in Bengal that they had succeeded in raising their cultural status by their own attainments. As for instance, the Gauḍas may be affiliated to the Gonds, the Suhmas and Rādhās to the tribal communities of Chhotanāgpur like the Muṇḍās, the Bhūmijas, etc. Similarly, the Puṇḍras may be also affiliated to the tribal communities of Chhotanāgpur. As to the Vaṅgas, no definite clue could be traced regarding their affiliation to any extant primitive community. It is quite likely that the Vaṅgas also like all other ancient peoples belonged originally to a non-Aryan tribal community. From whatever little information has been derived about physical features and cultural characteristics of these peoples, it appears that they all mostly belonged to the Austro-Asiatic language speaking group and Australoid ethnic stock. This is also corroborated by the present basic cultural patterns and ethnic characteristics of their surviving remnants.

The grand cultural edifice built up by the ancient peoples of Bengal has been further replenished and augmented by a host of other peoples of diverse ethnic and cultural origins who infiltrated and settled in Bengal at different periods of our history. This would be evident from a discussion made in the next two chapters on the 'Extra-Indian' and 'Intra-Indian' tribal and non-tribal communities coming and settling down in Bengal from both determinable and indeterminable times.

Many tribal communities from in and outside India had infiltrated

and settled in Bengal, and in course of time, they were all brought within the very framework of Brahmanism. For a proper treatment of all these tribal movements into Bengal, they have been categorized under two broad heads, namely, the Extra-Indian and the Intra-Indian Tribal Communities, and they have been discussed in two separate Chapters. The Chapter Seven is solely devoted to treating the infiltrating extraneous tribal communities presenting their all relevant details with the primary purpose of projecting them as integrants of the composite Bengali people and also of assessing their respective contributions in the making of the Bengali people and culture.

Further, for a proper understanding of the movements of the extra-Indian tribal communities into Bengal, they have been discussed under four heads, i.e., those coming from West, North-east, North and South-east. Since these extraneous tribes coming into Bengal were many, only a selected number of tribes coming from North-eastern and Western directions have been treated with necessary details in the Chapter. Even the tribal communities moving from North-east into Bengal are also no less in number and therefore, only five important tribal groups moving from North-eastern/ North India have been selected for treatment. These are : the Kirātas, the Kambojas, the Mech and the Koch and the Rājvaṁśis. Of these tribes again, the last three are cognate tribal communities. Each of these tribal communities has been discussed with regard to derivations and meanings of their respective names, early literary references, original habitats and settlements in Bengal, life-patterns and cultural complexes including their religious behaviour patterns, physical features and ethnic affiliations and lastly identity or rather identification of each of these tribes with the extant tribal community/communities or caste group in Bengal. It has been also found out that all these tribal communities coming from northern or north-eastern directions were mostly Mongoloid peoples possessing various cultural traits. Of the selected tribes again, the most ancient one was of course the Kirāta tribal community which has been elaborately mentioned in early Indian records and their cultural characteristics described. Others moved into Bengal in later periods, and most of them

have been identified with the extant peoples. Their contributions in the composition of the Bengali people and culture have been also of great significance. It is, however, to be noted that many of them have been brought under the influence of Brahmanism and given a position in the caste hierarchy of Bengal. A few of course are yet to be absorbed completely within the Brahmanical fold.

Next to the tribal communities entering into Bengal from North and North-eastern directions, a hoast of tribes entered also into India through North-West, and in course of time they also moved and settled in Bengal. Of the many tribes entering into India from North-western direction, the most important ones discussed in the present Chapter are : the Yavanas, the Mlec̣chhas, the Śakas, the Khasas, the Hūnas, the Chīnas, the Ābhīras, the Turashkas, etc. All these extraneous tribal communities have been fully or partly described in the early Indian literary and epigraphic records. Materials furnished by all available records have been collated for the purpose of dealing with their respective original habitat, disposal, movement, ethnic features, cultural patterns, identity, etc. It has been found out that in most cases these foreign peoples coming from western direction have in course of time lost their respective ethnic and cultural distinctiveness including even their original nomenclature. This has been possible only because of their complete Brahmanization. In fact, most of these foreigners coming to Bengal from western India as mercenary soldiers got settled in the fertile land of Bengal and became mixed up with the local people in such a way that hardly any trace of their remnants can be traced.

Regarding the Yavanas and the ^{Mlec̣chhas} ~~Mlec̣chhas~~ it has been pointed out that they were originally two distinct tribal groups, but in course of time both the names came to be used to denote all foreigners in general. Even today all foreigners are called Yavanas or Mlec̣chhas. As to the Khasas, the Śakas, the Hūnas and the Chīnas, it may be noted that these peoples also became fully mixed with other peoples of the land and thereby lost their respective identity. Some tribes, like the

Ābhīras and the Turashkas could, however, retain their separateness to a certain extent. It has been also shown that the Śāstrakāras primarily adopted different measures for Brahmanizing these foreign peoples and placing them in the different orders of the Brahmanical caste hierarchy. Invariably, all these extraneous peoples have been relegated to low social positions in the Brahmanical social structure. For the purpose of absorbing them, the Brāhmaṇas created also many tales relating to their respective mythological origins and for placing them in the social hierarchy their origins have been mostly derived from Anulōma and Pratilōma unions. An analysis of the social positions attributed to these foreigners shows that their respective caste positions have been mostly determined by Pratilōma unions and unions of mixed castes. Sometimes the ascriptions of the social order to ~~these~~ peoples has been also made arbitrarily. Some of these foreigners have been also ascribed a higher social order, but no one has been given the status of Brāhmaṇa. and none has been affiliated to the Brāhmaṇa Caste. An attempt has been also made to show that the absorption of all the extra-Indian tribal communities have been fully achieved, and it is through their mingling with other peoples of the land that they have contributed most to the cultural build of Bengal. As to their racial affiliations, it has been pointed out that most of the extra-Indian tribes coming from the western direction were affiliated to the Mongoloid ethnic stock and a few, to the Mediterranean race. Accordingly, these extraneous tribal communities have largely contributed Mongoloid ethnic element in Bengal. The Yavanas, however, appear to have belonged to the Mediterranean racial group. Really speaking, in respect of both physical features and cultural characteristics contributions of all the extra-Indian tribal communities are most significant in the composition of the Bengali people and culture.

Besides the infiltration of various tribal peoples from outside the geographical frontiers of India and their movements and settlements in Bengal, there were many other tribal communities moving into Bengal from various quarters and directions of India, and in course of time they made permanent settlements in Bengal and mingled with other

peoples of the land in such a way as to lose their respective distinctiveness. These movements of the tribal communities from different quarters of the sub-continent and their comingling and subscriptions to the formation of the Bengali people and culture have been treated in Chapter Eight.

Intra-Indian tribal movements into Bengal have been discussed in the Chapter under different heads : Tribal peoples moving originally from (i) Southern and Central India; (ii) Western India, North-West, and Upper India; (iii) South-eastern India, (iv) North-eastern India, (v) Eastern India and (vi) Miscellaneous tribes. Since the number of the tribal communities infiltrating into Bengal from different quarters of India are too many, a selected number of tribes moving from each quarter or region has been treated in the present Chapter. The quarterwise categorization of the tribal communities, though not strictly region-wise, has been made only for convenience of their treatment. Many of the tribes again have been only cursorily dealt with.

Further, since the determination of the regions from which many tribal peoples who settled in Bengal and became employed in the state services in later periods has not been always possible, some of them have been discussed under the head "Miscellaneous Tribal Communities". Moreover, a detailed and critical treatment has been made only with regard to those tribal peoples who have contributed most to the ethnic affiliations and cultural formation of the Bengali people. Other tribal communities have been only briefly discussed. Again, since the tribal peoples coming from South-India made the most distinctive contributions to the formation of the Bengali people and culture, a detailed treatment has been made at the very outset of the Chapter.

Of the many tribal communities moving into Bengal from Central and Southern India, a particular treatment has been made of the Drāviḍas, Kārṇāṭakas, the Kulikas, the Mālavas and the Mallas, the Ambashthas, the Vaidyas and the Cholas. Each of these tribal communities has been treated with all details in regard to its derivations and meanings of its

name, early references, original settlements and movements, origins, their cultural patterns, ethnic affiliations, contributions and their surviving remnants.

Of some tribal communities moving from Western India into Bengal the most significant part has been no doubt played by the Lātas. Accordingly, the Lātas have been treated with all relevant details. Next to the tribal people from Western India, the movements of tribal communities from South-eastern India have been dealt with. Of the many tribes moving from that direction, only a selected few like the Āndhras, the Kalingas including the Utkalas and the Uḍras have been treated. Besides, the tribal communities coming to Bengal from Eastern India-like the Māgadhas, the Kikāṭas and the Āṅgas have been also discussed. Of the tribal communities moving from North-eastern India, a particular treatment of the Prāgjyotiṣas and the Kāmarūpas have been made. Lastly, the miscellaneous tribal peoples like the Chāṇḍālas and the Namaśūdras, the Medas, the Chāṭas and the Bhāṭas have been also discussed.

It has been submitted that the tribal communities from various parts of the sub-continent infiltrated into Bengal under various circumstances, and in course of time they became permanent dwellers of Bengal and mingled with other peoples. Since these tribal peoples coming from different quarters of the sub-continent are numerous, only a selected number has been discussed with all information available from different sources. The study of these tribal communities under different regional heads tends to show as to how each of them brought its own regional ethnic and cultural characteristics with them and also as to how their ethnic and cultural bearings were all integrated into the ethnic and cultural setup of the Bengali people. Since the tribal people from Central and Southern India played the most vital role in the ethnic and cultural moulding of the Bengali people no less than five distinct major communities have been treated with all necessary details. All these five tribal communities belonging to different ethnic and cultural groups made their respective contributions in moulding the Bengali people and culture, though they were all originally non-Aryan primitive tribal peoples. They

have been fully or partly assimilated within the Brahmanical cultural framework and some of them could even elevate themselves to the high Brahmanical caste order. Others, however, have been long continuing as low caste people.

Similarly, many other peoples came from Western and South-eastern India and integrated themselves within the ethnic and cultural setup of Bengal. The Lāṭas from Western India became fully assimilated with the people of Bengal, and they were largely responsible for contributing such ethnic and cultural traits which have made the people of Bengal and Gujarāt alike in many respects. Of the people coming from South-eastern region, the Āndhras were no doubt very closely akin to the Drāviḍas and the people of South India. But more significantly, the Drāviḍas have been mentioned along with other peoples of foreign extractions. The Āndhras have been, however, relegated to a very low position and placed on a par with the Chaṇḍālas and others. An explanation of this kind of treatment of the Āndhras by the Brahmanical society has been also given. The Kaliṅgas and others were again allied with the Āndhras. The most westerly neighbour of the Bengali people were of course the Māgadhas and the Aṅgas of the present state of Bihar. An attempt has been made to show that the Māgadhas and the Aṅgas were also of tribal origins. They also made frequent infiltrations into Bengal and settlements therein. Their remnants are still to be found. Naturally, their contributions were also considerable. Besides, a number of tribal peoples from the Chhotanāgpur region in Bihar also came to Bengal in search of their livelihood. From the North-eastern region the most ancient tribal peoples coming to Bengal were, of course, the Prāgjyotiṣas who also made significant contributions.

Besides all these tribal communities coming from different regions of India, some tribes under the heads "Miscellaneous Tribal Communities" have been also treated. It is not known for certain from which particular region or direction they infiltrated into Bengal. Some of them were employed in the state services, and in course of time they became permanent inhabitants of Bengal. Ultimately, they were all Brahmanized

and given a place in the Brahmanical social hierarchy. Many of them have mingled with other peoples in such a way that they lost their distinctiveness and others are still continuing with their tribal names. Some of them, however, succeeded in elevating their position and becoming Brāhmaṇas like the Chāṭas and the Bhāṭas and others like the Namaśūdras have started claiming Brahmanahood in recent years.

A review of all these tribal communities coming from different quarters of India made in the Chapter shows that they all belonged to different ethnic and cultural groups, and in Bengal all of them mingled largely with other peoples and thereby contributed their respective ethnic and cultural elements in the formation of the Bengali people and culture. It has been also shown that all these tribal peoples became fully assimilated ^{and} incorporated within the Brahmanical cultural fold and thereby they became largely Brahmanized.

Since all the tribal peoples who came from outside Bengal were fully or partly Brahmanized, it is imperative to ^{have} an idea about the Aryans in India and Aryanization or Brahmanization of Bengal and also to know as to how and under what forms all those tribal peoples were absorbed within the Brahmanical social framework. Accordingly, these subject-matters have been treated in the next two Chapters, Nine and Ten, i.e., Aryans and 'Brahmanization of Bengal' and 'Brahmanization and Castes' of Bengal.

In Chapter Nine, a short discussion on the so-called Aryan problem in India has been made. In this connection, an attempt has been made to deal with the problems relating to the very existence of the people called the Aryans and their culture. For this purpose, archaeological evidences relating to the so-called Aryans in India have been also examined. Besides, a reference to the migration of the Aryans from outside has been also made. It has been found out that in fact, there is hardly any concrete evidence regarding the very existence of the Aryans in and outside India. There was, however, a group of people speaking the Aryan language. In that case, the term Aryan may be accepted as a

purely linguistic one having no relationship with any race or culture. It has been generally upheld that the culture represented in the Rigveda belongs to that of the Aryans. There were other peoples who were non-Vedic and non-Aryans in general. In course of time, there took place an admixture of the Vedic and the non-Vedic peoples, and as a result, the original Aryan religion and culture as reflected to in the Rigveda passed through several marked stages of development of which three are very prominent, i.e., Vedism, Brahmanism and Hinduism.

Of these three stages, the earliest one is of course Vedism which includes not only the religious behaviour patterns of the so-called early Aryans, but also their culture and general ways of life. The second stage, i.e., Brahmanism grew out of Vedism. This is reflected to in the later Vedic texts when cultural acculturation with the non-Aryans began and new ideas developed. Further fusion and mingling with the non-Vedic and non-Brahmanical people and culture began resulting in the emergence of so-called Hinduism out of Brahmanism. An attempt has been also made to give a definition of Hinduism and explain its relation with Brahmanism. This co-called Hinduism is best reflected to in the later texts, more particularly in the epics and the Purāṇas.

It has been pointed out that the Aryans originally lived in the region of the Sapta-Sindhus, and it was only after the development of Brahmanism that there were movements of those very peoples towards different directions of India. In this connection, a particular reference has been made to the Brahmanization of Eastern India, more particularly of Bengal. While doing so, it has been found out that the early peoples of Bengal have been hardly mentioned in the early Vedic texts. It was only in the later Vedic texts and still in a later period that the people of Bengal have generally been considered to be outside the orbit of Aryandom. Accordingly, in the Dharmasūtras and many other texts, Bengal including other outlying countries have been regarded as impure lands, and an Aryan traversing that region had to perform purificatory rites. Gradually, however, the situation changed, and the Aryans started infiltrating into Eastern India and by the time of the emergence of

Jainism and Buddhism Bengal appears to have been Aryanized or Brahmanized. In this connection, the Bengali people as represented in the Later Vedic and Sūtra texts, Buddhist and Jaina texts, epics, etc., have been referred to. Not only that, even the coming of the Brāhmaṇas and their settlements in different parts of Bengal as can be gleamed from a large number of epigraphic records have been also dealt with. It has been found out that in this matter of migration of the Brāhmaṇas into Bengal, both the kings and private persons took great initiatives by offering them lands and other gifts for settlements and also for their living and observing their rituals and worships. In this connection, a discussion has been also made on the traditional Ādiśūra legend and Brahmanization of Bengal. With the permanent settlement of the Brāhmaṇas diverse attempts were made for the spread of Brahmanical religion and culture. The Brāhmaṇas made also vigorous endeavours to assimilate or incorporate all non-Brahmanical or non-Aryan peoples of Bengal within the Brahmanical religious and social frame-work.

In this connection, a discussion has been also made on the vehicles by which the Brahmanical culture was spread in Bengal. These are Brahmanical language and scripts, Brahmanical names and surnames, place names, etc. The Brahmanization of Bengal which began from the later Vedic period continued unabated through different periods of history at least upto 12th Century A.D. It has been also submitted that Buddhism and Jainism as protestant movements against Brahmanical ritualism emerged in Eastern India, and the teachers of both the religions came to Bengal for the propagation of their respective faiths. The Brāhmaṇas, the torch-bearers of the Vedic religion and culture, also could no longer afford to keep Bengal outside the pale of Āryāvarta or Brahmavarta and started infiltrating into Bengal and made settlements therein. Not only that even strenuous efforts were made by the Brāhmaṇas themselves to bring the non-Aryan peoples of Bengal within the Brahmanical cultural fold, and in course of time Bengal was fully Brahmanized. But this was done not by uprooting the indigenous culture of Bengal. Even some important ancient tribal communities like the Puṇḍras and others have been also given recognition as Kshātrīyas, perhaps because they happened to be ruling

chieftains. At the same time, those very peoples were degraded to a lower social position because of their non-adherence to Brahmanical rites and practices. Again, many tribal communities have been brought within the fold of Brahmanical culture by affiliating them to one or other castes created by Anulōma and Pratilōma unions. But in many cases, these accounts of the Bengali people and caste origins have been found to be fictitious. Further, the employment of the Brāhmaṇas as officiating priests for the performance of all socio-religious rites and practices by the people has been always made the primary criterion for the incorporation of the non-Aryan tribal communities within the Brahmanical fold. However, all the indigenous tribal peoples could not be fully brought within the orbit of Brahmanism, and a few of them still persist on occupying a very low social position. Further, some of the Brāhmaṇas for more and more material benefits engaged themselves also as officiating priests of these communities, and as a result, they had to lose their own social position. It has been, however, shown that this Brahmanization of Bengal was not achieved by uprooting the prevailing indigenous culture in Bengal. There was hardly any forcible application or imposition of Brahmanical culture on the existing cultural patterns. On the other hand, the Brāhmaṇas made a wonderful rapprochement with the existing peoples of Bengal resulting in cultural acculturation of remarkable uniqueness.

In fact, what Brahmanism achieved in Brahmanizing the original cultural components of Bengal is primarily superficial, and if the Brahmanical plaster is removed wholly or partly, the true nature and character of the Bengali people and culture become revealed. This contention becomes fully borne out by an analysis of diverse elements, traits and complexes of the Bengali culture which have through centuries of Brahmanical influence most successfully retained their original form and character that are basically non-Aryan or non-Brahmanical. In reality, many non-Aryan cultural elements of Bengal have no doubt been Brahmanized, but only superficially, and Brahmanism is apparently seen glaring only on the surface. Therefore, a deep and penetrating insight reveals the true nature and character of the Bengali culture which is

essentially non-Aryan or non-Brahmanical. But Brahmanization has brought about a social convulsion on an unprecedented scale resulting in the creation and recreation of new caste orders. Accordingly, an attempt has been made in the next Chapter to deal with Brahmanization and incorporation of the ancient non-Aryan tribal peoples of Bengal within the Brahmanical social hierarchy.

In order to find out as to how the various tribal communities of Bengal were Brahmanized and placed in various graded social positions and caste orders within the Brahmanical domain, an attempt has been made to deal with castes and caste stratifications of Bengal in Chapter Ten (Brahmanization and Castes). The main purpose of this discourse has been to trace the tribal affiliations of the various caste groups of Bengal. This discussion on castes of Bengal within the Brahmanical fold has been made on the basis of relevant texts dealing with castes, more particularly those which treat castes of Bengal in particular. While doing so, references have been also made to some medieval and modern works dealing with castes.

At the very outset, a particular reference to the non-existence of four traditional castes in Bengal has been made and naturally, a discussion has been also done to explain the said absence. Next to this, a discourse has been made on the Saṅkara and Vrātya theories in respect of caste creations in Bengal. Further, castes of Bengal have been elaborately treated in the two Purāṇas which were perhaps compiled in Bengal. These two Purāṇas are the Bṛhaddharma-purāṇa and Brahmavaivarta-purāṇa dated at about 12th century A.D. Besides, valuable information regarding castes of Bengal has been also derived from the Dāyabhāga of Jimūtavāhana, Prāyaścitta-Prakarana of Bhavadevabhāṭṭa, Vallācharita, Parāśara-saṁhitā, etc. Besides frequent references to castes of Bengal and their respective social positions are also to be found mentioned in various inscriptions discovered from Bengal. Accordingly, materials furnished by all these documents have been discussed in this Chapter.

The caste stratification as described in the Bṛihaddharma-purāṇa and Brahavaivarta-purāṇa have been discussed in details, and a comparative study of these two accounts has been also made. Next to these, a discussion has been made on the accounts to be found in the Parāśarapaddhati quoted in the Śavdakalpadruma and in some later Saṁhitās like the Ushanasa-Saṁhitā and the Jātimālā. Moreover, the classifications of castes of Bengal as made by the authors of the 19th and 20th centuries like Risely and Bhattacharyya have been also fully treated pointing out all sorts of agreements and disagreements in respect of various caste orders. Next to these, it has been pointed out that most of the castes of Bengal have arisen out of Anulōma and Pratilōma unions. Naturally so, a discussion has been also made on these two kinds of unions and their results thereof. From these discussions, it has been possible to find out or determine the origins of the various caste orders of Bengal and their respective social positions. Accordingly, a discussion on the caste formations in Bengal has been also made. Lastly, a discussion has been made on the various methods adopted by the Brahmanas for the incorporation of the tribes of Bengal within the Brahmanical fold. In this connection, a comparative study has been made of the Brahmanical and modern methods or approaches of tribal absorption or incorporation.

It has been found out that most of the tribal communities of Bengal have been incorporated within the Brahmanical fold. As a result of this incorporation there has been ethnic and cultural amalgam in Bengal for a long time past. Large scale mingling and admixture become evident from the very fact that there is hardly any ethnic difference between various high and low caste peoples of Bengal. Similarly, an analysis of the cultural characteristic of Brahmanism or more popularly of Hinduism of Bengal reveals large-scale deviations from the orthodox Brahmanical culture of Upper India and bears many cultural traits which are strictly speaking non-Aryan or non-Brahmanical. This would be made clear from the treatment of this subject-matter made in the next concluding Chapter.

The concluding Chapter (Chapter Eleven) contains discussions on ethnic miscegenations and cultural amalgam that have been continuing for a long time past in Bengal. It has been pointed out that the heterogeneous ethnic and multifarious cultural entity of the Bengali people has been amply borne out by both historical and ethnological investigations. No information is, however, available regarding the earliest peoples or the prehistoric peoples of Bengal. Remains of the physical existence of the man belonging to the early pre-historic period are no doubt absent, but there are cultural relics in the form of stone tools (palaeoliths, microliths, and neoliths) discovered from different parts of Bengal. But no prehistoric settlement site has yet been found out in Bengal excepting one microlithic site at Bīrbhānpur in the district of Burdwan. Even the early prehistoric stone tools discovered so far are only stray and surface finds, and these certainly do not speak anything about the physical existence of their authors.

It is, however, from the Chalcolithic period that human skeletal remains have been available, the study of which has given a rough idea about the Chalcolithic man of Bengal. In this connection, a particular reference has been made to archaeological discoveries at Pāṇḍurājārdhibi wherein certain burials (complete, fractional and urn) have been discovered. But since the finds were meagre, no definite conclusion can be drawn about the Chalcolithic people as such. It may be, however, said that the people of Pāṇḍurājārdhibi were both long and medium headed, tall and medium statured and in one case the nose was broad. It has been also found out that there was no ethnic homogeneity even amongst the Chalcolithic people of Bengal. References have been also made to the discovery of human remains at the early historical sites at Rājbadidāṅgā and Haraipur. Since the archaeological discoveries of human remains in Bengal are very scanty, no definite conclusion can be drawn. Accordingly, a discussion has been concentrated on the ancient peoples of Bengal as described in the early literary texts, inscriptions and other later works, and attempts have been made to draw therefrom certain conclusions regarding the ethnic characters and racial affiliations of those peoples.

The treatment of the early peoples of Bengal has been made under certain categories as described in Chapters Four, Five, Six, Seven and Eight of the treatise as under the headings : The Aborigines, Indigenes, Ancient Peoples, Extraneous and Intraneous Tribal Communities. Attempts have been also made to determine the racial characteristics and affiliations of all these peoples from whatever meagre literary or epigraphic data are available. Not only their ethnic features have been presented, even their cultural characteristics have been treated as far as possible. It has been found out that the bedrock of the Bengali people and culture was formed by the non-Aryan peoples belonging to diverse cultural and ethnic groups. This was the picture of Bengal prior to the infiltrations of the so-called Aryans represented by the Brāhmaṇas coming from Upper India into Bengal. Accordingly, Aryanization or Brahmanization of the land and people of Bengal has been discussed in Chapters Nine and Ten. It has been shown as to how Bengal was Brahmanized and all non-Aryan peoples living in the land were gradually brought within the Brahmanical cultural framework. These Brāhmaṇas or the so-called Aryans introduced also new ethnic and cultural elements in Bengal. Even the Brāhmaṇas themselves passed through considerable ethnic and cultural amalgamation with other peoples. While dealing with this subject a particular discussion has been made on ethnic and cultural characteristics of the Aryans in Bengal and lastly, it has been pointed out that they even mingled with the non-Aryan peoples of Bengal who were mostly brought within the domain of Brahmanical culture. This has been discussed in Chapter Ten wherein attempts have been made to show as to how various non-Aryan tribal peoples were transformed into Brahmanial caste-orders.

In Section B of the Chapter an attempt has been made to point out the ethnic and cultural entity of the Bengali people in spite of a large scale miscegenation and cultural amalgam of diverse peoples infiltrating into Bengal from remote antiquity. This has been done by an ethnological study of the present day people of Bengal. While doing so a discussion has been made on the anthropometric measurements taken by Risley and his conclusions derived thereof. A discussion has been also made on the

criticism of Risley's findings made by the subsequent investigators. It has been found out that the criticism of Risley's findings made so far does not actually invalidate his basic stand in regard to the ethnic composition of the Bengali people. Next to this, somatic measurements made on the people of Bengal on the basis of the caste stratifications by several investigators have been also studied and the major ethnic types in different social orders found out. In this connection, a discussion has been made on an ingenuous theory of Prof. Chattopadhyay. Finally, diverse ethnic elements in the population of Bengal have been found out and their respective movements into Bengal have been also outlined. It has been accordingly concluded that the presence of diverse ethnic elements in the Bengali population is incontrovertible. In this connection, a reference has been made to the observation of Prof. Keith with regard to India and it has been concluded that Bengal was not a land of wilderness and that all racial elements found at present have been due to infiltrations from outsiders. On the other hand, there might have been evolution of heterogeneous ethnic strains on the very soil of Bengal. Further, the presence of diverse ethnic elements in Bengali population may be explained by referring to miscegenation of peoples belonging to different ethnic stocks. In fact, in Bengal there has been a wonderful amalgam of heterogeneous ethnic strains and the result has been the ethnic composition of the Bengali people of today.

In Section C, a discussion has been made on the amalgam of cultures on the soil of Bengal. This has been amply borne out by ethnological and historical investigations into various traits and complexes of the Bengali culture. While making this study, references have been made to the surviving cultural remnants of the different groups of people who settled in Bengal like the Austro-Nishādas, the Drāviḍas and Mediterranean cultural traits and the Kirāta cultural elements. Finally, a discussion has been made on the impact of the Aryan or Brahmanical culture on this fundamental base of Bengali culture. Next to this, the impact of Islam and Western culture has been also outlined.

It has been found out that Bengal actually possesses a tremendous absorbing capacity and vitality of her own. The people of Bengal have in reality shown great ingenuity of making all that they did borrow and adopt as their own. This has given the Bengali culture a tremendous force, vitality, complexity and refinement. This is what happened in the past and is happening even today. Even at present, Bengal is passing through a clash between traditionalism and modernism. This clash again has brought about tremendous changes in Bengal's approaches to life and thought, and it is still continuing and shall continue. From indeterminable time Bengal's cultural progress has been the result of an unending process of revolts rapproachments, assimilations and synthesis. Through long period of history, Bengal created a synthetic culture by adaptations and assimilations of all that came in, which supplied the rest of India new inspirations, thought and values of life. More than any other parts of India, it is in Bengal that such a grand ethnic and cultural synthesis has been produced. It is in this land that so many streams of people bearing diverse ethnic and cultural traits through long centuries of prehistory and history slowly and steadily composed a well-marked people and an integrated culture which is known today by the specific name, Bengali People and Culture.

The present ethno-historical reconstruction of the people and culture of Bengal along with her geographical and cultural perspectives has been made strictly on the basis of authentic materials derived from both primary and secondary sources pertaining to archaeological, historical, ethnological, anthropological, geographical and other disciplines. All references to various source materials have been listed in accordance with the numbers given in the body of the text and appended at the end of each Chapter. Besides, a bibliography of all primary and secondary sources have been added at the end of the text. For convenience, a list of abbreviations of all works mentioned in references and bibliography has been also appended. In the list of references to various works only abbreviations have been used.

The present dissertation is indeed a voluminous one because of the nature of the subject-matter dealt with. Certain repetitions and elaborations of the discourse have been inevitable in a work of such a magnitude. A few of these repetitions could have been avoided, but most of them are more or less indispensable. Further, there are no doubt certain glaring omissions and commissions which also could not be avoided. Moreover, there are many variations in respect of spellings, more particularly in respect of place names and other words, such as, Hugli/Hooghly/Hughli, Gujarāt/Gujrāt, Pāhārpur/Pāhādpur, Bāngarh/Bāngad etc. and also Prākṛit/Prākṛita, tantricism/tantrism, etc. There are also several variations with regard to diacritical marks. Several typing mistakes could not be also avoided. There are many other shortcomings in the present dissertation. In spite of all these drawbacks including language deficiency, it is submitted that sincere and honest efforts have been made to present as far as possible a full-proof dissertation. Since the work is to be hurriedly completed, some of these shortcomings and drawbacks could not be avoided, for which an apology is tendered.

The present research project was undertaken and completed under the UGC Teacher Fellowship grant-in-aid for which indebtedness is gratefully acknowledged. This dissertation is the result of strenuous work stretching for several years. A research work of this magnitude could not have been completed without the divine grace and blessings of Mā-Mahāmāyā of the temple at Karṇagad in the district of Midnapur and of the revered Gurudeva Sri V.Raghunath whose unfailing and ungrudging showering of favour and unmitigated encouragement have brought forth the present thesis. Blessings of father Late Nalinaksha Chattopadhyay and mother Sm. Anandamayī Devi have been the perennial source of inspiration.

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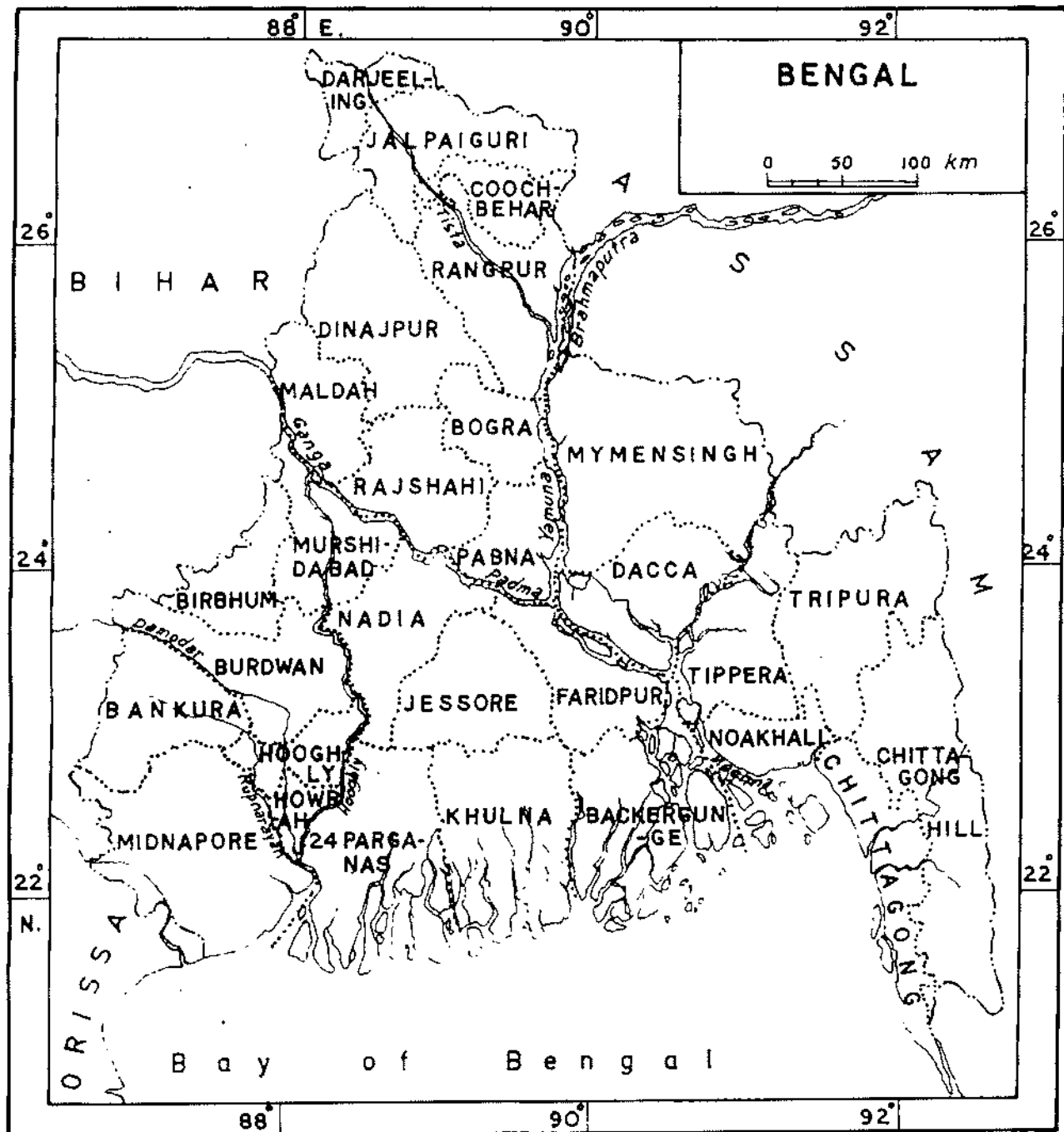
pursued at all excepting the indomitable help rendered by Prof.Das, for which indebtedness knows no bound. The research work was mostly carried out in the National Library, Asiatic Society Library, Sahitya-Parishat Library and Raja N.L.Khan Women's College Library. Grateful thanks are due to the Librarians of these Libraries who have been always very helpful in extending all facilities with regard to consultation of books in their respective Libraries.

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CHAPTER - ONE

INTRODUCING BENCAL

Map. NO. 1.



CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCING BENGAL

Undivided Bengal comprising today's West Bengal and Bāṅglādeś is indeed a geographical, ethnological and cultural entity. The territories over which the Bengali speaking people inhabit today form one linguistic unit. Regarding the geographical entity of Bengal there are certain natural peripheries separating her from other neighbouring states. Ethnically, the Bengalees do not certainly belong to one particular racial stock. They possess, however, certain physical features which are quite distinct from other neighbouring people. Bengal has a wide belt of territory bounded on the north by the Himalayas, on the West and East by the states of Bihar and Assam and on the South-west and South by Orissa and the Bay of Bengal. Over this wide tract of land there is indeed a distinct stamp of oneness in respect of language, physical features and behaviour patterns.

The English expression Bengal is indeed a derivation from Vaṅga and Vaṅgāla. Vaṅga occurs in early literary records as the name of both the country and the people inhabiting it¹. Vaṅgāla is also mentioned in both literary and epigraphic records as the name of a part of ancient Bengal². In the Tabaqāt-i-Nāsirī and Tārikh-i-Firuzshāhi, the regions attached to the towns of Sātgaōñ (Hugli'), Sonārgaōñ (East of Dacca) and Lakhnauti (Gaur) are called Diyaṛ-i-Bang, perhaps a verbal translation of the old term Baṅgadeś³. But the word Bengal or Baṅgālah does not occur in the Tabaqāt-i-Nāsirī or on Muhammadan coins, not even in the Tārikh-i-Firuzshāhi⁴. It is, however, in a passage of Ghazal by Hafiz that the form Baṅgālah occurs⁵. But soon the nomenclature Diyaṛ-i-Bang became obsolete and instead, we have the name Vaṅgāla⁶. The complexities in respect of all these terms have been to a certain extent clarified by Abul Fazl in his Āin-i-Akbarī⁷. He specifically stated that the original name of Bengal was Baṅg which is undoubtedly a variation of Vaṅga. It has been further said that the former rulers of

the country raised mounds measuring 10 yards in height and 20 yards in breadth throughout the province. This raised heap of earth has been called Āl⁸. Thus to the original name Baṅg the suffix Āl was added. The word Āl is again a derivation from the Sanskrit term Āli meaning dike⁹. Āli denotes also a mound of earth or ridge for crossing ditches dividing fields and the like¹⁰. With this suffix Āl, the name Baṅgālāh took its form.

It is thus evident that the term Bāṅgālāh or Bāṅglā (Bengālā) has been a transformed version of the words Vaṅga and Vaṅgāla. The Muslim writers in the Mughal period used the term Bāṅglā(Beṅgalā) to denote the deltaic regions of the Ganges and the Brahmaputra and the region from Garhi (Teliāgarhi in Bihar) to Chittagong in the South-east¹¹. All these variant forms like Bāṅgālāh and Bāṅglā used by the Muslim writers have been transformed into Bengala by the Portuguese and Bengal by the English people¹². The term Bengal is thus the anglicized name of the country inhabited by the Bengalees (i.e., Bengali speaking people) who call their land Bāṅglā or Bāṅgālā. This Bengal today is divided into two distinct regions and states which have been named as West Bengal and Bāṅglādeś.

This land par excellence of the Bengali people possessing a geographical, linguistic and cultural entity emerged as a political or administrative unit, more particularly from the time of the Muslim and the British regimes. Subā-Bāṅglā was indeed an administrative unit of the Muslim rulers¹³. It was this Subā Bāṅglā that became Bengal as the presidency of the Eastern region of India under the British rule.

In spite of Bengal's geographical and cultural entity, her political or administrative boundaries have undergone considerable changes from time to time. In the early period of the Muslim rule, the administrative boundary of Bengal extended from Garhi (i.e., Teliāgarhi in Bihar) to Chittagong in the South-east¹⁴. With the extension of the political power of the Muslim rulers Bengal included more neighbouring areas of the present states of Bihar, Orissa and Assam.

An account of the territorial units of Subā-Bāṅglā may be gleaned from the records of Todar Mall's revenue settlements which speak of her western boundary as corresponding to a straight line drawn from Garhi fort north of Rājmaḥal to Chittua (North-east of Medinīpur or Midnapur)¹⁵. Rājmaḥal has been aptly described in the Muslim accounts as the very door to Bengal. The Chittua Parganāh, however, formed the South-west boundary of Bengal and Orissa¹⁶. The regions west of this line were collectively called Jhārkhand or Jungle areas. The territories which formed the Western and South-western and southern fringes of Bengal were : (1) Tandāh (Murśidābād), (2) Sharifābād (south of Murśidābād to Burdwan), (3) Sulaimānābād (Nadiā, Burdwan, Huglī), (4) Sātgāoñ (Huglī, Howrah, Calcutta, 24-Parganās and south of Nadiā) and (5) Māndāran (the junction of Rūpanārāyaṇa and the Dāmōdar with the Huglī river)¹⁷. During the reign of Alauddin Hussain Shah who ruled over Bengal from 1498 to 1521 A.D. five Sirkārs or districts like Tandāh, Sharifābād, Sulaimānābād, Sātgāoñ and Māndāran formed western portion of Bengal¹⁸. In course of time, Bengal's Eastern boundary covered areas lying further to the East along with the extension of the political suzerainty of the Muslim rulers. Further, in the time of Akbar, the Sirkārs of Sylhet and Purnea, the Parganāh of Ākmahal (Rājmaḥal) and the famous pass of Teliāgarhi in the Santal Parganās formed integral parts of the Subāh of Bengal¹⁹. This was the administrative jurisdiction of Bengal during the time of Akbar.

The name Bengal (Bāṅglā of the Muslims) was given by the English people to delineate the Eastern region of British India. The wide extent of Subāh Bāṅglā was, however, considerably diminished in course of time on the basis of geographical, linguistic and cultural homogeneity. Bengal under the British rule was bounded by the Himalayas on the North, Bihar on the West, Orissa on the South-west, Assam on the East and the Bay of Bengal on the South. This area lies roughly between 27°9' and 20°50' North latitude and 86°35' and 92°30' East longitude²⁰.

Before 1947, Bengal of British India included the present states of West Bengal and Bāṅglādeś (previously East Pakistan). In 1947 two independent states - India and Pakistan emerged out of the undivided British India.

According to the Indian Independence Act of 1947 the subcontinent of British India was partitioned into India and Pakistan, and as a corollary, Bengal was divided into East Pakistan and West Bengal, the former mostly including East Bengal and parts of Assam. Again, in 1971 an independent state assuming the name of Bāṅglādeś covering the whole of Eastern Pakistan came into existence.

The total area of West Bengal is 34,000 sq.miles (88,000 k.m.²), and Bāṅglādeś with the major portion of Sylhet district from Assam is a little over 55,000 sq.miles (1,42,000 k.m.²).²¹ Thus Bengal before 1947, most probably, covered the area containing 89,000 sq.miles, i.e., 2,30,000 k.m.². Bengal's peripheries before 1947 are well-marked by nature in such a way as to establish its distinct geographical entity. This would be evident from a consideration of its natural frontiers.

On the North, Bengal stretches up to the Himalayas reaching the fringes of the states of Sikkim, Bhutān and Nepāl. Towards the South, the whole coast-line running up to Burma is washed by the waves of the Bay of Bengal. In the South-western direction the Mahānadī delta, the lower reaches of the Suvarṇarekhā and the other nearby rivers serve as the boundary between Bengal and Orissa. To the East, it extends up to Tripurā, Goālpārā, Sylhet and Cāchār and the mountainous regions known as Gāro, Khāsi and Jayantiyā hills of the State of ~~Meghalaya~~^{Assam}. In the West, Bengal extends upto the districts of Mānbhūm, Santal Parganās and Purnea, lying in the Santal Parganā ranges. The dense forest-areas extending from South-west Bengal upto the Chhotanāgpur hills and also the passes of Sikrigully form the natural boundary of Bengal on the West. Thus forests, mountains, hills and rivers play a distinct role in forming the natural boundaries of Bengal. This will be evident from a discussion on the principal landmarks of the physical features of Bengal in the following pages as may be gleamed from hoary antiquity to the present day by an analytical perusal of all records lying at our disposal.

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CHAPTER - TWO

PHYSICAL LANDSCAPE

CHAPTER TWO

PHYSICAL LANDSCAPE

The physical landscape of Bengal presents unity and integrity in the midst of diversity and variety. Bengal surrounded by mountains, hills, forests and jungles on her three sides, western, northern and eastern and washed by the sea on south is indeed a large deltaic region. The whole of Bengal as such is a geographical unit, a filled up depression surrounded by a Archaean to Tertiary hard rock relief on her three sides¹(Map, 2).

1. Hills and Rocks

Bengal is adorned on her North by the highest mountain system in the world, the Himalayas with its majestic peaks, the Mt. Everest (29,040 feet) and the Kanchanjunga (28,146 feet). In Darjeeling area, Tertiary rocks (soft massive North sandstones) occur as narrow bands along the foot of the Himalayas. Further north, occur Gondwanas (sandstones, quartzites, shales and beds of friable anthracite coal) overlain by a thousand feet of slates, phyllites and quartzite. The higher slopes are formed of hard gneisses and mica-schists².

On West, besides the Chhotanāgpur and Rājmaḥal hills, are to be mentioned the hills like the Bihārīnāth and Śūśūniā in the district of Bāñkurā, and Pañchet, Ayodhyā or Bāgmūḍi and Kalmā range with peaks like Gorāburi hill (2,200' - 2,000' feet) in the district of Purulia³. This range forms the watershed of the Suvarṇarekhā and Kāsāi rivers. In western part of West Bengal runs a belt of Archaean gneisses and schists along with intrusive granites⁴. The town of Bāñkurā stands near the eastern edge of this belt. Accordingly, the Western part of Bengal covering the whole of the district of Purulia and parts of the districts of Midnapur and Bāñkurā are formed of Archaean-Dharwarian rocks containing a multitude of granitoid and schistose crystallised, at least 900 million years ago⁵. The Śūśūniā (439.5 meters i.e., 1,442 feet) hill in Bāñkurā district having this type of physiography is older than the Himalayas. Harder rocks like granites or gneisses or quartzites are to be found in the Śūśūniā hill. The inliers

of the basalt trap have been traced in the neighbourhood of Nalhāṭi in Bīrbhūm district⁶. Sedimentary rocks of the Gondwana system with their characteristic coal-beds and sandstones form the southern part of Rāṇīguṇj⁷.
 West district⁶. Sedimentary rocks of the Gondwana system with their character-
 and istic coal-beds and sandstones form the southern part of Rāṇīguṇj⁷.
 East

Massive laterites also contribute to the formation of some of the high hills in this tract. The western part of Bengal is indeed a shelf of laterite old alluvium. Laterite beds cover the entire region northward from Orissa through Midnapur, Bāṅkūrā, Burdwan, Bīrbhūm to the Rājmaḥal hills and eastern portion of the Chhotanāgpur plateau⁸. The western part of Bengal is indeed a shelf of laterite old alluvium. It may be presumed that the lateritic Rādhā tract of West Bengal was the last deltaic land - formation developed in the mio-geosyncline of the Nāgā-Lushāi orogen⁹. The eastern region covering the Nāgā, Lushāi, Gāro and Khāsi hills are also formed of Archaean rocks, but less compact and much younger than those of the West¹⁰. Further, in the East erosion has given rise to many ridges and valleys.

Thus Bengal is surrounded by mountains and hills on her three sides. The geologists think that the range of the Himalayas to the north of Bengal, specially Darjeeling, is younger than the western Archaean belt of Chhotanāgpur and Rājmaḥal in the history of the evolution of land-formation¹¹. The Archaean belt of Western Bengal is again a continuation of the Gondwana land which is said to be the most ancient surface of the world¹². Further north of the Himalayan range of Darjeeling runs the Gondwana rock range which is also to be found towards East in the Gāro, Lushāi and Khāsi hills. Though much younger than those of the West, sedimentary rocks are the later formations caused by the process of sedimentation resulting from the action of torrential rains and continuous high wind¹³.

II. Forest

Like mountains and hills, the role of forests and jungles in the history and culture of Bengal is no less significant. Forests cover the northern, eastern, southern and western portions of Bengal. In other words, it may be said that the alluvial plains of Bengal are surrounded by forests. At the foot of the Himalayas, the Tarai region is covered with dense forests. This Tarai area covering Jalpāiguri North district and stretching about a quarter of the 2,000 sq.miles (5,180km.) is clothed mainly by valuable Śāl (Shorea robusta) trees. As the mountain slopes down to the foothills, the density of forests becomes more and more glaring.

The plains in the district of Jalpāiguri known as Dooars (duār, dooār) also abound with forests. The Dooār forests densely wooded with ever green vegetation are the resorts of wild animals including the Royal Bengal Tiger, rhinoceros , elephants, antelopes and different species of snakes including the python. To the east, Khāsi-Jayantiā, Gāro and Lushāi hill areas are also covered with forests. So also is the Madhurjungle in Dacca Division.

To the West, wide forest areas known as Jhārkhand or Jungle areas lying on west of the Bhāgīrathī extend from the bank of the Dāmōdar in Rādhā region through West Midnapur, West Bāñkurā, West Bīrbhūm and West Puruliā districts up to the Chhotanāgpur hills. In the Mughal period this entire hilly jungle area including the northern portion of Dumkā in Bīrbhūm forest region was known West as Jhārkhand. The same area formed the district called Jañgal-mahal during the British period in 1805¹⁴. In this triangular zone, all forests lie more or less scattered in innumerable small patches between latitude 21°75' to 24°33' North and longitude 85°70' to 87°80' East¹⁵. Thus on West, forests are primarily located in the laterite belt. The laterite Rādhā tract is largely covered by Śāl (Shorea-robusta), Mahuā (Madhuca latifolia or bassica latifolia) and Palās (Butea frondosa) trees. From bygone days, these forests have been guarding and serving as the natural barriers against all foreign inroads from West.

To the South, across the Hugli river lies the extensive and thick tidal forest known as the Sundarvan which literally means 'the beautiful forest'. The very name Sundarvan might have been derived from the word Sundarī or Sundrī i.e., Heretiera litoralis or small timber tree. The major portion of this forest is located in the districts of Khulnā and Bariśāl of Bāñglādes and 24-Parganas of West Bengal. The whole area is largely covered with Sundarī trees. The Sundarvan South forest extends from the Hugli to the Fenī river covering an area of 10,000 sq. miles¹⁶. Close to the sea belt, the jungles are thick and hardly penetrable on account of the boggy character of the soil. This forest is the abode of the Royal Bengal tigers, leopards, rhinoceros, wild buffaloes, wild hogs, deer, monkeys, pythons, different species of cobra and other snakes and many varieties of bird.

Thus like hills, forests abounding certain parts of Bengal also mark her natural boundaries. The plains surrounded by all these natural boundaries like forests and hills maintain a continuity, though very often intercepted by rivers. Besides forming natural barriers these forests have

been from bygone days supplying all sorts of flora and fauna and other natural products to meet the requirements of the people at large.

III. Delta and Soil

Bengal is indeed a veritable riverine plains with three great river systems, the Ganges, the Brahmaputra and the Bhāgīrathī. Besides, a large part of Bengal is also covered with alluvium. A semi-aquatic rice-plains intersected by rivers is also a characteristic feature. In water-logged areas depressions are again very common.

The plains of Bengal, though characteristically flat, can be broadly demarcated as : (i) the plains-land lying north of the Ganges - the Padmā - Meghnā axis; (ii) the plains lying south of this axis; (iii) the erosional and flood plains lying west of the Bhāgīrathī - Hugli river; (iv) the plains lying at the foot of the Himalayas and (v) the plains lying along the coast of the Bay of Bengal¹⁷.

Demar- The plains lying west of the Bhāgīrathī river is definitely older. The
cations of general slope of the land is somewhat steeper with the plains lying
of plains both above flood level and also remaining below the water level. This
difference in levels exerts considerable influence on agricultural operations.

Undoubtedly, Bengal is a large delta. Since the Pleistocene period, the Bengal delta has been formed with heavy loads of alluvium from the mountain ranges in the north. It has been presumed that about 30 million years ago there was a great convulsion of nature which was responsible for bringing down the landmass on both sides of this subcontinent and thereby forming the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian sea¹⁸. Then again, a mighty convulsion brought into existence the Himalayas. The upliftment of the Himalayas from the bosom of the sea as

Forma- testified to by palaeontological records gave rise to a curious depression
tion of between the northern mountain ranges and the Deccan plateau which
delta has been termed as the Indo-Gangetic trough. This deep trough filled
and up the deposits of detritus of mountains for millions of years, which
landmass form the regions covered now by the states of the Pāñjāb, Uttar-Pradeś and Bengal. The detritus deposition agencies were the rivers descending from the Himalayas. A large number of rivers flowed downwards and being obstructed by high and stony barriers rolled themselves into the mighty Ganges. The Ganges and her tributaries carrying a huge quantity of silt formed the present deltaic

region of Bengal. The rivers like the Ganges, the Brahmaputra, the Meghna and their tributaries have indeed built up the whole landmass of Bengal making it a region of most fertile alluvial plains for human habitation. The alluvial plains of Bengal may be conveniently divided into four parts : (i) Western Bengal, i.e., Old Delta ; (ii) Eastern Bengal, i.e., New Delta; (iii) Central Bengal, i.e., part of the New Delta and (iv) North Bengal, i.e., the Gaṅgā-Brahmaputra Doāb¹⁹. (Map.3)

Below the present Bengal delta, there lies a surface of the oldest delta composed of materials different from those deposited by the Ganges and her tributaries. A deposition of yellow clay and sand appears to underlie upper and newer deposits of blue clay and sand. It has been supposed that this oldest surface of the delta was created by the rivers issuing from North and North-east. This older delta became depressed and permitted the flow of the Ganges carrying silt and thereby forming the later deltaic region which was gradually raised by the silt deposition left by the rivers issuing from the Himalayas and the Chotanāgpur hills.

Of the four categories of delta, Western Bengal, the Old Delta, is represented by the present Burdwan division comprising the land to the west of the river Hugli. Considering the geological structure and physiographic features, it may be said that the greater part of the districts of Bāñkurā, Burdwan, Bīrbhūm and the western half of Midnapur is a continuation of the Chotanāgpur plateau to the east. The present surface of this region has been formed mainly by a process of degradation. The surface of this region is rocky. The old alluvium also occurs over this area. Besides, a belt of Archaean gneisses and schists also runs through this region. It is one of the sunken basins of the Archaean terrain that contains the deposit of the coal-bearing Gondwanas. Typical lateritic soil and laterite (Khōāi & gravels) are found largely in this delta area. The laterite soil is characterised by a very low percentage of silica and nitrogen with higher percentage of iron and aluminium oxides²⁰. In the upper part of this delta, more particularly in the districts of Rañgpur, Bīrbhūm, Bāñkurā, Mursīdābād, Midnapur and West Dinājpur, red clay is found. This red clay is the result of alluvium deposited by the rivers that flowed long before the present river system developed.

The upland region of this Delta is rich in minerals. For example, the richest coal-deposits are found in the Rāñgañj belt. There are also deposits

of iron, copper and tungsten ores. Mica and alluvial gold also occur in many places. Fire-clay and China clay occur extensively in the Rāṇīgaṇ coal-field area and also in Bāṅkura district. This type of alluvium soil can be found in Chittagong and former Tipperah (Tripurā) districts as well. But this region comprising the districts of Tipperah, Noākhālī and Chittagong may not be considered as deltaic because it contains a part of the sub-mountainous region as well. The Chittagong and Tipperah hill tracts are definitely hilly, and the plains of Tipperah, Noākhālī and Chittagong districts can at best be composed of alluvial materials washed down the hills and deposited serially. Moreover, this tract is not formed of silts deposited by the rivers. Again, the eastern hilly areas contain oil gas, petroleum and tertiary coal. Further, the eastern half of Midnapur district extending up to the Hugli river is a low-lying region characterised by swamps and unhealthy condition.

Central Bengal belongs to the New Deltaic region. The Delta between the Bhāgīrathī and the Padmā is known as the Gangetic Delta or Central Bengal. The tract between Māldah and Murśīdābād was the ancient Gangetic Delta where the rivers split up into numerous channels. The major portion of the Gangetic Delta on east of the Bhāgīrathī forms parts of the present state of Bāṅglādeś. The strip of land of the Gangetic Delta on west of the Bhāgīrathī belongs to the present West Bengal. The Gangetic Delta or Central Bengal has been gradually raised above the flood level and thereby turned into a moribund shape. This deltaic region is bounded on North by the Padmā, on West by the Bhāgīrathī and on East by the Madhumatī. The river Yamunā carrying the main stream of the Brahmaputra also forms the eastern boundary of Central Bengal. The river Padmā flows into the Bay of Bengal as the Meghnā. This Delta between the Bhāgīrathī-Hugli and the Padmā-Meghnā known as the Delta of the Gāṅgā or Central Bengal is approximately at a latitude of $40^{\circ}40' N$, longitude $88^{\circ}0' E$, with its southern tip stretching as far south as $21^{\circ}50' N$. The longitudinal expansion of the base of the delta is from $88^{\circ}0' E$ to $90^{\circ}50' E$. The area covers roughly 58,752,80 square Km., i.e., a little over one fourth of undivided Bengal. The soil of this Delta is marshy and alluvium.

The New Delta includes East Bengal. A vast area of this region is semi-aquatic. This newly built stretch of deltaic plains is composed of lower portions of the Ganges and the Brahmaputra. The great rivers overflow their banks during the rains and leave behind fertile silt deposition. The soil of this Delta is undoubtedly alluvium and fertile.

The Lower Delta, a portion of the Gangetic or Central Delta as well as Eastern Delta, is a labyrinth of creeks, rivers and swamps extending through the dense forest of Sundarvan. The northern border of the Sundarvan forest has been cleared up, and its land has been largely prepared for cultivation. The tract of Sundarvan, geologically speaking, is not very old. It is presumed that by about 6,000 to 7,000 years back, the whole of Sundarvan was under the sea²². The process of land-formation is still continuing and chars, i.e., strips of sandy land rising out of the bed of a river or sea above the water-level are being daily formed by desiltation of tides coming inland and also of the rivers flowing into the Bay of Bengal.

The Lower Delta or Sundarvan area has thus been well described by O'Malley as : "Briefly the Sundarvans may be described as a low flat alluvial plains in which the process of land-making is still going on, covered, where not under cultivation, with forests and swamps, intersected from north to south by wide tidal rivers or estuaries and from west to east by narrow tidal rivers or Sundar- creeks"²³. All estuaries and most of the rivers are salty, and there is little or no current down them. These are practically tidal water-courses and connected with others by an intricate series of branches and the latter, in their turn by innumerable channels. As a result, 'the whole tract may be described as a tangled net-work of estuaries, rivers and water-courses which enclose a large number of islands of various shapes and sizes'. These flat swampy islands are again covered with dense forests, the most plentiful and important botanical species being Sundri (Heritiere littoralis) which thrives most where water in the channels is least brackish²⁴. The soil in the Sundarvan area is undoubtedly alluvial and immature, and water is everywhere saline. The alluvial soils also show white efflorescences of sodium chloride impregnated with salt²⁵. The coastal soil has been formed from deposits brought by tidal currents. Deposits are either rich in calcium or magnesium or consist of half decomposed organic matter. The chemical composition resulting thereof may be classified as saline, non-saline alkali and degraded alkali soil²⁶.

The Ganges and the Brahmaputra doab or the Delta of North Bengal extends from north to south between the lower spurs of the Himalayas and the Ganges. Along the banks of the Tistā, the Brahmaputra and the Meghnā, the river-silt deposits or silt-loams predominate. Sandy loams cover alluvial plains

in the north. This soil has been derived from the mountain-regions of the Himalayas, and this is carried by the hill-rivers like the Tistā, Mahānandā, Torsā, Jaladhākā and other tributaries. The soil of this area is acidic and poor in base.

Besides the above mentioned deltaic areas, the entire landmass of Bengal falls into three groups : (a) Moribund, (b) Mature and (c) Active Delta. The rivers are the primary sources in the formation of these different types of deltas. Where the rivers have ceased to carry silt and become dead, active land-formations have stopped and the Delta may be described as Moribund. But the Delta where the rivers have ceased to carry silt, but is still active is Mature Delta. Further, the land where the rivers are active in carrying silt and land building is still continuing in full-swing is an Active Delta.

The Moribund Delta lies mainly in Nadiā, Jessore, Mursīdābād and parts of Khulnā and 24-Parganās districts. Between the Moribund Delta and the Sundarvan is a belt consisting of the northern half of the districts of 24-Parganās and Khulnā, which belongs to the category of Mature Delta. The rivers in this Delta carry a good deal of local rainwater, but these are deteriorating. The Active Delta covers the Sundarvan including southern parts of the districts of Khulnā and 24-Parganās, the land between the Madhumatī and Meghnā (Faridpur and Bākhargāñj districts). In the East, the Padmā, the Meghnā and the Brahmaputra carrying vast quantities of silt are still active in the formation of land. Due to the formation of land (subsidence), Tamluk (Midnapur district) which once stood on the sea shore (Velākulam) is now away from the sea. It is due to this process of land-formation that the channel on which Tamluk once stood was silted up by about the 10th century A.D.²⁶.

The nature and character of soils vary according to this deltaic divisions. The Moribund Delta contains mainly sandy loam with some areas of stiff clay. Soil in the Mature Delta along the Madhumatī is full of clay with loams. Towards the mouth of the Meghnā, the soil is more and more sandy, and further up along the Padmā, the soil is pure silt-loam. The soil of Bengal may be classified into six kinds : (1) laterite, (2) red soil, (3) alluvial, (4) coastal, (5) Terai or Tistā soil and (6) colluvial soil²⁷.

Laterite or lateritic soils cover the area extending from Orissa through the districts of Midnapur, Bāñkurā, Burdwan, Bīrbhūm to the Rājmaḥal hills. The soil is acidic and poor in organic matter containing nitrogen, phosphorus and calcium²⁸. This soil is poorly aggregated and possesses low water-holding capacity. The ancient crystalline and metamorphic rocks on weathering have given rise to red soil. This red soil is sometimes misrepresented as laterite. In fact, it is the transported soil from the hills of the Chhotanāgpur plateau. Red soil is also to be found in the districts of Bīrbhūm, Burdwan, Bāñkurā, West Dinājpur and Midnapur. It is rather shallow and coarse textured and mildly acidic and poor in organic matter²⁹. The areas containing lateritic and red soil are generally covered with forest having plentiful growth of Palās trees (Parrot tree-Butea frondosa). Sometimes, deforestation has resulted in soil-erosion which can be seen near the banks of the river Ajay.

Alluvial soil may be subdivided into two types like the Vindhyan alluvium and Gaṅgā alluvium. The Vindhyan alluvium soil has been formed of silt brought down by the rivers originating from the Chhotanāgpur plateau which is a physiographic continuity of the Vindhya ranges. This kind of soil is to be found in the Dāmodar, Rājmaḥal and the Kāsāi riverine areas. It occurs also in the districts of Murśidābād, Bīrbhūm, Bāñkurā, Puruliā, Burdwan, Hugli and Midnapur³⁰. The fertile Gaṅgā alluvium is again of different types : (i) Gaṅgā riverine, (ii) Gaṅgā flat lands, (iii) Gaṅgā low lands and (iv) Gaṅgā uplands³¹. The Gaṅgā riverine soil contains fine sand having a greyish white appearance. The Gaṅgā flat land contains clay and fine and white sand, and her low land consists of coarse sand. The Gaṅgā uplands contain older alluvium soil with moderate accumulation of clay and high concentration of lime in the form of concretion in the sub-soil.

Alluvial and other soils The coastal soil has been formed by deposits brought by tidal currents. The Terai soil or the Tistā soil is mostly sandy and deep black to grey black in colour. The soil is acidic and poor in bases. The colluvial soil is derived from the hills which are extensions of the Chhotanāgpur plateau. The Bengal Gondwana soil, Bengal gneisse soil and transition soil are different colluvial soils³². It occurs in the district of Puruliā, in Western parts of the districts of Bīrbhūm, Bāñkurā and in the Asansol sub-division. This soil contains a large amount of coarse sand and gravels.

The Delta and the soil formations of Bengal are indeed the veritable gifts of the rivers. From indeterminable times, Bengal is being served by a network of large and small rivers flowing downwards into the Bay of Bengal. These rivers and the deltaic alluvial soil have transformed Bengal into a land of agricultural bountifulness and an attractive refuge of peoples from outside. This will be evident from a discussion of the river system of Bengal, and its influence on the life and activities of the Bengali people as a whole. Before describing the river system of Bengal a brief reference may be made to other natural environs, more particularly climatic condition and rainfall, which were no less responsible for moulding the nature and character of the Bengali people.

IV. Climate and Rainfall

As to climate and rainfall of ancient Bengal there are only very few references in literatures and epigraphic records at our disposal. The available records furnish very little information regarding any glaring difference between the climatic condition of the past and the present. Therefore, the present climatic condition of Bengal shall present a perspective of the picture of the past. There are four distinct seasons in Bengal, namely, Summer, Rainy, Winter and Spring. Bengal falls within the monsoon area, and as such, the general rainfall is at least quite adequate.

The climate of Bengal is tropical, and temperature is moderate. Plains are warm except during the short winter season. The mountainous region in the north is cold on account of its altitude, but humidity is high. Summer becomes sometimes unbearable because of its extreme humidity. In areas having dry summer the temperature is comparatively high and humidity less. The highest temperature is to be found in the western region bordering Chhota Nagpur. Temperature decreases south-eastwards, north-eastwards and southwards³³.

Bengal is too much affected by the monsoon-wind causing abundant rainfall. The highest rainfall is naturally in the submountainous areas and Jalpāiguri in North Bengal, around the Padmā and the Meghnā mouth, in Sylhet between the Shillong plateau and Tripurā-Lushāi hills in eastern direction of Bengal³⁴. The rainfall decreases in the West. In the North, rainfall varies from 150" to 120" inches³⁵. In the eastern region of Bengal, i.e., in present Bānglādēś the rainfall is between 95" and 60" inches. Along the Padmā and the lower Meghnā the rainfall

varies from 95" to 75" inches. The western region is primarily characterised by drought condition, and generally, the rainfall ranges from 60" to 50" inches. This is evident from the average rainfall of the western districts like Midnapur (80" to 45"), Bāṅkurā (53.12") and Puruliā (52.00")³⁶. Summer is always accompanied by violent cyclonic weather known as Kāl-Vaiśākhī in Bengal, which is the prologue to the rainy season. Truly, the rainy season has its own charm and appeal to the poets, and as such, not only in literature, but even in some epigraphic records of ancient Bengal there are frequent references to the rainy season which through centuries has made its mark on the history and culture of the people of Bengal.

Regarding the climatic condition prevailing in ancient Bengal there are a few stray references in literary and epigraphic records. It may be, however, said that the climatic condition of ancient Bengal might have been almost similar to the one prevailing today. This would be evident from the accounts of the four kingdoms of Bengal given by the Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsang in the 7th century A.D. It has been stated by the Chinese pilgrim that the land in Puṇḍravardhana, Samatata, Tāmralipta and Karnaśuvarṇa was low and moist, but the climatic condition prevailing in all these countries differed a little. In Puṇḍravardhana the climate is said to have been congenial, but the climate of Tāmralipta has been described as hot and that of Karnaśuvarṇa as temperate³⁷.

A perusal of the early literary and epigraphic records of ancient Bengal presents also a vivid picture of the rainy season and showers as communicated through charming language of the poets and writers. In this context, a particular reference may be made to the Rāmacharita which refers to large and swiftly moving clouds in Varendrī (Atikadāḥ jah vegavantaścha ghanā meghā prabhūtaṁ Varshitamityāśayah)³⁸. Another verse in the Rāmacharita relates to the raining showers which certainly speak of abundant rainfall in Varendra³⁹. With the advent of monsoon in Bengal, the sky becomes overcast with clouds, a picturesque account of such a cloudy sky making resounding sounds has been depicted by Jayadeva in the first Śloka of his famous work Gīta-Govinda in the following words⁴⁰ :

Mēghairmedurambaram /
Vanabhūvaśyāmāstamāladrumah //

Besides, there are also frequent references to exquisite beauty of the rainy season in other verses of the Gīta-Govinda like Vṛṣhṭivṛcākula-gokula and Sajalajalada-samudaya⁴¹. Again, that there used to be heavy rainfall in Bengal becomes evident also from the Saduktikarnāmrita (11th-12th century A.D.) which refers to 'Prabhūta-payasah'^{41a} and 'Deve niramudāramujajhati sukham śete niśām grāmanīh' (2/84/3^{41b}). A still more vivid account of the heavy rainfall in Bengal has been given by Abul Fazal in his Āin-i-Akbarī. Though of a later date, the account certainly represents the condition prevailing in ancient times. Abul Fazal writes : "the rains begin when the sun is midway in Taurus (May) and continue somewhat more than 6 months, the plains being made under water and the mounds being alone visible"⁴². Here the continuation of the rainy season for 6 months as stated by Abul-Fazal is hardly in conformity with the prevailing rainy season in Bengal. It may be that in ancient and medieval times, the rainy season might have continued for a longer period. Even in other medieval literary texts of Bengal, the rainy season of Bengal has been always described with all its charms.

Not only in literary texts, even the epigraphic records bear a few references to rainy season and also to heavy and continuous rainfall. As for instance, in the Bāngad Copper plate inscription of Mahipāla there is a positive reference to abundant and continuous rainfall as : "deśe prāchi prachura payasi svachchhamā-pīyatoyam"⁴³. Similarly, the Khālimpur Copper plate of Dharmapāla refers to constant presence of the rainy season as : "Niratisāya ghana ghanāghana ghata śyāmāyamān vāsaralakshmī samārabdha santata jaladasamaya"⁴⁴. An identical account of the rainy season is to be found in the Monghyr Copper plate inscription⁴⁵. The inscriptions of the Vaṅga king Govinda-chandra also contain references to heavy showers⁴⁶. As to heavy rainfall in Bengal, a reference may also be made to the Tirumalai inscription of Rājendra Chola of the 11th century A.D.⁴⁷.

It would be thus appear that all through the ages rains of Bengal have always attracted the notice of the poets, philosophers and other thinkers who have given vent to their feelings, thoughts, love and addictions to the charms of rains, which in diverse ways moulded the life-patterns of the people of ancient Bengal.

Regarding the Spring season or Vasanta of ancient Bengal a glowing account is to be found in the Gīta-Govinda of Jayadeva, which describes the blowing of balmy, soothing and soft breeze. Jayadeva beautifully describes as to how the wind dwindled the tender Lavaṅga-creeper and Vāsantī-creepers became full bloomed (Vasante Vāsantīkusumasukta) and clusters of Vakula blossomed, the tender sprays of the Tamāla-trees stood forth in profusion, perfuming the breeze with the fragrance of musk (Lalita lavaṅgalatā parīśīlanakōmalamayasaṁirē Madhukaranikara Karanvita kōkilakūjitakuñjakutīre⁴⁸). Thus the exquisite beauty of the Spring or Vasanta has been vividly portrayed in the Ślokas of the Gīta-Govinda. Besides, there are also frequent references to Spring in several other Ślokas in the Gīta-Govinda like : Vahati malayasamirē, Kōkilakalaravakūjita, etc⁴⁹. Again, the spring and the cool, beautiful and charming breeze generally known as "Malaya-pavana", i.e., wind blowing in Spring are referred to in Dhoyī's Pavanadūta (a work of the 12th century A.D.⁵⁰). The Rāmācharita also speaks of the cool and fragrant breeze which is of course the wind of the Spring season⁵¹. About other seasons, it may be stated that Winter was never severe in Bengal. Abul Fazal recorded that the cold season was very short like the present winter period⁵². The Autumn is, however, the most enjoyable one. It is the season par-excellence of most of the religious ceremonies of Bengal.

These seasonal variegations, tropical climate, moderate temperature, humidity, both dry and wet and adequate rainfall produced fruitful effects on agriculture. This very climatic condition exercised all throughout Bengal's history considerable influence on moulding the nature and character of the people of Bengal. It is because of this climatic condition that the Bengali people are less strenuous, laborious and tenacious. But there developed in Bengali people other traits which made them more thoughtful and ever persistent in their pursuit of learning and thought-provoking endeavours.

V. River System

The physical landscape of Bengal is very closely related to her large and varied river systems. Rivers have through centuries played the most important role in the formation of the deltaic land and in moulding the nature and character of the Bengali people. Bengal is indeed a veritable land of rivers, of which the most important ones are the Ganges (Gāṅgā), the Padmā (a branch of the Ganges) and the Brahmaputra which merges into the second great one in the plains before discharging her waters into the sea. As the rivers played the most

vital role in the formation of the Bengali culture, it is necessary to give an account of the principal river systems of ancient Bengal as can be gleaned from both literary and epigraphic sources. It is to be, however, noted that almost all rivers have frequently changed their courses, and some of them have even completely dried out leaving faint traces of their ancient flow. All the rivers of Bengal either fall into the Bay of Bengal or into the two principal rivers, i.e., the Ganges and the Brahmaputra (Map. 4).

(i) **The Gaṅgā :**

The most ancient and sacred of all rivers of India is indeed the Ganges, and Bengal has been sanctified by her flow from hoary antiquity. The Ganges is indeed the very life-stream of Bengal. It enters into Bengal near the Rājmaḥal and flows downwards with the name of Bhāgīrathī. It was from this region that the Ganges bifurcated into the Bhāgīrathī and the Padmā. The tract between the modern Maldah and Mursīdābād is the most ancient Gangetic delta, but the river splits up into numerous spilled channels like the Sarasvatī, Bhāgīrathī, Bhairav, etc. The lower portion of the present Bhāgīrathī is now called Hugli, the name given by the English in the 17th century⁵³. The mouth of the river Hugli has been referred to as Kambyson by Ptolemy in the 2nd century A.D.⁵⁴. The river Hugli flows southward directly into the sea. At present, the main flow of the Ganges is carried through the Padmā resulting in gradual dying out of the Bhāgīrathī, for which the big dam at Farakkā has been recently constructed. Bhāgīrathī to maintain the regular flow of the Ganges into the Bhāgīrathī and the Hugli. A very authentic account regarding the bifurcation of the Gaṅgā has been given by Abul-Fazal. It has been stated that the Ganges is divided into two, the Bhāgīrathī and the Padmāvati⁵⁵. The sacred river Gaṅgā, though flowing through Bengal under the common name of Bhāgīrathī, has been frequently mentioned in both literary and epigraphic records of ancient Bengal.

In all early Indian texts beginning from the Rigveda onwards the river Gaṅgā has been variously described and its religious sanctity most scrupulously upheld. But in ancient texts and inscriptions of Bengal the river Gaṅgā has been mostly referred to as the Bhāgīrathī, i.e., the branch of the Gaṅgā flowing through Bengal. It implies thereby that both the nomenclatures, i.e., the Gaṅgā and the Bhāgīrathī were synonymously used to denote the branch of the Gaṅgā that flowed through Bengal. Another point that emerges from a study of both

literary and epigraphic records is the great sacredness that was attached to the river Gaṅgā-Bhāgīrathī, and that the very concept of purification of a person by a bath in the sacred water of the Gaṅgā was very commonly prevalent amongst the people of ancient Bengal as well. This becomes evident from the contents of a large number of inscriptions like Bāṅgaḍ Grant, Āṁgāchhi Copper plate of Vigrahapāla III, Jājilpārā Copper plate inscription, Bōdh-Gayā inscription of Dharmapāla, Dubi Copper plate of Bhāskaravarman, etc., wherein it has been stated that/king made land-grants after taking a bath in the sacred river Gaṅgā⁵⁶. Not only that, even in certain inscriptions like the Gañjām plates of Śaśāṅkarāja, the Gaṅgā has been called as the river of Gods, and the story of its origins has been also related⁵⁷. It has been stated that the Gaṅgā issued from the sky, and she was brought down on the earth by Bhagīratha. This certainly refers to the Bhāgīrathī. In many verses of the Rāmācharita, the Gaṅgā has been referred to as a sacred river⁵⁸. In all other literary accounts as well the sacredness of the river Gaṅgā has been largely acknowledged. This would be evident from all that is known about the Bhāgīrathī.

(ii) The Bhāgīrathī :

In ancient times, the Bhāgīrathī was the main channel connecting Bengal with upper India. In the Rāmāyaṇa and the Matsyapurāṇa, the mythical story of Bhagīratha who is said to have brought down the Gaṅgā to the earth has been narrated in details⁵⁹. It has been also stated that the Gaṅgā flowed into the sea passing through the countries of the Kurus, ^{the} Bharatas, the Pāñchālas, the Kauśikas, the Māgadhas, the Brahmottaras, the Vaṅgas and the Tāmraliptas⁶⁰. This account furnishes direct information regarding the courses of the Ganges. ^{Epic and Purāṇas} The Vaṅgas and the Tāmraliptas were undoubtedly peoples of Bengal, and the main flow of the Ganges thence passed perhaps by the side of Tāmralipta, i.e., near modern Tamluk. Here, the Ganges flowing by the side of Tāmralipta obviously denoted the Bhāgīrathī which was once the principal branch of the Ganges as described in both the Mahābhārata and the Rāmāyaṇa.

In the account of Megasthenes (4th century B.C) and the Periplus of the Erythraean Sea (1st century A.D.), the Ganges is referred to as the eastern-most course⁶¹. According to Arrian, the Ganges was the mightiest of the rivers in India⁶². Megasthenes has also specifically stated that the Ganges is much larger than the Indus^{62a}. From the account of Megasthenes it appears that the Greek ambassador probably referred to the Bhāgīrathī. The Periplus has given

an account of the Ganges, perhaps also of the Bhāgīrathī as : "The Ganges is the largest river in India. It has the annual increase and decrease like the Nile, and there is on it a mart called after it Gange, through which passes a considerable traffic consisting of betel, the Gangetic spikenard, pearl and the finest of all Gāṅgā in muslins, those called Gangetic. In this locality, there is said to be a gold mine and a gold coin called chryse (golden) which lies directly under the rising sun and the extremity of the world towards the East"⁶³.

This account in the Periplus refers no doubt to the river Bhāgīrathī. In one passage, Diodorus states that the "Ganges which is 30 stadia broad, flows from north to south forming the eastern boundary towards the east of the tribe of the Gangaridai"⁶⁴. This account relating to the course of the river running from north to south perhaps indicates the ancient flow of the river Bhāgīrathī.

The Greek geographer Ptolemy who flourished in the first half of the 2nd century A.D. records the five mouths of the Ganges as : (i) the Kambyson, the most western (Long 144°30', Lat. 18°15'); (ii) Mega (145°45', 18°30'); (iii) the Kamberikhon (146°30', 18°40'); (iv) Pseudostomon (147°40', 18°30') and (v) Antibole (148°30', 18°15'). The distance between the two extremes of the mouths has been said to be 4° degree of latitude which corresponds to the distance between Tamluk and Chittagong⁶⁵. Ptolemy also adds that the country about the mouths of the Ganges is occupied by the Gangaridai with the city Gange (146°, 19°15')⁶⁶. It appears from the accounts of Ptolemy and Hiuen Tsang (2nd and 7th Century A.D.) that the main branch of the Ganges flowed into the sea near the present Tamluk in the district of Midnapur⁶⁷. Further, while describing the boundary of India Ptolemy speaks of the Ganges as well. He says that India is bounded on the east by the river Ganges⁶⁸. Thus Ptolemy appears to have meant the mouth of the Bhāgīrathī as the easternmost boundary. But a more detailed account of the Bhāgīrathī as the Ganges is to be found in the travel accounts of the Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsang. He speaks of many creatures in the river, and her water is described as pleasant and sweet. This water is called Fu-Shui, i.e., happiness water or water of religious merit. It has been stated that all sins are effaced by taking a bath in this river, and those who drown themselves in her water are re-born in heaven, and if the bones of the dead are consigned into the river that one does not go to a bad place⁶⁹.

That the Bhāgīrathī was the principal flow of the Ganges is also proved by the very fact that in ancient times it served as the only means of communication between Bengal and upper India. It is learnt from Nidhanpur Copper plate inscription (7th century A.D) that Bhāskarvarman, the king of Kāmaṇḍapa, proceeded with a large navy through the Bhāgīrathī and pitched up a military camp on its bank at Karṇasuvarṇa⁷⁰. This Copper plate was actually issued from the Jayaskandavāra at Karṇasuvarṇa. Sometime by about 642 A.D. Bhāskaravarman proceeded with his army consisting of elephants, 20,000 in number, to meet Harsha at Kajaṅgala near Rājmaḥal, and his 30,000 ships passed along the Ganges to the same destination. This is a clear testimony to the navigability of the Bhāgīrathī near Rājmaḥal in the 7th century A.D. The river Bhāgīrathī and her navigability have been specifically referred to as : Sa-khalu Bhāgīrathī-patha pravartamāna nānāvidha nauvāṭaka sampādita in several inscriptions like the Khālīmpur Copper plate of Dharmapāla, the Monghyr Copper plate inscription of Devapāladeva, Bāṅgaḍ Copper plate inscription of Mahīpāla I, Nālandā stone slab inscription of the time of Mahīpāladeva, the Bhāgalpur plate of Nārāyaṇapāla, etc⁷¹. In all these inscriptions, the aforesaid expression is almost identically stated, and the reference to the Bhāgīrathī-patha is significant enough to indicate her navigability. Besides, the Tirumalai inscription of Rājendra Chola speaks of the navigability of the Bhāgīrathī in the 11th century A.D⁷². In several other inscriptions, the Bhāgīrathī has been described as the limit of the conquest made or as boundary of the country. As for instance, according to the Tirumulai inscription, Rājendra Chola had to cross the Bhāgīrathī to enter into Vaṅgāladeśa ruled over by Govindachandra⁷³. It thus appears that Vaṅgāladeśa lay on the east of the Bhāgīrathī. This is further supported by the Śaktipur Copper plate of Lakshmaṇasena which refers to Vaṅga as lying to the east of the Bhāgīrathī⁷⁴. In the Pāikor inscription, the river Bhāgīrathī is again mentioned as the limit of the conquest of Karṇa, the Kalachuri king⁷⁵. In the Muslim account of Tabāqāt-i-Nāsirī of the 2nd half of the 13th century A.D., the Bhāgīrathī has been stated as the main channel of the Ganges, and Rai (Rāḍha) is described to have been situated on the western side of the river Gāṅg. (Ganges)⁷⁶. Even the very name Ādigāṅgā, the river course flowing by the side of Calcutta, is an indication of the earliest course of the Ganges. This is also evident from the Śaktipur grant of Lakshmaṇasena, which refers to the flow of the Bhāgīrathī, south of Calcutta, via., Uluberia and Gaṅgāsāgar⁷⁷. It appears from this record that the present course of the Bhāgīrathī has remained unchanged for about 1000 years, at least from c.1025 A.D.

That the Bhāgīrathī was the main flow of the Ganges is also proved by the very fact that all ancient ports of Bengal were situated on its bank. In this connection, a particular reference may be made to Tāmralipti which continued as the greatest port-town of Eastern India at least up to the 8th - 9th century A.D. Ptolemy places Tāmralipti on the bank of the Ganges, and Hiuen Tsang refers to it as lying near the sea⁷⁸. The ancient Tāmralipti has been generally identified with the modern town Tamluk on the basis of synonymity of names and literary references, though tangible record for the same is yet unavailable.

Tāmra-
lipti
port It may be, however, contended that the Bhāgīrathī reached the sea near the present area of Tamluk. In this context, Majumdar has referred to the conclusion of the Stevenson Moore Committee which reports about the Sarasvatī (a branch of the Ganges) flowing into an estuary near modern Tamluk⁷⁹. But subsequently, the Sarasvatī shifted towards the east, and Tamluk lost its importance, and its place was taken up by Sāt-gāon or Saptagrāma by about the 13th century A.D. Saptagrāma was the first Muslim capital of Bengal, and it became a flourishing city by the 14th century A.D.⁸⁰. Yet, Tāmralipta continued as a small market-town, and ^{the}Portuguese made it one of their principal settlements. In some Persian works of the 17th century, Tamluk is actually mentioned as a centre of slave-trade. Even the Feringis and the Maghs also used the present Tamluk area as a slave-market. According to Valentyn, Tamluk continued also as a Portuguese settlement even upto 1724 A.D.⁸¹.

After the decline of Tāmralipta, Hijli became a great centre of maritime trade. In the 16th century A.D. Ralph Fitch recorded that many ships anchored Hijli at this port for loading various kinds of merchandise. Hijli became also an important centre of the Portuguese traders. By 1636 the Portuguese were, however, ousted from this place by the Mughals. Subsequently, in 1687 the British agent Job Charnock captured Hijli⁸².

Hijli could not, however, turn out to be a great centre of maritime trade as did Saptagrāma which became the Muslim capital of Bengal in the 14th century A. D. Several archaeological relics discovered from the present Ādi-Saptagrāma, lying at a distance of about 27 miles from Calcutta, speak of the identification of the ancient Saptagrāma with it⁸³. The Portuguese made their first settlement for trading purposes at Saptagrāma in the fourth decade of the 16th century. That Saptagrāma was a great centre of trade and a port-town

appears from the very fact that it contributed no less than 30,000 rupees annually Saptagrāma to the Mughal treasury during the reign of Akbar. The importance and of Saptagrāma as a trading centre has been also aptly described in other ports the Chandī-Kāvya⁸⁴. But unfortunately, because of the silting of the river Sarasvatī, the importance of Saptagrāma declined, and the place was abandoned by the Portuguese who in preference made Huglī on the bank of the Bhāgīrathī their main trading centre. In 1586, Ralph Fitch gave an account of many other ports on the Bhāgīrathī like Baklā, Tandā, Śrīpura, etc.⁸⁵. Another port-town of great importance was Gauḍa which maintained commercial links with many foreign countries. In this context, it is very significant to note that relics of old masts have been discovered from some villages in the neighbourhood of Pāṇḍuā through which the Mahānandā used to flow. These relics certainly speak of the maritime trading vessels of ancient times.

As large vessels could no more sail upto Saptagrāma, the Portuguese diverted their shipping operation to Huglī on the bank of the Bhāgīrathī. In 1567, Caesar Fredrick wrote : "In the Hooghly river large ships of the Portuguese came into Bator (Shibpur, Howrah) whence smaller ships sailed upto Satgaon (Saptagrāma) and loaded all sorts of merchandise". Even the great Mughal emperor Akbar granted all sorts of facilities to the Portuguese for establishing trade settlements at Huglī that gradually turned into a most flourishing, populous and rich centre. By the 17th century the Portuguese power started declining because of the Mughal intervention. Afterwards, the Dutch, the French and the English traders appeared as great competitors of the Portuguese. By the middle of the 17th century the English traders established settlements in the vicinity of Huglī, and the British company's agent Job Charnock carried on devastations at Huglī in 1686, and subsequently, Charnock (in 1687) took refuge at Sutānati on the other side of the river Bhāgīrathī which proved to be very much attractive and strategic to him⁸⁶. Being encouraged by the local traders and bankers Charnock made British settlements at this place⁸⁷. These settlements crippled considerably the importance of Huglī as a port and market town. Moreover, the silting of Huglī the river prevented large vessels from sailing up to Huglī at a quick speed and gradually the Huglī port sank into insignificance, and the other side of the Bhāgīrathī proved to be more attractive for shipyards and trading settlements. The present Huglī river, the lower Sarasvatī, was connected with the Ādi-Gaṅgā by a canal near the present Khidirpur. When the river Sarasvatī was silted up,

the river Hugli. took the present shape by depriving the Ādi-Gaṅgā the supply Sutānati of voluminous water. As a result, the Ādi-Gaṅgā became narrower and narrower. Even the map of De Barrows in the middle of the 16th century shows the Ādi-Gaṅgā and the Sarasvatī as the two most important rivers, and on the banks of these two rivers were located a large number of ports and market-towns which were indeed the most important places in mediaeval Bengal⁸⁸. In the Bengali literary works of the 15th and 16th centuries, i.e., the Chandī Kāvyas and the Manasāmaṅgala there are detailed accounts of these important places on both sides of the river Bhāgīrathī like Saptagrāma, Garifā, Andalpārā, Nowpārā, Teliāpārā, Other ports and market-towns Nunaighāt, Mahesh, Sulkiyā, Betaḍ (Howrah), Khardaha, Kōnnagar, Chitpur, Kalikātā, Bhātpārā, Kākinārā, Mulājod, Jāguliā, Pāikpārā, Ichhāpur, Śrīpāt, Rishrā, Kāmārhatī, Āriādaha, Kālighāt, Bāruipur, Huliā, Chatrabhōg, Māthinagar, etc.⁸⁹. All these places are not far away from the city of Calcutta that was turned out to be the very nerve centre of all early and late medieval market-places and port-centres along the Bhāgīrathī. Accordingly, it can be said that in the medieval period the importance of the Bhāgīrathī as a great channel of trade did not diminish. But it was again from the medieval period that the Bhāgīrathī started silting, and as a result, its navigability was gradually lost.

The Bhāgīrathī, however, continued to be navigable throughout all seasons at least upto the 13th century A.D. It was only after this century that the river started drying up, perhaps due to a continuous process of silting. There are indeed some authentic records testifying to the silting up of the river. It is learnt from a letter of the French traveller, Travernier, dated 6th January, 1666, that Bernier had to travel overland from Rājmaḥal to 'Cossimbazar' because the river was not navigable⁹⁰. He has also referred to the river as a simple channel. In 1683, Hedge wrote about the river above Nadiā as full of shoals and as such, he had to travel by land route⁹¹. Rennel in 1783, 1788 and 1793 actually described the Bhāgīrathī as dry during October and May⁹². In 1787, Colebrook recorded that the river was navigable in 1796, but not in 1797⁹³. Colebrook noted also that near Suti, the great river, obviously the Ganges, had encroached within a mile of that place and the 'Cossimbazar river' (Bhāgīrathī) was gradually silted or closed up by a mound of sand⁹⁴. Thus, it caused the diversification of the principal stream into another channel. Colebrook referred to this fact in the following words : "From Bogwangole the river turns eastward and

the stream strikes with peculiar force upon a steep and crumbling bank⁹⁵. In 1813, the Bhāgīrathī deserted its old course, and Stewart in 1847 recorded that the river was navigable only by boats during the rainy season only⁹⁶. He also pointed out that the navigation of the Bhāgīrathī was closed at Suti, and therefore, the Padmā branched off from the Gaṅgā just to its south⁹⁷.

The operations of both natural and human agencies were primarily responsible for the gradual silting and drying up of the Bhāgīrathī. Of the natural agencies, particular references are to be made to raising the river bed and the general level, normal geological formation and natural decay of the river due to silt-depositions. Canalization, raising of embankments, chocking of the mouth of the Bhāgīrathī by artificial means, construction of railways, bridges, etc., are various other factors created by the human agency. All these factors were primarily responsible for the gradual drying of the river Bhāgīrathī⁹⁸. Hence was the diversion of the flow of the Ganges, and thereby the present river Padmā became its principal flow.

(iii) The Padmā :

Today, the Padmā carrying the main volume of water of the Ganges is the eastern branch of the Gaṅgā. Previously, the region through which the Padmā flowed was in sea-bed. After throwing off tributaries like the Jalāṅgī, Māthābhāṅgā, Ichhāmatī Bhairab, Navagaṅgā and the Gorāi, the Padmā is joined by the Brahmaputra. Then the Padmā and the Brahmaputra flow into the Bay of Bengal as the river Meghnā. The Delta bounded by the Bhāgīrathī-Hugli. and the Padmā-Meghnā is indeed the Central Delta or the well-known Delta of the Gaṅgā.

Legendary accounts of the origins of the river Padmā are to be found in the Mahābhāgavata-purāṇa, Vrihaddharma-purāṇa and Kṛittivāsa's Rāmāyana⁹⁹. But the dates of these texts are uncertain, and as such, it is very difficult to trace the antiquity of the river Padmā. In 1930 William Willcocks expressed the view that the Padmā has been always the main channel of the Ganges, and the Bhāgīrathī was excavated for the irrigation purpose¹⁰⁰. But the Stevenson Moore Committee reports that the Bhāgīrathī continued as the principal channel of the Gaṅgā till the 16th century A.D. As already stated, it is only after this century that the Gaṅgā took a south-easterly turn along the Padmā.¹⁰¹ This will

be evident from the very fact that in all early Sanskrit texts, the Ganges from the Himalayas up to the sea is called Bhāgīrathī, and this appellation is never applied to the river Padmā. Such common names as Jāhnavī and Bhāgīrathī or Gaṅgā applied to the river flowing from the Himalayas to the sea certainly speak of the very fact that the Bhāgīrathī was the main channel of the Gaṅgā. Besides, the inscriptions belonging to the 11th - 13th century specifically refer to the Gaṅgā, Bhāgīrathī as the Gaṅgā or Jāhnavī¹⁰². Even Dhōyī in his Pavanadūtam (verse 33; 12th century A.D.) speaks of the Bhāgīrathī as the Gaṅgā¹⁰³. Again, the Bhāgīrathī has been always recognised as a holy river, i.e., the Gaṅgā, but not the Padmā. In the Naihāṭi Copper plate of Vallālasena, the queen-mother is described to have performed a great religious ceremony on the bank of the Bhāgīrathī¹⁰⁴. The Govindapur Copper plate of Lakshmanasena while describing the boundaries of the village refers to Jāhnavī on the east (Pūrvē-Jāhnavī), i.e., Gaṅgā (Bhāgīrathī)¹⁰⁵. That the present river called the Huglī was also called Jāhnavī (Gaṅgā) is proved by the very fact that it "flowed by the village of Betaḍ" which has been taken as Bator (Śibpur). If it be so then the river-course which later on became known as the Sarasvatī was the main channel of the Bhāgīrathī. Even in De Barros' Map Bator figures on the Huglī river, a little above its junction with the Sarasvatī. It has been already pointed out that the Bhāgīrathī was the main channel of navigation from very ancient times. This is further proved by the very fact that all ancient trading settlements of Bengal stood on the bank of the river Bhāgīrathī. It is, however, to be admitted that in some later texts, the Padmā has been also referred to as the Gaṅgā. This will be evident from the following discourse on the legendary origins of the Padmā.

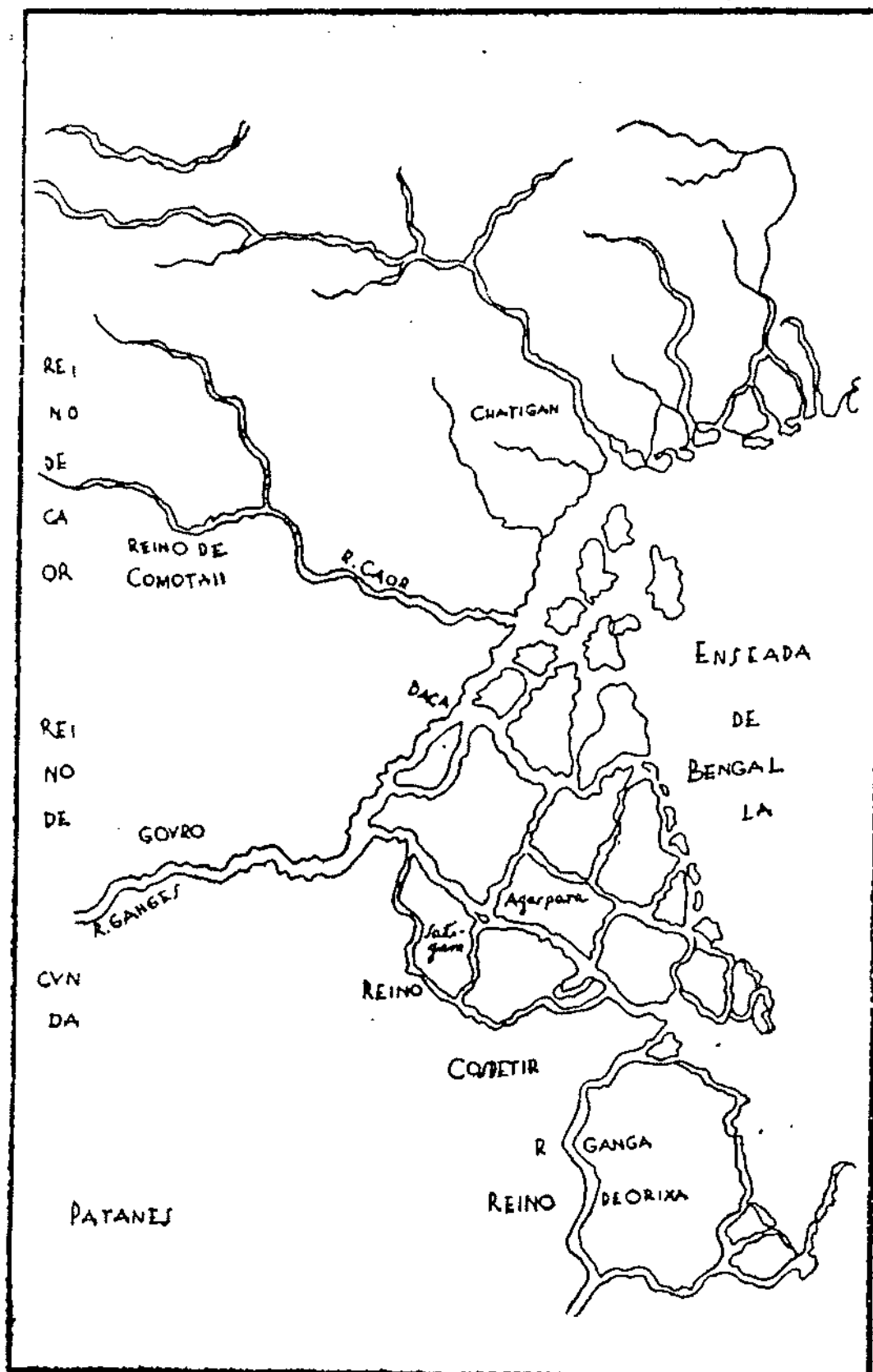
It is narrated in the Devī-Bhāgavatam that the course of the Ganges and the Padmā originated from the course of the Goddess¹⁰⁶. The Rāmāyana mentions the old Padmā as Nalini, one of the seven flows of the Gaṅgā¹⁰⁷. The Ganges is referred to in the accounts of Megasthenes, the Periplus of the Erythraean Sea and in the Geography of Ptolemy¹⁰⁸. But no specific reference to the Padmā is to be found in all these accounts. Even in the 7th century A.D., the Padmā does not figure in any one of the accounts attributed to the Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsang. In the travel accounts of Hiuen Tsang there are positive references to the crossing of the Ganges and the Karatōyā by him¹⁰⁹. But no reference to the Padmā is found in the texts when Hiuen Tsang continued his journey to

Samatāṭa and Kāmarūpa¹¹⁰. But this does not, however, conclusively prove the non-existence of the Padmā as a river in the 7th century A.D. There are, however, certain indications or indirect references by which the existence of the Padmā can be inferred. It is true that Ptolemy does not make any specific reference to the Padmā, but the mention of Kamberikon identified with the Kumāra river is very significant. There are again certain other indirect references which may prove the existence of the river Padmā at an early period.

The literary texts cited above refer to the Padmā. But these are not very old. It is, however, the Edilpur Copper plate of Śrī Chandra (11th century A.D.) which refers to the grant of land in a village situated in Satatapadmāvatī and the Mandala Kumāra-tālaka within it¹¹¹. The expression Satata-Padmāvatī perhaps refers to the river Padmā, and the Kumāratalaka possibly denotes the Kumāra river. This would accordingly prove the existence of the two rivers at least in the 10th - 11th century A.D. The inscription (11th century A.D.) of Govinda-
 Antiquity chandra makes, however, a specific reference to the Padmā¹¹². Govinda-
 and early chandra is described to have recrossed the Padmā and entered into
 refe- Uttara-Rādha (Mursīdābād and Bīrbhūm districts) and reached the
 rences bank of the Bhāgīrathī. Further, the Kumāra river, as already stated,
 to the appears to have been referred to by Ptolemy as Kamberikon, the third
 Padmā mouth of the Ganges¹¹³. There are again some other indications about the existence
 of the Padmā in a still earlier period. But positive evidences are lacking. While
 indicating the locality called Gaur (Gauda), the river Padmā is, however, mentioned
 in Sobhārāmpur plate of Dāmōdaradeva¹¹⁴. It is to be noted in this context that
 the Tabaqat-i-Nāsiri (13th century A.D.) refers to Rādha and Varendra lying
 on both sides of the Ganges, implying thereby the Bhāgīrathī¹¹⁵. It may be therefore
 contended that even up to the 13th century the Bhāgīrathī was the principal
 flow of the Ganges.

It is only from the 14th century that frequent references to the Padmā may be cited. Ibn Batuta who visited Bengal in the 14th century A.D. speaks of Sadkawan as a 'big place on the sea shore'. Then he refers to the rivers like the Ganges and the Jun. Yule identified Sadkawan with Chittagong, the Ganges with the Padmā and Jun with the Yamunā. But these identifications are not acceptable to all. Majumdar thinks that there are good grounds for identifying Sadkawan with Saptagrāma and the two others with the Bhāgīrathī and the Yamunā¹¹⁶. In fact, in some maps of the 17th century Sātgaon has been also shown as close to the sea-shore. It thus appears that even by the 14th century

Map. No. 5.



JAO DE BARROS MAP OF BENGAL (1550 A.D.)

A.D., the Padmā can not be said to be the main channel of the Ganges. From the 16th century A.D., the Padmā, however, began carrying the bulk of the water of the Ganges. This is fully corroborated by the Portuguese records. De Barrow's Map of Bengal (C 1550 A.D.) shows the Padmā as the main channel of the Ganges¹¹⁷ (Map. 5) Manrique while describing his voyage to Hugli. in 1628 Latter says : "We entered the mouth of the large and far-famed old Ganges"¹¹⁸. The name Ganges has been also applied to the Padmā by Abul Fazal¹¹⁹. According to the Stevenson Moore Committee Report, the Padmā first flowed past Rāmpur Boāliā through the Chālān-Jhil, the Dhaleśvarī and the Burigāṅgā rivers¹²⁰. The same report records that the Padmā flowed past Dacca into the Meghnā¹²¹. This course is also shown in De Barrow's map (C 1550 A.D.) in which Dacca is distinctly located on the northern bank of the river Padmā¹²² (Map. 5). Again, in De Barrow's map, the town of Sonārgāon is placed to the south-east of Dacca on the Southern bank of the Padmā¹²³. Majumdar, however, does not agree with the view of the Moore's Committee¹²⁴. De Barrow's map refers also to a river called Caor which fell into the Padmā near a town known as Bandar or port¹²⁵. In this context, it may be again noted that the name Gaṅgā was even applied to the Padmā by the foreign travellers of the 16th century A.D. In fact, they recognised the Padmā as the main channel of the Ganges. It has been upheld by some that the river Kośī fell into the Ganges, and the combined waters of the two opened the course of the Padmā¹²⁶.

Further, the river Padmāvatī as described by Tavernier in his account and by the Boharistan-i-Ghysbi indicates roughly the course of the river Padmā in the 17th century A.D.¹²⁷. It appears that in the 17th century A.D. the course of the Padmā ran along the Dhaleśvarī channel or a parallel channel, the "Isamutty" (Ichhāmatī¹²⁸). By about the middle of the 18th century, the Padmā being thus strengthened by the waterflow produced new channels cutting right across the line of the Bhairab¹²⁹. In the later half of the 18th century A.D. during Major Rennell's survey, the lower course of the Padmā flowed further southwards¹³⁰ (Map. 7). It seems that the river Dhaleśvarī (Burigāṅgā) probably represents the earliest and most northerly course of the Padmā. In the 18th century the Āriākhān was perhaps its most southern course flowing through the districts of Faridpur and Bākhargānj and joining the Meghnā estuary just above the island of Dakshin-Shāhbāzpur, about 25 miles south of Chāndpur¹³¹. Flowing by the side of the city of Rājnagar, the river Kāligāṅgā connects the

Padmā with the Meghnā river. Thus the lower course of the Padmā is joined by the Brahmaputra and the Meghnā, and these combined rivers form the mighty Meghnā estuary. In the middle of the 19th century the main volume of the Padmā flowed through the Kīrtināsā.

Thus the Padmā became more and more extensive in size and superseded the united flow of the Ichhāmātī and the Brahmaputra. Gradually, the Padmā adopted its present course as the Yamunā carrying the main volume of the waters of the Brahmaputra meets her near Goāṇḍa. The mighty Padmā causes great havoc and creates terror and is hardly looked upon with great veneration like the Bhāgīrathī. The Padmā does not bear any traditional religious sanctity.

(iv) Other Important Rivers :

It thus follows from the above that the Bhāgīrathī was originally the principal and the oldest branch of the Ganges. When the Bhāgīrathī started drying up, the Padmā began to carry the main volume of water of the Ganges, and being fed by waters of other rivers, the Padmā became transformed into a principal river of Bengal. Besides the Bhāgīrathī and the Padmā, there are many other rivers which are mostly fed by them. The Bhāgīrathī in its upper course taking the waters of the Bānsloi, the Pāglā, the Brāhmaṇī, the Dvārakā, the Mor or Mayūrākshī and the Ajay became separated into three branches at Tribenī. These are : (a) The Sarasvatī on west, (b) the Yamunā on east and (c) the Hugli in the centre. Abul Fazal has referred to the three streams of the Bhāgīrathī as Sarsuti (Sarasvatī), Jamna (Yamunā) and the Ganges¹³². The junction of these three streams is called Tribenī (3 hair-braids). It has been observed by Wilford that waters of these 3 rivers do never mix¹³³. The waters of the Yamunā are blue, those of the Ganges, muddy-yellowish colour and those of the Sarasvatī, white. There are again some other rivers which played significant role in the history and cultural setting of the people of Bengal. An account of some these important rivers of ancient Bengal is presented here for a proper understanding of their historical and cultural import.

(a) The Sarasvatī :

The most ancient course of the Sarasvatī is closely linked up with the history of two ports of ancient Bengal, Tāmralipti (Tamluk) and Saptagrāma (Sātgaon). The Sarasvatī once flowed into an estuary near modern Tamluk and received not only the waters of the Rūpnārāyaṇa and the Dāmodara, but also of many other streams issuing from the hills of the Santal Parganās. That Tāmralipta

continued as a flourishing port till the 8th century A.D. was all due to the great
 Tāmra- flow of the river Sarasvatī. Sometimes after the 8th century A.D.
 lipti the port of Tāmralipta lost its importance on account of the silting
 up of the mouth of the Sarasvatī and the consequent shifting of its course towards
 the east.

In the beginning, the Sarasvatī was the main channel of the river
 Bhāgīrathī, and gradually it splited up into three main streams at Tribenī. Because
 of the drying up of the Sarasvatī, Tamluk lost its importance, and its place was
 ultimately taken up by Sātgaon or Saptagrāma situated a little higher up. Sātgaon
 Saptagrāma was the capital of South-western Bengal in the 14th century A.D.
 and the Sarasvatī flowed in its south-west direction¹³⁴. In the 16th
 century A.D., the volume of the waters of the Bhāgīrathī began to flow through
 the Hugli, and the Sarasvatī ceased to be its main channel¹³⁵. Sātgaon lost
 its importance from the 16th century A.D. and gradually its place was taken
 up by the Hugli, and subsequently by Calcutta. This is clearly borne out by the
 Portuguese records¹³⁶.

The Portuguese selected Hugli for their settlement (1580 A.D.) in
 lieu of Sātgaon, because the main stream of the river Bhāgīrathī no longer flowed
 through the Sarasvatī. From the settlement records made by Ceasar Frederick
 in 1565 A.D. it becomes evident that the Sarasvatī above Bator (Śibpur) was
 very shallow and big ships could no more enter into the port of Sātgaon¹³⁷.
 Again, the Sarasvatī also started decaying because of the construction of an
 Decaying artificial canal which connected the Hugli channel below Calcutta
 of the through Garden Reach with it at Sāñkrāl¹³⁸. The Hugli deserted
 Sarasvatī the old Ādi-Gaṅgā channel and flowed through the lower course of
 the Sarasvatī at Sāñkrāl. Gradually, the Sarasvatī was piled high above the sea
 level. Now the Sarasvatī is a dead river leaving only its traces at different places
 of its old course.

(b) The Yamunā and other Rivers :

The eastern branch of the Bhāgīrathī, i.e., the Yamunā was not a promi-
 nent river in ancient times. It does not find any mention even in Rennell's map.
 Its lower portion is referred to as Yamunā (Jubna) and its upper portion as
Ichhāmutty (Issamet) in Rennell's map¹³⁹. The Yamunā flowed south-east down
 its present bed. Among many other western tributaries of the river Bhāgīrathī,

the Kapiśā or Kāñśāi, the Rūpnārāyaṇa, the Dāmodar, the Suvarṇarekhā and the Ajay are to be described as other ancient rivers of Bengal.

(c) **The Kapiśā :**

The river Kapiśā (Kharabhā) or Kāñśāi has been referred to in the early texts as a large river of great importance. As early as the 2nd century A.D., Ptolemy refers to Kambyson which has been identified with the river Kāñśāi or Kapiśā on the bank of which stands today the present district town of Midnapur^{139a}. Even in some early texts, the river Kapiśā is mentioned. Kālidāsa in his Raghuvaṃśa while describing Raghu's Digvijaya refers to Kapiśā. It is narrated that after crossing the river Kapiśā or Kharabhā, the victorious hero entered into the territory of the Utkalas¹⁴⁰. From the description given by Kālidāsa it follows that the southern portion of the river Kapiśā was adjacent to Utkala, i.e., Orissa. The Mārkaṇḍeya-purāṇa also refers to this river under various forms as Kapiśavati or Kāñśavati, i.e., modern Kāñśāi which now flows through the districts of Bāñkurā and Midnapur and falls into the river Rūpnārāyaṇa¹⁴¹.

(d) **The Rūpnārāyaṇa :**

The Rūpnārāyaṇa is an ancient river which flowed by the side of Tāmra-lipta (modern Tamluk). Tamluk was linked up with the Bay of Bengal by a channel of the Rūpnārāyaṇa river. The disappearance of the channel linking Tamluk to the sea had a far reaching effect on the history of Bengal, and this was largely responsible for the decline of this ancient sea port-town which failed to maintain its contact with the world outside. When the river Sarasvatī was the main channel of the Bhāgīrathī, the Rūpnārāyaṇa was, most probably, a branch of the Sarasvatī. The course of this river has been actually shown in Rennell's map which bears a number of channels connecting it with the Dāmodara¹⁴² (Map. 7). The southeasterly channel of the Rūpnārāyaṇa can be also traced in the maps prepared in the 16th and early part of the 17th century. But in the later part of the 17th century A.D. it was silted up. Even today the tidal basin of the Rūpnārāyaṇa plays a very important role in feeding the Hugli. river below and above its junction at Geoñkhāli and also in relieving the flood congestion of the plains of lower Dāmodar, Śilāi and Kāñśāi. Besides the Hugli., the port of Calcutta as well as the flood plains of the Dāmodar, the Dvārakeśvar, the Śilāi and the Kāñśāi are also largely dependant on the Rūpnārāyaṇa. They run more or less from west

to east, each independent of the other, through wide alluvium filled troughs. These are mere trickles in the greater part of the year, but with the advent of the monsoon-rains they become unformidable, violent and destructive.

(e) **The Dāmodar :**

The Dāmodar, the sacred river of the primitive Santals, rises in the Chhotanāgpur-watershed and after a south-easterly course of about 350 miles falls into the Hugli. The river has, however, changed its ancient course below Burdwan. In Van Den Broucke's map of Bengal dated 1660 A.D., the Dāmodar or at least a major branch of it flowed almost due east of Burdwan and fell into the Hugli near Kālā¹⁴³ (Map. 6). The river Dāmodar flowing through the Burdwan district is also referred to in inscriptions like Jayarāmpur Copper plate inscription of the time of Gopachandra¹⁴⁴. This course of the Dāmodar is indicated in Rennel's map as well by a small rivulet and is referred to in the Manasār-Bhāsān by Kshemānandadās (C.1640 A.D.^{144a}).

(f) **The Ajay :**

The Ajay originating from the Chhotanāgpur hills drains a large portion of the southern and western slopes of West Bengal. The bed of the river is sandy, annually inundating its banks. Hunter urged that the name Aja is a derivation from the Sanskrit Ajaya meaning unconquerable¹⁴⁵. The Ajay, one of the tributaries of the Bhāgīrathī, has been identified by Wilford with the Amystis of Arrian¹⁴⁶. The Ajay flowing by the side of the town of Kantadupa (may be identified with Katwa) fell into the Bhāgīrathī by the north of Navadvīpa. Rājendra Chola appears to have crossed the Ganges (Bhāgīrathī) near the Ajay river as learnt from the Tirumalai inscription¹⁴⁷. In the Śāktipur Copper plate of Lakshmanasena it has been stated that the river Ajay separated northern Rādhā from its southern part¹⁴⁸. This contention is supported by Dubi plate of Bhāskavarman¹⁴⁹. In the Śāktipur Copper plate it is also mentioned that northern Rādhā was bounded by the Ajay on south and the Bhāgīrathī on east¹⁵⁰.

(g) **The Suvarṇarekhā :**

The Suvarṇarekhā is also an important river in ancient Bengal. Ptolemy has referred to Kambyson as the westerly mouth of the Ganges¹⁵¹. This Kambyson of Ptolemy has been identified either with the Hugli or the Suvarṇarekhā called the Jellāsūr river by Wilford¹⁵². The river Sarasvatī joined the Suvarṇarekhā near Danton in Midnapur District. If the identification of the western mouth

of the Ganges with the Suvarṇarekhā is accepted, the second mouth of the Ganges called the Mega by Ptolemy may be equated with the Hugli.¹⁵³ This river Suvarṇarekhā is mentioned in the Irda Copper plate of the Kamboja king Nayapāladeva¹⁵⁴. While describing the extent of the Dandabhūkti-maṇḍala it is stated that the same comprised at least the southern and south-western portion of Midnapur district including the lower reaches of the Suvarṇarekhā river, but not the portion of the Balasore district itself¹⁵⁵. The sea was near the mouth of this river as is known from Jayarāmpur Copper plate inscription of the time of Gopachandra¹⁵⁶. It is also known that near the mouth of this river there was a chance of forming delta in course of geological movements in both sea and land in this coastal country¹⁵⁷. Among other rivers mention is to be made of the river Mora which has been identified with the modern Mor or Mayūrākshī which flowed through the district of present Bīrbhūm as learnt from Śaktipur Copper plate of Lakshmanasena¹⁵⁸.

V. Rivers of the Central Delta

Among the important rivers in the deltaic region lying between the Bhāgīrathī-Hugli and the Padmā mention may be made of ^{the} Ichhāmāti, the Jalāṅgī, the Māthābhāṅgā and the Garāi, the Betnā, the Kobedak, the Bhadrā, the Rūpsā, etc. Besides, the Kumār and the Bhairab are also supposed to be very old rivers in Central Delta.

(a) The Bhairab :

When the silting of the Bhāgīrathī was complete, her accumulated waters took easterly trend through the channel known as the Bhairab. Thus the Bhairab became the main outlet for the waters of the Ganges. There is another opinion regarding the origin of the Bhairab. According to this opinion, at one time the Ganges found its way to the sea along the course of the Bhāgīrathī, and in those days, before the Padmā broke its way eastward and intersected the drainage of the Darjeeling Himalayas there must have been some earlier streams to carry that drainage to the sea, of which the Bhairab is said to have been one¹⁵⁹. Thus the Bhairab has been turned into a distributary of the waters of North Bengal. When the Padmā began to carry the main volume of the waters of the Ganges, the Bhairab became the main outlet of the waters of the Padmā. Once the Bhairab was a mighty channel of the Padmā, opposite Rāmpur Boāliā right upto her discharge in Haringhātā estuary. The intervening tract between the Bhāgīrathī and the Bhairab was gradually raised up by the alluvium thrown

by the Jalāngī and the Māthābhāṅgā and many other intervening redistributaries like the Yamunā, the Churnī, the Ichhāmatī, the Betnā, the Kobedak, the Bhadrā, the Rūpsā, etc. All these rivers may be described as belonging to the Bhairab system. Gradually, the region was elevated higher and higher. Then the Padmā being the main flow of the Ganges shifted further eastwards throwing its waters through the channel, the Māthābhāṅgā. Thus the flow of the Padmā was divided among the three streams, viz., the Bhairab, the Jalāngī and the Māthābhāṅgā. Therefore, the Bhairab lost its importance and gradually became a dead river.

(b) **The Māthābhāṅgā and the Kumār:**

With the decline of the Bhairab, the Māthābhāṅgā became prominent. The Kumār was the first redistributary of the Māthābhāṅgā. According to Majumdar, the Kumār appears to be an older channel than the Māthābhāṅgā which was formed on the decay of the Bhairab¹⁶⁰. Moreover the Kumār, the Navagaṅgā and the Chitrā were the redistributaries of the Māthābhāṅgā. The course of the Māthābhāṅgā usurped the channel of the Bhairab from below Sukalpur to Sultānpur and then proceeding further south transmitted its waters into the Churnī and the Ichhāmatī. The Māthābhāṅgā along with her system of redistributaries, the Kumār, the Navagaṅgā, the Chitrā, etc., extended the deltaic region and raised the general level eastwards up to the furthest end of Faridpur at least up to the border of the Āriākhān. However, both the Bhairab and the Māthābhāṅgā were important distributaries in early times, but the Garāi did not attain any importance.

(c) **The Garāi and the Madhumatī:**

The Garāi flowed as a cross-channel between the Ganges and the Kumār. When the Kumār began to silt up, the Ganges poured more and more of its waters down the Garāi which then began to swallow up the Kumār. The development of the Garāi, in the opinion of Majumdar, "was due to the diversion of the Brahmaputra through the Yamunā channel meeting the Ganges at Goālanda, thereby heading up the Ganges flood to a certain extent and forging it to find some other outlet higher up".¹⁶¹

The river Barisā was one of the channels of the Kumār. Being a narrow river, it was unable to carry off the influx of water and opened up a new western channel called the Alanghali. The Barisā and Alanghali being united formed the river known as Madhumatī as described by O' Malley.¹⁶² During the end of the 19th century A.D., the river Madhumatī, writes O' Malley, was a beautiful stream

of clear water navigable by large vessels all the year round¹⁶³. The Madhumatī brought down the great quantity of the Ganges water to the sea. On the basis of O' Malley's statement it has been held that the Garāi and the Madhumatī, comparatively new rivers, became important after a series of disastrous floods in the early part of the 19th century A.D.¹⁶⁴. The Garāi-Madhumatī channel is now raising up the deltaic portion built up by the Āriākhān system. During Rennell's time, the Chandanā was the most important river of all the distributaries of the Ganges flowing through Central Bengal¹⁶⁵. It was navigable throughout the year. Rennell did not, however, refer to the Garāi because of its insignificance. In Rennell's time another important river was the Jalāngī¹⁶⁶.

VI. Rivers of the East

Thus originated the flows of the Ichhāmātī, the Bhairav, the Kumār, the Bhadrā, the Kabadak, the Garāi, the Madhumatī, the Barisā, the Alanghali, the Jalāngī, the Chandanā and others in Central Bengal. It is, however, to be noted that all the rivers described above were not equally active in carrying waters and in forming the delta. When the rivers in the west of the delta were active, those in the east were in their infancy, and when the rivers in the east were adollescing, those in the west became senile. The most important rivers of the east are the Brahmaputra and the Meghnā.

(a) The Brahmaputra :

Of the three principal rivers, the Padmā, the Brahmaputra and the Meghnā of Eastern Bengal, the Brahmaputra is undoubtedly the most important and ancient one. The river Brahmaputra is also known as Lauhitya which is a Sanskrit derivation of the Indo-Mongoloid word Luhit¹⁶⁷. The term Luhit is still used to denote the easternmost branch of the Brahmaputra which is now flanked by Mishmi (North Assamese), Singpho or Kachin (Burmese-Kuki-Lolo) and Khamti speakers¹⁶⁸. Originally, the area of the Luhit river appears to have been inhabited by the Bodo people¹⁶⁹. Dihāng is the name of the Dihāng-Brahmaputra. Sesirī and the Dibāng are the names of two other branches from the north. The Luhit is the main feeder from the east which, beyond the eastern frontiers of India, is known as the Zayul¹⁷⁰.

The name Lohit was once used for the entire river now known as the Brahmaputra. The name Lohitya or Lohini to denote the Brahmaputra is also mentioned in the Purāṇas¹⁷¹. The Brahmaputra, originally a small stream, became a formidable river of the Ganges when it joined with the Tsanpo of Tibet through its tributary the Dihong (in Upper Assam) and with the Tistā¹⁷². Till the middle of the 14th century A.D., the Brahmaputra did not play any vital role in the economic life of Bengal as it poured into the sea near the port of Chittagong. It is in the 17th century A.D. that the main channel of the Brahmaputra passed through the district of Dacca. But it also gradually decayed and changed its course. Sometimes, the river flowed towards the west and then again moved towards the east in a zigzag course. A definite westward flow of the Brahmaputra began from the middle of the 18th century A.D. Then the river Brahmaputra flowed through the channel of the Dhaleswarī. Again, after the Tistā floods of 1789, Old and the Brahmaputra changed its course towards the Yamūnā¹⁷³. Thus new courses the old course of the Brahmaputra curbing round the Gāro hills on the west took a south-easterly course near Dewāngañj and flowing by Jāmālpur, Mymensing and the neighbourhood of the Madhupur jungle in the district of Mymensing ran through the eastern part of the Dacca district. At this point, the Brahmaputra threw off a branch called Lakhmiyā and then passing by Nāngalband to the south-west of Sonārgāoñ fell into the Dhaleswarī¹⁷⁴. The Lakhmiyā runs almost parallel to the main course. Then passing by Nārāyaṅgañj, the Lakhmiyā met the Dhaleswarī and flowed into the main stream of the Brahmaputra. This course of the Brahmaputra was deserted in the 18th century when it began to flow further east and joined the Meghnā near Bhairab-bazar in the Mymensing district, and below the confluence, the river became known as the Meghnā¹⁷⁵. In the first quarter of the 19th century, since the time of Rennell's survey, many square miles of the country between the Brahmaputra and the Tistā have been swept away by the former.

Like most of the rivers the Brahmaputra also formed the boundary mark between two countries. According to Yoginī-Tantra, the country lying to the east of the Brahmaputra was called Kāmarūpa (Kāmarūpe mahāpūjā sarva-siddhi-siddhi-phala-prajā, Nepālasya Kāñchanādrim Brahmaputrasya saṅgamam¹⁷⁶...). In some inscriptions, the river Lohitya is mentioned. The Mandasor inscription of the 6th century A.D. records that Yaśodharman extended his sway as far as Lohitya (Brahmaputra¹⁷⁷). The river Lohitya (Brahmaputra) is also mentioned in the Apsad inscription of Ādityasena of the 7th century A.D. According to this inscription Mahāsenagupta emerged victorious out of a struggle with

Susthitavarman, and the glory or fame of Mahāsenagupta was sung on the bank of the river Lauhitya (Brahmaputra¹⁷⁸). The river Lauhitya/Brahmaputra also

Early marked the eastern limit of the kingdom. The Bāghāūrā (district
refe- Tippera) Nārāyaṇa Image inscription (Year 3) refers to the Lauhitya or
rences Brahmaputra river as a boundary mark between the two countries¹⁷⁹.

Mymensingh and Dacca districts remained to the east of the Brahmaputra. In the Sobhārāmpur plate of Dāmodaradeva (Śaka 1158) as well the river Brahmaputra is mentioned¹⁸⁰. It is known from this inscription that Susthitavarman transferred his capital to a new city built by him on the bank of the holy river, i.e., the Brahmaputra¹⁸¹. From this inscription, it appears that the old capital was not exactly on the Brahmaputra. The capital city built by the king Susthitavarman is usually identified with the modern city of Gauhāṭi on the Brahmaputra¹⁸². The older city may also have been situated not very far from Gauhāṭi. All these references certainly speak of the antiquity and importance of the river Brahmaputra as a boundary mark between the ancient kingdoms of Kāmarūpa and Bengal. Like the Ganges the Brahmaputra is also recognised as a sacred river and thousands of pilgrims take their bath in the muddy pools near Nāngalband.

(b) ~~The Meghna~~ **The Meghna:**

The river Meghna, however, does not either drain such extensive areas or carry much silt like the Ganges or the Brahmaputra. During Rennell's time, the Lower reach of the Brahmaputra or the Meghna was four to five miles wide. Towards the end of the 18th century the importance of the river Yamunā increased, and since 1850, it became the main channel of the Brahmaputra. The present course of the Brahmaputra runs further west flowing by the side of Mymensingh town. The Dhaleśvarī, the Burigangā and the Lakhmia (Lakhya) are the important streams which flow in between the Yamunā and the Meghna. Amongst these three rivers, the Lakhya is a comparatively steady river.

Unlike the Ganges and the Brahmaputra, the Meghna is primarily fed by rain-water. Excessive rains on the southern slopes of Meghālaya in the Eastern Hills and the Surmā valley find their way into the Meghna-channel and thereby making it a formidable river. The presence of a number of large alluvial lakes locally known as Bāors along the course of the Meghna tends to make the flow more uniform than that of the Ganges and the Brahmaputra¹⁸³. To

the east of the Meghnā, the only river of importance is the Karnaphulī, the mouth of the maritime outlet of East Bengal. The river Meghnā was also the natural boundary between Dāmodaradeva's territory and the dominion of Vāṅga as is recorded in the Mehar Copper plate of Dāmodaradeva of the year 4 dated 1156 Śaka¹⁸⁴.

VII. Rivers of North Bengal

Rivers in North Bengal flow either into the Padmā or the Brahmaputra. Among the rivers in North Bengal, the Tistā, the Karatōyā, the Mahānandā, the Ātrāi and the Punarbhabā deserve special treatment. The North Bengal plains are bordered on the east by the Brahmaputra and on the south by the Ganges-Padmā and on the west by the Kōśī and across them flow the Tistā, the Mahānandā, the Punarbhabā, the Ātrāi, the Karatōyā and other streams.

(a) The Tistā;

The Tistā is an ancient river which has very often changed its course. Even at present, the most important river of North Bengal is the Tistā which flows down the slopes of the Himalayas and passes through the plains to discharge its waters finally into the Brahmaputra.

Originally, the Tistā flowed into the Brahmaputra. Then it changed its course and became a tributary of the Ganges. But the Tistā deserted her old flow and took the course falling into the Brahmaputra. In its second stage, from Jalpaiguri the Tistā flowed towards south and bifurcated into three channels, namely, the Karatōyā to the east, the Punarbhabā to the west and the Ātrāi in the centre. These three streams have been appropriately named Trisrota (trisrota, i.e., tri or three and srota or flowing current; Tri+srota = Trisrota or three flowing streams in three channels). The term Trisrota has been actually transformed into Tistā.

In the maps of Rennel, the Tistā is shown as flowing through the North Bengal plains in several branches like the Punarbhabā, the Ātrāi and the Karatōyā¹⁸⁵. All these streams flowing southward joined with the Mahānandā, the westernmost river in North Bengal. The current of these combined rivers was known as the Hoorsāgar which finally discharged into the Padmā at Jaffargāñj near modern Goālnanda¹⁸⁶. It is to be noted that in Rennel's time the lower

course of the Hoorsāgar used to run almost parallel to the Ganges for nearly 150 miles¹⁸⁷. The Hoorsāgar river is still extant. It is the combined outfall of the Borāl, a spill-channel of the Ganges, the Ātrāi, the Yamunā or Yamuneśvarī (not the main Yamunā through which the Brahmaputra now flows) and the Karatōyā. The Hoorsāgar falls into the main Yamunā, a few miles above the confluence of these two rivers at Goālanda¹⁸⁸.

Hunter has pointed out that due to high flood in 1787 A.D. the Tistā suddenly changed her course and rushed south-east and ran into the Brahmaputra near Bahādurābād¹⁸⁹. Before its diversion by about 1787, the Tistā used to discharge her waters through the Punarbhabā, the Ātrāi and the Karatōyā into the Ganges. After the diversion of her course, most of the channels of the Tistā are gradually creating waterlogging due to inadequate drainage. This diversion of the Tistā into the Brahmaputra-course by about 1787 led to a relative decline in the old course of the Brahmaputra, east of Dacca, already ponded back by waters brought from the Surmā valley by the Meghnā¹⁹⁰.

However, since the diversion of the Tistā, most of the rivers of North Bengal have been deprived of sufficient waters and are now dying out. The Māhanandā is the only exception. But even this river shows a tendency to leave its present bed and take to new westerly channels. The river Māhanandā also formed the boundary line of Varendra on west and the Karatōyā on east¹⁹¹. The Karatōyā, the Ātrāi and the Punarbhabā are the three principal channels of the Tistā.

(b) **The Karatōyā:**

The name Karatōyā is derived from Kara, i.e., hand and toyā, i.e., water. According to a mythical story, Karatōyā signifies that the river was formed by water which was poured on the hands of Śiva when he married the goddess Pārvatī¹⁹².

In ancient times, the Karatōyā was recognised as a big and sacred river of North Bengal. In the Rāmacharita of Sandhyākaranadī, the Karatōyā is mentioned as a glorious river flowing through Varendrī¹⁹³. Its sanctity is also recognised with reverence in this treatise. Even today, the work Karatōyā-Māhātmya bears testimony to its sanctity. In the list of the rivers given in the

Mahābhārata, the Karatōyā is mentioned as the eastern boundary of the Pundra country and is noted for its sanctity¹⁹⁴. The Amarakōsha and Hemachandra's Abhidhāna-Chintāmaṇi give the synonym of Karatōyā as Sadānīrā, i.e., always with water or 'never dry'¹⁹⁵. But in the Mahābhārata, the Sadānīrā appears to be different from the Karatōyā¹⁹⁶. The sacred river Karatōyā is also mentioned in the Laghubhārata (Vrihatparīśarapunya Karatōyā Mahānadi)¹⁹⁷. It is also learnt from the same work that the Karatōyā demarcated the boundary between Gauḍa and Vaṅga^{197a}. Hiuen Tsang (7th century A.D.) in course of his travel in Bengal and Assam refers to two big rivers crossed by him¹⁹⁸. He crossed the Ganges near Rājmaḥal in order to reach North Bengal, and a large river, probably the Karatōyā which he crossed over to Kāmarūpa (Assam¹⁹⁹). The Karatōyā was a big river in the 7th century A.D. If it is presumed that the Kuśī and the Mahānandā formerly joined the Karatōyā, the wide expanse of the river can be easily gleaned. Hunter has actually noted that the Kuśī flowing through the Tejpur-Parganā continued its easterly course and met the Karatōyā²⁰⁰. Then the Karatōyā on its way received waters of the Ātrāi and the Tistā as well. The wide expanse of the river may be further proved by the fact that for crossing the river ten kāṇan of cowris were required²⁰¹. It may be, however, contended that this heavy charge might have been a sort of embargo for passing from one kingdom to another separated by the river.

In the 3rd century B.C. the ancient city of Pundravardhana stood on the bank of the river Karatōyā²⁰². The ruins of the city of Pundravardhana have been discovered at Mahāsthāngarh, a few miles from Bogra, and the decaying Karatōyā still passes by the side of the ancient city. The course of the river in this region may be regarded as a fixed landmark in the shifting of the Bengal rivers. The old riverbed has been nearly filled up and is no longer a territorial boundary. Like other rivers, the Karatōyā is also mentioned as a boundary-mark in the inscriptions. As for instance, the Sobhārāmpur plate of Dāmodaradeva records that the Gauḍas established their suzerainty over North Bengal at least upto the river Karatōyā in the east²⁰³. But the Karatōyā is more remarkable for the demarcation of two distinct kinds of soil²⁰⁴. On its west, Bogra is a veritable land of Edom, the soil being almost as red as blood, but at the same time very hard and tenacious²⁰⁵. The peasants even today build their huts with this earth. The old rampart known as the Bhīmjaṅgal still runs along its western side. But the soil on its east is full of sand and alluvium. Gradually, this mighty

river has turned into an insignificant stream. It becomes dry in winter and is scarcely navigable except in the rainy season.

(c) The Kuśī.

The Kuśī is another ancient river of North Bengal. The Sanskrit name of the present Kuśī is Kauśika who is said to have been a river-nymph worshipped on its bank²⁰⁶. The ancient city of Pundravardhana was bounded on west by the river Kuśī. It has very often changed its courses, and now, it flows through the district of Purnea into the Ganges, much higher up above the Rājmahal²⁰⁷. But originally the Kuśī ran east-west and fell into the Brahma-putra.

In the Epics and the Purānas the present river is represented by the name Kauśikī. The Mahābhārata (Vanaparva) refers to Trisrota-Kauśikī, i.e., three courses or three rivers²⁰⁸. Both the Mārkaṇḍeya and the Vāyu Purānas refer to the river Kauśikī; the former mentions the river after the Gaṇḍakī as flowing from the slopes of the Himalayas and the latter Pūrāṇa, however, contains the expression : Kauśikī cha tritīyā tu²⁰⁹. Again, there are also references to Sapta-Kauśikas which include the main river and its tributaries, such as, the Tambra, the Tamrā, the Āran or Eran, the Dudhkōśī, the Likhu Kōśī, the Tambā Kōśī and the Bhotia Kōśī²¹⁰.

According to Hunter (1877), the Kuśī in its eastward course first met the Karatōyā which received waters of the Ātrāī and the Tistā²¹¹. He has further stated that the Kōśī and the Mahānandā formerly joined together and brought about considerable changes in the physical set up resulting in depopulation of Gaur²¹². Leaving its eastern course, it passed through the Kālindi, a channel known as the Marā-Kuśī (dead Kuśī) and rushed into the Ganges. Numerous marshes lying near Maldah bear traces of the river Kōśī. Fergusson suggested that the Kuśī discharged its water through the Ātrāī and Ursāgar into the Brahma-putra²¹³. It has been pointed out by Buchanan Hamilton that the channel of the Kuśī in the past joined with the Mahānandā released a volume of water to the Ganges and passed through the Padmā.²¹⁴ It flows south of Tejpur-Parganā, passing through the Kālindi and strikes against Gaur.²¹⁵ Shillingford thinks that the Kuśī flowed to the north and east, and the Haringhāṭṭā is the channel by which the Kuśī was swelled by many tributaries flowing into the Brahmaputra.²¹⁶

It has been pointed out by Hirst (1903) that the Kośī is a river flowing at different times over the land along the junction of the Ganges and the Brahmaputra plains (roughly longitude 87° East²¹⁷). According to Bhattacharyya, the river crossed by Hiuen Tsang in the 7th century A.D. during his sojourn to Kāmarūpa was the Tistā which is the eastern channel of the Kośī²¹⁸. He refers to two inscriptions, Nidhānpur Copper plate and Tejpur grant in this context. The former refers to some areas west of this river and the latter to Trisrōtāyāh paśchimata and to Chandrapuri on the Tistā²¹⁹. Thus the Nidhānpur Copper plate refers to the dying Kośī²²⁰. But this identification of the Tistā with the Kośī cannot be accepted. An old channel was noticed by Rennell in the district of Purūnea, and Barua identifies it with the Śushka-Kauśika (marā Kōśī)²²¹.

It is indeed very difficult to determine the old courses of the river Kośī with any amount of precision, nor possible to locate its position at a particular age. It may be, however, contended that the Kuśī throughout its course formed a sort of ethnic boundary line of Bengal between the people of the south and those of the north like the Kōch and the Kirātas²²².

(d) The Ātrēyī :

Another ancient river of North Bengal is obviously the river Ātrēyī. Mention of this river is to be found in the Sabhāparva of the Mahābhārata as : Karatōyā tathātreyī Lauhityasva Mahānandāh²²³. The river Ātrāi is also mentioned in the Kalāikuri (Dist. Bogra) inscription of the year 120 (Gupta Era²²⁴).

(e) The Vātānadī :

The Vātānadī mentioned in Kalāikuri (Dist. Bogra) inscription (Gupta year 120) is another ancient river of North Bengal²²⁵. According to this inscription, the village Dhānyapaṭalikagrāma was bounded by the river Vātā and by the borders of Gulmagandhikagrāma²²⁶. The river Vātā flowed through the Śrīngavera-vīthi as is stated in the inscription with the present Baranai flowing west to east through the southern part of the Rājsāhi district²²⁷. Śrīngavera-vīthi has been again identified with the modern Singra police station in the Nātor Subdivision of Rājsāhi district, situated about 10 miles to the north-east of the junction of the Baranai and the Ātrāi²²⁸.

(f) The Balabhī and the Kāli :

The Balabhī and the Kāli are the two excessively weak rivers of Varendrī or North Bengal as recorded in the Rāmacharita of Sandhyākaranandī :

(Balabhīnādī Kṛśātarā cha yā Kālinādī²²⁹). These two rivers have not yet been identified properly.

VI. Observation

The above brief review of the rivers of Bengal, past and present, relates more particularly to the principal rivers flowing (or once flowed) in different directions and finally falling into the Bay of Bengal. Besides the principal rivers, there are also many other large/small rivers/tributaries of the former. Towards lower Bengal nearing the sea, there are numerous rivulets issuing out of the Bhāgīrathī, the Padmā and the Brahmaputra. Further, numerous canals and streamlets coming out of these rivers abound all over Bengal. In fact, a network of rivers, large and small, has been from hoary antiquity the most characteristic features of Bengal. The river system of Bengal has been from very early times the very bedrock of Bengal's cultural attainments including her distinctive ways of life and thought bearing a marked stamp of her own. This would be evident from a brief reference to the influence of the rivers on various aspects of the life of the people of Bengal.

VII Influence of Rivers

Bengal has been through centuries a veritable plain landmass with innumerable rivers, broad and narrow, perennial and intermittent. Three principal rivers of Bengal, namely, the Bhāgīrathī, the Padmā and the Meghnā, have again numerous tributaries and branches. All these rivers having their winding and changing courses and flowing sometimes swiftly or slowly pour their waters either into the big rivers or into the Bay of Bengal. The rivers in Bengal have been constantly changing their courses resulting on the one hand in the continual emergence of new land mass and on the other, in complete or partial devastation of the areas which had formerly been important centres of trade and administration. Some of the rivers, once noted for their volumes and sizes, have become gradually silted up or reduced to the shape of small streams, standing as strange and disappointing relics of their former grandeur and majesty. The role of the rivers in forming the landmass and in moulding the nature and character of the people and their cultural patterns is indeed worthnoting. From times immemorial, both physical and cultural changes in Bengal have been greatly conditioned by the rivers. The constant shifting of the river-courses, erosions, accretions and innundations have always produced significant changes

in the history and culture of the Bengali people. The rivers have indeed left distinct marks upon every sphere of Bengal's life : political, social, economic and cultural.

Rivers in Bengal have frequently changed their courses through centuries, some of which have completely disappeared leaving only faint traces of their ancient flow. The Ganges rolled down through the Bhāgīrathī-Huglī channel, and the Padmā has now become her main outlet due to the shifting of her principal course towards the East. The Tistā, the Karatōyā, the Kuśī, the Brahmaputra and the Meghnā have also changed their courses several times. As a result of the diversion of the courses of the rivers, sometimes new streams have come out. Thus emerged the Bhairab, the Garāi, the Chandanā, the Madhumatī and the Kumār. Again, many rivers have ceased to flow due to heavy silt deposition and deterioration of the river-beds. The constant silt-deposition makes the river-bed flat, and its continuity for decades creates obstructions on its flow. Therefore, such a river is bound to change its course or it gradually becomes dried up. Once, the main current of the Bhāgīrathī flowed through the Sarasvatī-channel which is now dead leaving only faint traces of its previous flow.

Frequent changes in the courses of the rivers have been largely responsible for the ruination of many old places and the rise and development of new ones. Many flourishing cities and thriving marts, harbours and ports have been made and unmade by such changes. Sometimes even the whole landscape of an area has undergone wholesale transformation. Constant shifting of the river beds has been largely responsible for disfiguring continuously the face of Bengal. Because of the absence of any other physical barriers, the rivers have always played a significant role in the demarcation of the territorial units of Bengal. Again, with the fluctuation of the river beds, the extent of the various territorial divisions did also undergo considerable changes.

The very existence of the villages or cities depended/depends largely on the shifting of the courses of the rivers. The shifting of the river-courses brought about the ruination of many ancient cities like Karnasuvarṇa, Tāmrāipti, Saptagrāma, etc. It is also believed that the shifting of the beds of the river

Kośī gave rise to swamps and floods which at last brought about the destruction of the city of Gauda²³⁰. The capricious Padmā has engulfed many old cities and villages. Sometimes many flourishing cities, towns, ports and villages have been wholly or partly washed away or engulfed by the rivers. It is the shifting of the river-beds that makes the habitation places unhealthy and inaccessible. The diversion of the course of the river also creates havoc and disasters.

The deltaic plains of Bengal, its alluvial soil and geological and topographical character, physical features, climatic condition and rainfall, aridity, population and settlement are also largely dependent on the river-system. Deltas have been formed by the vast deposition of silts carried by the rivers. The Delta between the river Bhāgīrathī and the Padmā has been solely formed by silt-depositions. From very ancient times, this process of forming landmass has been going on. This process has again brought about distinct changes in the physical aspects of Bengal to a great extent. In some areas, because of the deposition of silt the level of the land has been considerably raised and in others, it has become comparatively low and waterlogged. Thus, the rivers of Bengal concentrated their activities in the construction and reconstruction of landmass. In Northern Bengal, the old rivers have been silting up their beds for some decades, and large areas which were once ancient seats of civilization are now water-logged.

Sometimes, inundations cause the rivers to overflow her banks and adjacent lands, and water recedes leaving alluvial deposits. As a result of this alluvial deposition, a greater portion of Bengal, particularly the deltaic plains, has become extremely fertile. Where the rivers are still actively performing their original functions the land is fertile. But the places where the rivers are deteriorating, the land has become arid, dry and unproductive. The promotion of the fertility of soil is a veritable contribution of the rivers. In fact, it is the fertility of soil that has made Bengal agriculturally prosperous from times immemorial. The rivers of Bengal like the Ganges or Bhāgīrathī, the Brahmaputra, the Meghnā and their host of tributaries have largely contributed towards the agricultural affluence of Bengal. Besides agricultural bountifulness, Bengal's economy has been also largely augmented by industry and trade. The network of rivers has been sometimes considered as deterrent to industrial growth. But

in reality, ancient Bengal was a key centre of many industries which supplied some primary needs to other regions of the subcontinent and different parts of the world. This is so in respect of the textile industry. The textile products of Bengal have been through ages considered as prized possessions. Again, the rivers of Bengal have made the Bengalees daring, adventurous and proficient in navigation and water transports. The rivers thereby made the Bengali people more and more commercial enterprisers in carrying out riverine and maritime trading, both internal and foreign. Literary texts contain many references to such trading with different parts of the sub-continent as well as of the world and also to a number of big merchants/traders who often lost their fortunes including merchandise. Not only that, even the foreigners came and traded with various parts of Bengal through the river channels. In fact, the rivers of Bengal have from very early times been promoting and fostering both internal and foreign trade. Bengal's agricultural bounty and prosperous industry and trade have been all the most veritable gifts of her river system. Plentiful agricultural produces, refined industrial outputs and flourishing trade have been largely responsible for economic prosperity in Bengal. It follows that the economic wellbeing of the people of ancient Bengal has been largely due to her elaborate river system. The river valleys have been always very congenial and healthy resorts for human habitation. But the diversion of the river course or drying out of the river causes great havocs on the human life. In fact, many parts of Bengal have lost their importance in respect of both people's health and soil-fertility. The drying beds of the rivers and marshy lands have created unhealthy condition. In such areas, the breakout of epidemic diseases like malaria, cholera, etc., have become the inevitable results. It may be mentioned in this connection that the decline of the Ātrāi, the Karatōyā, the Ichhāmatī and others has caused the break out of malaria and other diseases in the neighbouring regions of those rivers.

Along these river-beds of Bengal the ancient human settlements grew and thrived. All primary settlements are to be invariably found in the valleys of the old rivers. Gradually, human settlements extended and villages and cities sprang up in different ages, obviously by the side of the rivers. Indeed the rivers played the most significant role in respect of the origins and development of both rural and urban centres of ancient Bengal.

The river valleys have been always the veritable resorts of the people. Accordingly, the population density is glaring in the river valleys. Thus the

percentage of density of people in East Bengal is higher than that in West Bengal. In fact, the basin of the active rivers swarms with people. Hence, a high population density forms a continuous belt running from North to South²³¹. In the past as well, the density of population depended primarily on the fertility of soil. It is also noticeable that in ancient times human settlements arose invariably by the river sides. It is only in modern times that sometimes settlements have grown up in places away from the river. This is one point of difference between the ancient and modern settlement patterns. Sometimes, the river deserted its old course and took a new turn. In such a case, the people also left their old habitation and took refuge in a congenial region adjacent to the river-bed. So, it is found that changes in the river-courses and their constant silting ceased displacement of settlements as well. In this way, many ancient settlements have been engulfed by the river or deserted or gone under earth.

Communications by both land and water have been quite well-known from ancient times. Because of innumerable rivers, the ~~non~~-existence of regular roadways in Bengal is quite but natural. Accordingly, the rivers have been the principal means of communication. Both internal and external trade and commerce were and are being carried out through the rivers. There are positive evidences of an active riverine trade and commerce in ancient Bengal. This becomes evident from the Arthaśāstra of Kauṭilya and the Periplus of the Erythraean Sea (1st century A.D.²³²). The four big rivers, the Bhāgīrathī (Ganges), the Padmā, the Brahmaputra and Meghnā were all navigable even in ancient times. Since bygone days, Bengal's rivers and canals have been always magnificent channels of inland water-transportation. The Bhāgīrathī in ancient times served as a great navigable trade-channel between Bengal and upper India. Even in medieval times, when the river Bhāgīrathī began decaying, the foreigners made this river their main channel of trade, and many trading settlements grew up on its bank. But with the drying of the Bhāgīrathī this riverine trade also declined. Now again, attempts are being made to divert the flow of the Gaṅgā into its old channel by the construction of a barrage at Farakkā.

The rivers and their channels also served the purpose of an elaborate drainage system. The rain-water including other waste-water is being drained through ages into the rivers which again release their surplus waters into the

sea. The Jalāṅghī, the Māthābhāṅgā, and the Churnī served the purpose of draining the eastern parts of Murśidābād, Nadiā and Jessore even in the 19th century²³³.

Bengal has become a well fortified area because of its intersection by so many large and small rivers, their tributaries and canals. Therefore, Bengal has been largely inaccessible to unknown or foreign peoples. In fact, the rivers have always given natural protection to the interiors of Bengal. In this context a reference may be made to the pass at Sikrigully which has a great strategic importance. It was because of the networks of rivers that Bengal, more particularly Eastern Bengal, could hardly be easily conquered by the undaunted foreign invaders. Again, despite this riverine protection, invasions and infiltrations from outside were not less frequent. In fact, many external invasions into Bengal were carried through the Ganges and other rivers. There are indeed many references to naval expeditions into Bengal. Through these rivers, the foreigners could also make their access into the interiors of Bengal. Gradually, the foreign invaders succeeded also to secure a firm foothold on the soil of Bengal and thereby displaced the indigenous peoples. Sometimes, the outsider forcibly displaced the original settlers and established their own habitats. Thus the original inhabitants being defeated took refuge in the forest or marshy and swampy lands in East, West and South Bengal. These peoples again had to struggle constantly with the animals living in the forest and river for their very existence. Yet, they have made veritable contributions towards augmenting the agricultural prosperity of the country. It is again through the rivers that the people belonging to different racial and linguistic groups entered into Bengal from North, West and East. The so-called Aryans and Mongoloids followed the routes along the Ganges and the Brahmaputra respectively. Even in subsequent periods all invasions/migrations have taken place following the river courses.

The rivers in Bengal indirectly fostered an independent and regional spirit among her inhabitants. The people of Bengal could retain their regional independence for a long time because of the special advantages offered by her river-system. It was because of the rivers that the Mughal army was repeatedly defeated by the Bāro-Bhūñiās of Bengal. The political integrity of Bengal has been thus zealously guarded to a certain extent by her

rivers. This has again helped the Bengali people to maintain their cultural integrity and individuality.

The role of the rivers has been also very significant in the field of religious life and activities of the Bengali people. In Bengal, from times immemorial, rivers are being worshipped for their sacredness. Even now, the Bhāgīrathī, the Karatōyā, the Brahmaputra and many other old channels are well-known for their sanctity. Thousands of people even today take their sacred bath for earning religious merit. Many river-sides were again the most hospitable resorts of the followers of the different religious sects of Buddhism, Jainism, Brahminism, etc. Most of the ancient religious establishments are also to be found most significantly on the river sides. All popular religious beliefs and practices centre round the rivers as well.

The rivers have also played a fundamental role in moulding the nature and character of the Bengali people. Frequent changes in the river-courses gave birth to individualism instead of social and group behaviour patterns. Again, the rivers have made the people more accommodating to new or alien manners, customs and behaviour instead of strictly adhering to the traditional ones. This explains the changing patterns of the Bengali culture from bygone days.

In general, it can be said that from hoary antiquity, the life of the people of Bengal is closely associated with the rivers. The livelihood of the people is also largely dependent on the rivers. Food-stuffs of the Bengali people have been largely conditioned by the rivers which nourish fishes and many other water animal species. Abundant supply of fishes and the like by the rivers has made the Bengalees veteran fish-eaters. Even today the Bengalees are largely dependent on the rivers for supplying their main food-stuffs. Sometimes, the diversion of the river-courses has brought considerable changes in the livelihood patterns of the people. The rivers have been always active in invigorating and strengthening the life of the Bengalis. The rivers have also made the people more and more adventurous. At the same time, sharp intellect and creative acumen are also the very gifts of the rivers. The imaginative power, romantic mind, softness in character and deep affection characterising the Bengalis are the varitable gifts of the rivers. Love of nature and broadness of mind are also the contributions of the rivers. In reality, the rivers have made the Bengalis

more dynamic and loosened the traditional social bonds paving the way for cultural adaptations, assimilations and acculturations. Moreover, erosions and changes in the courses of the rivers have very often compelled the people to shift their settlements from one place to another and thereby resulting in cultural acculturations and admixtures. At the same time, the Bengali culture has always maintained its own individual character. The rivers have given the Bengalis the vigour to retain their individuality in respect of their cultural attainments. Again, the rivers have also served as the medium for a cultural synthesis. The destructive and creative nature of the rivers in Bengal is the very fountain of history and culture of Bengal. As a result of the destructive nature of the rivers, many villages, cities, towns, ports, harbours and old settlements have been engulfed or washed away. Many brilliant chapters of Bengal's history are now hidden beneath the bosom of the rivers. At the same time, it is noticeable that the continuity of the culture of Bengal is also due to the perennial flow of the rivers.

Thus, the rivers in Bengal contributed largely not only to the land-formation, but also to moulding the political, social, economic, religious and cultural life-patterns of the Bengali people. The Bengali culture is indeed the veritable gift of rivers, more particularly of the Ganges. In reality, the riverine nature has left its mark upon every aspect of Bengal's life, inspiring her poets to sing her incomparable beauty, wealth and prosperity. The Charyyāpadas speak also highly of the influence and contributions of the rivers to the making of the history and culture of Bengal²³⁴. Even the principal philosophical thoughts and secret magico-religious performances have their vivid manifestations in Bengal's seas, rivers and canals. In reality, most of the characteristic traits of the people and culture of Bengal are indeed the veritable gifts of her innumerable rivers.

VII. General Observation

The above resume on the physical landscape of Bengal reveals that there has not been any substantial transfiguration/transformation of her physical features from determinable ancient times. This is so, more in respect of hills and rocks, forests and landmass, deltas and soils, distinctive seasonal and climatic variations, excluding of course her river system which has from bygone days undergone considerable changes in regard to the river courses, drying out of rivers and emergence of new outlets for drainage. The physical features as

outlined above have made Bengal a well fortified geographical entity having at her disposal all vital resources needed for human existence and progress. Alluvium, fertile soil and adequate seasonal rainfall have made Bengal Sujalā and Suphalā with bountiful agricultural crops and fruits. Excepting some days of hot and humid summer, all other seasons of Bengal are not only soothing and pleasing, but also invigorating. Besides, the rivers of Bengal, perennial and non-perennial, have been through centuries the very life-streams of her people providing all primary needs of man and other subsidiaries to be created by human efforts and machinations. It is because of her natural bountiness and other material resources along with her seasonal and climatic characteristics that Bengal has been from remote antiquity the most coveted and much sought after resort or refuge for human settlements and also a veritable centre for the advancement of the creative faculties of man and their enrichment by adapting, assimilating and synthetizing new ideas and ways of life that crept into and also by moulding them in her own fashion and thereby giving them a distinct stamp of Bengaliness.

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CHAPTER - TWO

PHYSICAL LANDSCAPE

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PHYSICAL LANDSCAPE

The physical landscape of Bengal presents unity and integrity in the midst of diversity and variety. Bengal surrounded by mountains, hills, forests and jungles on her three sides, western, northern and eastern and washed by the sea on south is indeed a large deltaic region. The whole of Bengal as such is a geographical unit, a filled up depression surrounded by a Archaean to Tertiary hard rock relief on her three sides¹ (Map, 2).

1. Hills and Rocks

Bengal is adorned on her North by the highest mountain system in the world, the Himalayas with its majestic peaks, the Mt. Everest (29,040 feet) and the Kanchanjunga (28,146 feet). In Darjeeling area, Tertiary rocks (soft massive North sandstones) occur as narrow bands along the foot of the Himalayas. Further north, occur Gondwanas (sandstones, quartzites, shales and beds of friable anthracite coal) overlain by a thousand feet of slates, phyllites and quartzite. The higher slopes are formed of hard gneisses and mica-schists².

On West, besides the Chhotanāgpur and Rājmaḥal hills, are to be mentioned the hills like the Bihārīnāth and Śūśūniā in the district of Bāñkurā, and Pañchet, Ayodhyā or Bāgmūḍi and Kalmā range with peaks like Gorāburi hill (2,200' - 2,000' feet) in the district of Purulia³. This range forms the watershed of the Suvarṇarekhā and Kāsāi rivers. In western part of West Bengal runs a belt of Archaean gneisses and schists along with intrusive granites⁴. The town of Bāñkurā stands near the eastern edge of this belt. Accordingly, the Western part of Bengal covering the whole of the district of Purulia and parts of the districts of Midnapur and Bāñkurā are formed of Archaean-Dharwarian rocks containing a multitude of granitoid and schistose crystallised, at least 900 million years ago⁵. The Śūśūniā (439.5 meters i.e., 1,442 feet) hill in Bāñkurā district having this type of physiography is older than the Himalayas. Harder rocks like granites or gneisses or quartzites are to be found in the Śūśūniā hill. The inliers

of the basalt trap have been traced in the neighbourhood of Nalhāṭi in Bīrbhūm district⁶. Sedimentary rocks of the Gondwana system with their characteristic coal-beds and sandstones form the southern part of Rāṇīguṇj⁷.
 West district⁶. Sedimentary rocks of the Gondwana system with their character-
 and istic coal-beds and sandstones form the southern part of Rāṇīguṇj⁷.
 East

Massive laterites also contribute to the formation of some of the high hills in this tract. The western part of Bengal is indeed a shelf of laterite old alluvium. Laterite beds cover the entire region northward from Orissa through Midnapur, Bāṅkūrā, Burdwan, Bīrbhūm to the Rājmaḥal hills and eastern portion of the Chhotanāgpur plateau⁸. The western part of Bengal is indeed a shelf of laterite old alluvium. It may be presumed that the lateritic Rādhā tract of West Bengal was the last deltaic land - formation developed in the mio-geosyncline of the Nāgā-Lushāi orogen⁹. The eastern region covering the Nāgā, Lushāi, Gāro and Khāsi hills are also formed of Archaean rocks, but less compact and much younger than those of the West¹⁰. Further, in the East erosion has given rise to many ridges and valleys.

Thus Bengal is surrounded by mountains and hills on her three sides. The geologists think that the range of the Himalayas to the north of Bengal, specially Darjeeling, is younger than the western Archaean belt of Chhotanāgpur and Rājmaḥal in the history of the evolution of land-formation¹¹. The Archaean belt of Western Bengal is again a continuation of the Gondwana land which is said to be the most ancient surface of the world¹². Further north of the Himalayan range of Darjeeling runs the Gondwana rock range which is also to be found towards East in the Gāro, Lushāi and Khāsi hills. Though much younger than those of the West, sedimentary rocks are the later formations caused by the process of sedimentation resulting from the action of torrential rains and continuous high wind¹³.

II. Forest

Like mountains and hills, the role of forests and jungles in the history and culture of Bengal is no less significant. Forests cover the northern, eastern, southern and western portions of Bengal. In other words, it may be said that the alluvial plains of Bengal are surrounded by forests. At the foot of the Himalayas, the Tarai region is covered with dense forests. This Tarai area covering Jalpāiguri North district and stretching about a quarter of the 2,000 sq.miles (5,180km.) is clothed mainly by valuable Śāl (Shorea robusta) trees. As the mountain slopes down to the foothills, the density of forests becomes more and more glaring.

The plains in the district of Jalpāiguri known as Dooars (duār, dooār) also abound with forests. The Dooār forests densely wooded with ever green vegetation are the resorts of wild animals including the Royal Bengal Tiger, rhinoceros , elephants, antelopes and different species of snakes including the python. To the east, Khāsi-Jayantiā, Gāro and Lushāi hill areas are also covered with forests. So also is the Madhurjungle in Dacca Division.

To the West, wide forest areas known as Jhārkhand or Jungle areas lying on west of the Bhāgīrathī extend from the bank of the Dāmōdar in Rādhā region through West Midnapur, West Bāñkurā, West Bīrbhūm and West Puruliā districts up to the Chhotanāgpur hills. In the Mughal period this entire hilly jungle area including the northern portion of Dumkā in Bīrbhūm forest region was known West as Jhārkhand. The same area formed the district called Jañgal-mahal during the British period in 1805¹⁴. In this triangular zone, all forests lie more or less scattered in innumerable small patches between latitude 21°75' to 24°33' North and longitude 85°70' to 87°80' East¹⁵. Thus on West, forests are primarily located in the laterite belt. The laterite Rādhā tract is largely covered by Śāl (Shorea-robusta), Mahuā (Madhuca latifolia or bassica latifolia) and Palās (Butea frondosa) trees. From bygone days, these forests have been guarding and serving as the natural barriers against all foreign inroads from West.

To the South, across the Hugli river lies the extensive and thick tidal forest known as the Sundarvan which literally means 'the beautiful forest'. The very name Sundarvan might have been derived from the word Sundarī or Sundrī i.e., Heretiera litoralis or small timber tree. The major portion of this forest is located in the districts of Khulnā and Bariśāl of Bāñglādes and 24-Parganas of West Bengal. The whole area is largely covered with Sundarī trees. The Sundarvan South forest extends from the Hugli to the Fenī river covering an area of 10,000 sq. miles¹⁶. Close to the sea belt, the jungles are thick and hardly penetrable on account of the boggy character of the soil. This forest is the abode of the Royal Bengal tigers, leopards, rhinoceros, wild buffaloes, wild hogs, deer, monkeys, pythons, different species of cobra and other snakes and many varieties of bird.

Thus like hills, forests abounding certain parts of Bengal also mark her natural boundaries. The plains surrounded by all these natural boundaries like forests and hills maintain a continuity, though very often intercepted by rivers. Besides forming natural barriers these forests have

been from bygone days supplying all sorts of flora and fauna and other natural products to meet the requirements of the people at large.

III. Delta and Soil

Bengal is indeed a veritable riverine plains with three great river systems, the Ganges, the Brahmaputra and the Bhāgīrathī. Besides, a large part of Bengal is also covered with alluvium. A semi-aquatic rice-plains intersected by rivers is also a characteristic feature. In water-logged areas depressions are again very common.

The plains of Bengal, though characteristically flat, can be broadly demarcated as : (i) the plains-land lying north of the Ganges - the Padmā - Meghnā axis; (ii) the plains lying south of this axis; (iii) the erosional and flood plains lying west of the Bhāgīrathī - Hugli river; (iv) the plains lying at the foot of the Himalayas and (v) the plains lying along the coast of the Bay of Bengal¹⁷.

Demar- The plains lying west of the Bhāgīrathī river is definitely older. The
cations
of general slope of the land is somewhat steeper with the plains lying
plains both above flood level and also remaining below the water level. This
difference in levels exerts considerable influence on agricultural operations.

Undoubtedly, Bengal is a large delta. Since the Pleistocene period, the Bengal delta has been formed with heavy loads of alluvium from the mountain ranges in the north. It has been presumed that about 30 million years ago there was a great convulsion of nature which was responsible for bringing down the landmass on both sides of this subcontinent and thereby forming the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian sea¹⁸. Then again, a mighty convulsion brought into existence the Himalayas. The upliftment of the Himalayas from the bosom of the sea as testified to by palaeontological records gave rise to a curious depression between the northern mountain ranges and the Deccan plateau which has been termed as the Indo-Gangetic trough. This deep trough filled up the deposits of detritus of mountains for millions of years, which form the regions covered now by the states of the Pāñjāb, Uttar-Pradeś and Bengal. The detritus deposition agencies were the rivers descending from the Himalayas. A large number of rivers flowed downwards and being obstructed by high and stony barriers rolled themselves into the mighty Ganges. The Ganges and her tributaries carrying a huge quantity of silt formed the present deltaic

region of Bengal. The rivers like the Ganges, the Brahmaputra, the Meghna and their tributaries have indeed built up the whole landmass of Bengal making it a region of most fertile alluvial plains for human habitation. The alluvial plains of Bengal may be conveniently divided into four parts : (i) Western Bengal, i.e., Old Delta ; (ii) Eastern Bengal, i.e., New Delta; (iii) Central Bengal, i.e., part of the New Delta and (iv) North Bengal, i.e., the Gaṅgā-Brahmaputra Doāb¹⁹. (Map.3)

Below the present Bengal delta, there lies a surface of the oldest delta composed of materials different from those deposited by the Ganges and her tributaries. A deposition of yellow clay and sand appears to underlie upper and newer deposits of blue clay and sand. It has been supposed that this oldest surface of the delta was created by the rivers issuing from North and North-east. This older delta became depressed and permitted the flow of the Ganges carrying silt and thereby forming the later deltaic region which was gradually raised by the silt deposition left by the rivers issuing from the Himalayas and the Chotanāgpur hills.

Of the four categories of delta, Western Bengal, the Old Delta, is represented by the present Burdwan division comprising the land to the west of the river Hugli. Considering the geological structure and physiographic features, it may be said that the greater part of the districts of Bāñkurā, Burdwan, Bīrbhūm and the western half of Midnapur is a continuation of the Chotanāgpur plateau to the east. The present surface of this region has been formed mainly by a process of degradation. The surface of this region is rocky. The old alluvium also occurs over this area. Besides, a belt of Archaean gneisses and schists also runs through this region. It is one of the sunken basins of the Archaean terrain that contains the deposit of the coal-bearing Gondwanas. Typical lateritic soil and laterite (Khōāi & gravels) are found largely in this delta area. The laterite soil is characterised by a very low percentage of silica and nitrogen with higher percentage of iron and aluminium oxides²⁰. In the upper part of this delta, more particularly in the districts of Rañgpur, Bīrbhūm, Bāñkurā, Mursīdābād, Midnapur and West Dinājpur, red clay is found. This red clay is the result of alluvium deposited by the rivers that flowed long before the present river system developed.

The upland region of this Delta is rich in minerals. For example, the richest coal-deposits are found in the Rāñgañj belt. There are also deposits

of iron, copper and tungsten ores. Mica and alluvial gold also occur in many places. Fire-clay and China clay occur extensively in the Rāṇigaṇ coal-field area and also in Bāṅkura district. This type of alluvium soil can be found in Chittagong and former Tipperah (Tripurā) districts as well. But this region comprising the districts of Tipperah, Noākhālī and Chittagong may not be considered as deltaic because it contains a part of the sub-mountainous region as well. The Chittagong and Tipperah hill tracts are definitely hilly, and the plains of Tipperah, Noākhālī and Chittagong districts can at best be composed of alluvial materials washed down the hills and deposited serially. Moreover, this tract is not formed of silts deposited by the rivers. Again, the eastern hilly areas contain oil gas, petroleum and tertiary coal. Further, the eastern half of Midnapur district extending up to the Hugli river is a low-lying region characterised by swamps and unhealthy condition.

Central Bengal belongs to the New Deltaic region. The Delta between the Bhāgīrathī and the Padmā is known as the Gangetic Delta or Central Bengal. The tract between Māldah and Murśīdābād was the ancient Gangetic Delta where the rivers split up into numerous channels. The major portion of the Gangetic Delta on east of the Bhāgīrathī forms parts of the present state of Bāṅglādeś. The strip of land of the Gangetic Delta on west of the Bhāgīrathī belongs to the present West Bengal. The Gangetic Delta or Central Bengal has been gradually raised above the flood level and thereby turned into a moribund shape. This deltaic region is bounded on North by the Padmā, on West by the Bhāgīrathī and on East by the Madhumatī. The river Yamunā carrying the main stream of the Brahmaputra also forms the eastern boundary of Central Bengal. The river Padmā flows into the Bay of Bengal as the Meghnā. This Delta between the Bhāgīrathī-Hugli and the Padmā-Meghnā known as the Delta of the Gāṅgā or Central Bengal is approximately at a latitude of $40^{\circ}40' N$, longitude $88^{\circ}0' E$, with its southern tip stretching as far south as $21^{\circ}50' N$. The longitudinal expansion of the base of the delta is from $88^{\circ}0' E$ to $90^{\circ}50' E$. The area covers roughly 58,752,80 square Km., i.e., a little over one fourth of undivided Bengal. The soil of this Delta is marshy and alluvium.

The New Delta includes East Bengal. A vast area of this region is semi-aquatic. This newly built stretch of deltaic plains is composed of lower portions of the Ganges and the Brahmaputra. The great rivers overflow their banks during the rains and leave behind fertile silt deposition. The soil of this Delta is undoubtedly alluvium and fertile.

The Lower Delta, a portion of the Gangetic or Central Delta as well as Eastern Delta, is a labyrinth of creeks, rivers and swamps extending through the dense forest of Sundarvan. The northern border of the Sundarvan forest has been cleared up, and its land has been largely prepared for cultivation. The tract of Sundarvan, geologically speaking, is not very old. It is presumed that by about 6,000 to 7,000 years back, the whole of Sundarvan was under the sea²². The process of land-formation is still continuing and chars, i.e., strips of sandy land rising out of the bed of a river or sea above the water-level are being daily formed by desiltation of tides coming inland and also of the rivers flowing into the Bay of Bengal.

The Lower Delta or Sundarvan area has thus been well described by O'Malley as : "Briefly the Sundarvans may be described as a low flat alluvial plains in which the process of land-making is still going on, covered, where not under cultivation, with forests and swamps, intersected from north to south by wide tidal rivers or estuaries and from west to east by narrow tidal rivers or Sundar- creeks"²³. All estuaries and most of the rivers are salty, and there is little or no current down them. These are practically tidal water-courses and connected with others by an intricate series of branches and the latter, in their turn by innumerable channels. As a result, 'the whole tract may be described as a tangled net-work of estuaries, rivers and water-courses which enclose a large number of islands of various shapes and sizes'. These flat swampy islands are again covered with dense forests, the most plentiful and important botanical species being Sundri (*Heritiere littoralis*) which thrives most where water in the channels is least brackish²⁴. The soil in the Sundarvan area is undoubtedly alluvial and immature, and water is everywhere saline. The alluvial soils also show white efflorescences of sodium chloride impregnated with salt²⁵. The coastal soil has been formed from deposits brought by tidal currents. Deposits are either rich in calcium or magnesium or consist of half decomposed organic matter. The chemical composition resulting thereof may be classified as saline, non-saline alkali and degraded alkali soil²⁶.

The Ganges and the Brahmaputra doab or the Delta of North Bengal extends from north to south between the lower spurs of the Himalayas and the Ganges. Along the banks of the Tistā, the Brahmaputra and the Meghnā, the river-silt deposits or silt-loams predominate. Sandy loams cover alluvial plains

in the north. This soil has been derived from the mountain-regions of the Himalayas, and this is carried by the hill-rivers like the Tistā, Mahānandā, Torsā, Jaladhākā and other tributaries. The soil of this area is acidic and poor in base.

Besides the above mentioned deltaic areas, the entire landmass of Bengal falls into three groups : (a) Moribund, (b) Mature and (c) Active Delta. The rivers are the primary sources in the formation of these different types of deltas. Where the rivers have ceased to carry silt and become dead, active land-formations have stopped and the Delta may be described as Moribund. But the Delta where the rivers have ceased to carry silt, but is still active is Mature Delta. Further, the land where the rivers are active in carrying silt and land building is still continuing in full-swing is an Active Delta.

The Moribund Delta lies mainly in Nadiā, Jessore, Mursīdābād and parts of Khulnā and 24-Parganās districts. Between the Moribund Delta and the Sundarvan is a belt consisting of the northern half of the districts of 24-Parganās and Khulnā, which belongs to the category of Mature Delta. The rivers in this Delta carry a good deal of local rainwater, but these are deteriorating. The Active Delta covers the Sundarvan including southern parts of the districts of Khulnā and 24-Parganās, the land between the Madhumatī and Meghnā (Faridpur and Bākhargāñj districts). In the East, the Padmā, the Meghnā and the Brahmaputra carrying vast quantities of silt are still active in the formation of land. Due to the formation of land (subsidence), Tamluk (Midnapur district) which once stood on the sea shore (Velākulam) is now away from the sea. It is due to this process of land-formation that the channel on which Tamluk once stood was silted up by about the 10th century A.D.²⁶.

The nature and character of soils vary according to this deltaic divisions. The Moribund Delta contains mainly sandy loam with some areas of stiff clay. Soil in the Mature Delta along the Madhumatī is full of clay with loams. Towards the mouth of the Meghnā, the soil is more and more sandy, and further up along the Padmā, the soil is pure silt-loam. The soil of Bengal may be classified into six kinds : (1) laterite, (2) red soil, (3) alluvial, (4) coastal, (5) Terai or Tistā soil and (6) colluvial soil²⁷.

Laterite or lateritic soils cover the area extending from Orissa through the districts of Midnapur, Bāñkurā, Burdwan, Bīrbhūm to the Rājmaḥal hills. The soil is acidic and poor in organic matter containing nitrogen, phosphorus and calcium²⁸. This soil is poorly aggregated and possesses low water-holding capacity. The ancient crystalline and metamorphic rocks on weathering have given rise to red soil. This red soil is sometimes misrepresented as laterite. In fact, it is the transported soil from the hills of the Chhotanāgpur plateau. Red soil is also to be found in the districts of Bīrbhūm, Burdwan, Bāñkurā, West Dinājpur and Midnapur. It is rather shallow and coarse textured and mildly acidic and poor in organic matter²⁹. The areas containing lateritic and red soil are generally covered with forest having plentiful growth of Palās trees (Parrot tree-Butea frondosa). Sometimes, deforestation has resulted in soil-erosion which can be seen near the banks of the river Ajay.

Alluvial soil may be subdivided into two types like the Vindhyan alluvium and Gaṅgā alluvium. The Vindhyan alluvium soil has been formed of silt brought down by the rivers originating from the Chhotanāgpur plateau which is a physiographic continuity of the Vindhya ranges. This kind of soil is to be found in the Dāmodar, Rājmaḥal and the Kāsāi riverine areas. It occurs also in the districts of Murśidābād, Bīrbhūm, Bāñkurā, Puruliā, Burdwan, Hugli and Midnapur³⁰. The fertile Gaṅgā alluvium is again of different types : (i) Gaṅgā riverine, (ii) Gaṅgā flat lands, (iii) Gaṅgā low lands and (iv) Gaṅgā uplands³¹. The Gaṅgā riverine soil contains fine sand having a greyish white appearance. The Gaṅgā flat land contains clay and fine and white sand, and her low land consists of coarse sand. The Gaṅgā uplands contain older alluvium soil with moderate accumulation of clay and high concentration of lime in the form of concretion in the sub-soil.

Alluvial and other soils The coastal soil has been formed by deposits brought by tidal currents. The Terai soil or the Tistā soil is mostly sandy and deep black to grey black in colour. The soil is acidic and poor in bases. The colluvial soil is derived from the hills which are extensions of the Chhotanāgpur plateau. The Bengal Gondwana soil, Bengal gneisse soil and transition soil are different colluvial soils³². It occurs in the district of Puruliā, in Western parts of the districts of Bīrbhūm, Bāñkurā and in the Asansol sub-division. This soil contains a large amount of coarse sand and gravels.

The Delta and the soil formations of Bengal are indeed the veritable gifts of the rivers. From indeterminable times, Bengal is being served by a network of large and small rivers flowing downwards into the Bay of Bengal. These rivers and the deltaic alluvial soil have transformed Bengal into a land of agricultural bountifulness and an attractive refuge of peoples from outside. This will be evident from a discussion of the river system of Bengal, and its influence on the life and activities of the Bengali people as a whole. Before describing the river system of Bengal a brief reference may be made to other natural environs, more particularly climatic condition and rainfall, which were no less responsible for moulding the nature and character of the Bengali people.

IV. Climate and Rainfall

As to climate and rainfall of ancient Bengal there are only very few references in literatures and epigraphic records at our disposal. The available records furnish very little information regarding any glaring difference between the climatic condition of the past and the present. Therefore, the present climatic condition of Bengal shall present a perspective of the picture of the past. There are four distinct seasons in Bengal, namely, Summer, Rainy, Winter and Spring. Bengal falls within the monsoon area, and as such, the general rainfall is at least quite adequate.

The climate of Bengal is tropical, and temperature is moderate. Plains are warm except during the short winter season. The mountainous region in the north is cold on account of its altitude, but humidity is high. Summer becomes sometimes unbearable because of its extreme humidity. In areas having dry summer the temperature is comparatively high and humidity less. The highest temperature is to be found in the western region bordering Chhota Nagpur. Temperature decreases south-eastwards, north-eastwards and southwards³³.

Bengal is too much affected by the monsoon-wind causing abundant rainfall. The highest rainfall is naturally in the submountainous areas and Jalpāiguri in North Bengal, around the Padmā and the Meghnā mouth, in Sylhet between the Shillong plateau and Tripurā-Lushāi hills in eastern direction of Bengal³⁴. The rainfall decreases in the West. In the North, rainfall varies from 150" to 120" inches³⁵. In the eastern region of Bengal, i.e., in present Bānglādēś the rainfall is between 95" and 60" inches. Along the Padmā and the lower Meghnā the rainfall

varies from 95" to 75" inches. The western region is primarily characterised by drought condition, and generally, the rainfall ranges from 60" to 50" inches. This is evident from the average rainfall of the western districts like Midnapur (80" to 45"), Bāṅkurā (53.12") and Puruliā (52.00")³⁶. Summer is always accompanied by violent cyclonic weather known as Kāl-Vaiśākhī in Bengal, which is the prologue to the rainy season. Truly, the rainy season has its own charm and appeal to the poets, and as such, not only in literature, but even in some epigraphic records of ancient Bengal there are frequent references to the rainy season which through centuries has made its mark on the history and culture of the people of Bengal.

Regarding the climatic condition prevailing in ancient Bengal there are a few stray references in literary and epigraphic records. It may be, however, said that the climatic condition of ancient Bengal might have been almost similar to the one prevailing today. This would be evident from the accounts of the four kingdoms of Bengal given by the Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsang in the 7th century A.D. It has been stated by the Chinese pilgrim that the land in Puṇḍravardhana, Samatāṭa, Tāmralipta and Karnaśuvarṇa was low and moist, but the climatic condition prevailing in all these countries differed a little. In Puṇḍravardhana the climate is said to have been congenial, but the climate of Tāmralipta has been described as hot and that of Karnaśuvarṇa as temperate³⁷.

A perusal of the early literary and epigraphic records of ancient Bengal presents also a vivid picture of the rainy season and showers as communicated through charming language of the poets and writers. In this context, a particular reference may be made to the Rāmacharita which refers to large and swiftly moving clouds in Varendrī (Atikadāḥ jah vegavantaścha ghanā meghā prabhūtaṁ Varshitamityāśayah)³⁸. Another verse in the Rāmacharita relates to the raining showers which certainly speak of abundant rainfall in Varendra³⁹. With the advent of monsoon in Bengal, the sky becomes overcast with clouds, a picturesque account of such a cloudy sky making resounding sounds has been depicted by Jayadeva in the first Śloka of his famous work Gīta-Govinda in the following words⁴⁰ :

Mēghairmedurambaram /
Vanabhūvaśyāmāstamāladrumah //

Besides, there are also frequent references to exquisite beauty of the rainy season in other verses of the Gīta-Govinda like Vṛṣhṭivṛcākula-gokula and Sajalajalada-samudaya⁴¹. Again, that there used to be heavy rainfall in Bengal becomes evident also from the Saduktikarnāmrita (11th-12th century A.D.) which refers to 'Prabhūta-payasah'^{41a} and 'Deve niramudāramujajhati sukham śete niśām grāmanīh' (2/84/3^{41b}). A still more vivid account of the heavy rainfall in Bengal has been given by Abul Fazal in his Āin-i-Akbarī. Though of a later date, the account certainly represents the condition prevailing in ancient times. Abul Fazal writes : "the rains begin when the sun is midway in Taurus (May) and continue somewhat more than 6 months, the plains being made under water and the mounds being alone visible"⁴². Here the continuation of the rainy season for 6 months as stated by Abul-Fazal is hardly in conformity with the prevailing rainy season in Bengal. It may be that in ancient and medieval times, the rainy season might have continued for a longer period. Even in other medieval literary texts of Bengal, the rainy season of Bengal has been always described with all its charms.

Not only in literary texts, even the epigraphic records bear a few references to rainy season and also to heavy and continuous rainfall. As for instance, in the Bāngad Copper plate inscription of Mahīpāla there is a positive reference to abundant and continuous rainfall as : "deśe prāchi prachura payasi svachchhamā-pīyatoyam"⁴³. Similarly, the Khālimpur Copper plate of Dharmapāla refers to constant presence of the rainy season as : "Niratiśaya ghana ghanāghana ghata śyāmāyamān vāsaralakshmī samārabdha santata jaladasamaya"⁴⁴. An identical account of the rainy season is to be found in the Monghyr Copper plate inscription⁴⁵. The inscriptions of the Vaṅga king Govindachandra also contain references to heavy showers⁴⁶. As to heavy rainfall in Bengal, a reference may also be made to the Tirumalai inscription of Rājendra Chola of the 11th century A.D.⁴⁷.

It would be thus appear that all through the ages rains of Bengal have always attracted the notice of the poets, philosophers and other thinkers who have given vent to their feelings, thoughts, love and addictions to the charms of rains, which in diverse ways moulded the life-patterns of the people of ancient Bengal.

Regarding the Spring season or Vasanta of ancient Bengal a glowing account is to be found in the Gīta-Govinda of Jayadeva, which describes the blowing of balmy, soothing and soft breeze. Jayadeva beautifully describes as to how the wind dwindled the tender Lavaṅga-creeper and Vāsantī-creepers became full bloomed (Vasante Vāsantīkusumasukta) and clusters of Vakula blossomed, the tender sprays of the Tamāla-trees stood forth in profusion, perfuming the breeze with the fragrance of musk (Lalita lavaṅgalatā parīśīlanakōmalamayasaṁirē Madhukaranikara Karanvita kōkilakūjitakuñjakutīre⁴⁸). Thus the exquisite beauty of the Spring or Vasanta has been vividly portrayed in the Ślokas of the Gīta-Govinda. Besides, there are also frequent references to Spring in several other Ślokas in the Gīta-Govinda like : Vahati malayasamirē, Kōkilakalaravakūjita, etc⁴⁹. Again, the spring and the cool, beautiful and charming breeze generally known as "Malaya-pavana", i.e., wind blowing in Spring are referred to in Dhoyī's Pavanadūta (a work of the 12th century A.D.⁵⁰). The Rāmācharita also speaks of the cool and fragrant breeze which is of course the wind of the Spring season⁵¹. About other seasons, it may be stated that Winter was never severe in Bengal. Abul Fazal recorded that the cold season was very short like the present winter period⁵². The Autumn is, however, the most enjoyable one. It is the season par-excellence of most of the religious ceremonies of Bengal.

These seasonal variegations, tropical climate, moderate temperature, humidity, both dry and wet and adequate rainfall produced fruitful effects on agriculture. This very climatic condition exercised all throughout Bengal's history considerable influence on moulding the nature and character of the people of Bengal. It is because of this climatic condition that the Bengali people are less strenuous, laborious and tenacious. But there developed in Bengali people other traits which made them more thoughtful and ever persistent in their pursuit of learning and thought-provoking endeavours.

V. River System

The physical landscape of Bengal is very closely related to her large and varied river systems. Rivers have through centuries played the most important role in the formation of the deltaic land and in moulding the nature and character of the Bengali people. Bengal is indeed a veritable land of rivers, of which the most important ones are the Ganges (Gaṅgā), the Padmā (a branch of the Ganges) and the Brahmaputra which merges into the second great one in the plains before discharging her waters into the sea. As the rivers played the most

vital role in the formation of the Bengali culture, it is necessary to give an account of the principal river systems of ancient Bengal as can be gleaned from both literary and epigraphic sources. It is to be, however, noted that almost all rivers have frequently changed their courses, and some of them have even completely dried out leaving faint traces of their ancient flow. All the rivers of Bengal either fall into the Bay of Bengal or into the two principal rivers, i.e., the Ganges and the Brahmaputra (Map. 4).

(i) **The Gaṅgā :**

The most ancient and sacred of all rivers of India is indeed the Ganges, and Bengal has been sanctified by her flow from hoary antiquity. The Ganges is indeed the very life-stream of Bengal. It enters into Bengal near the Rājmahal and flows downwards with the name of Bhāgīrathī. It was from this region that the Ganges bifurcated into the Bhāgīrathī and the Padmā. The tract between the modern Maldah and Mursīdābād is the most ancient Gangetic delta, but the river splits up into numerous spilled channels like the Sarasvatī, Bhāgīrathī, Bhairav, etc. The lower portion of the present Bhāgīrathī is now called Hugli, the name given by the English in the 17th century⁵³. The mouth of the river Hugli has been referred to as Kambyson by Ptolemy in the 2nd century A.D.⁵⁴. The river Hugli flows southward directly into the sea. At present, the main flow of the Ganges is carried through the Padmā resulting in gradual dying out of the Bhāgīrathī, for which the big dam at Farakkā has been recently constructed. Bhāgīrathī to maintain the regular flow of the Ganges into the Bhāgīrathī and the Hugli. A very authentic account regarding the bifurcation of the Gaṅgā has been given by Abul-Fazal. It has been stated that the Ganges is divided into two, the Bhāgīrathī and the Padmāvati⁵⁵. The sacred river Gaṅgā, though flowing through Bengal under the common name of Bhāgīrathī, has been frequently mentioned in both literary and epigraphic records of ancient Bengal.

In all early Indian texts beginning from the Rigveda onwards the river Gaṅgā has been variously described and its religious sanctity most scrupulously upheld. But in ancient texts and inscriptions of Bengal the river Gaṅgā has been mostly referred to as the Bhāgīrathī, i.e., the branch of the Gaṅgā flowing through Bengal. It implies thereby that both the nomenclatures, i.e., the Gaṅgā and the Bhāgīrathī were synonymously used to denote the branch of the Gaṅgā that flowed through Bengal. Another point that emerges from a study of both

literary and epigraphic records is the great sacredness that was attached to the river Gaṅgā-Bhāgīrathī, and that the very concept of purification of a person by a bath in the sacred water of the Gaṅgā was very commonly prevalent amongst the people of ancient Bengal as well. This becomes evident from the contents of a large number of inscriptions like Bāṅgaḍ Grant, Āṁgāchhi Copper plate of Vigrahapāla III, Jājilpārā Copper plate inscription, Bōdh-Gayā inscription of Dharmapāla, Dubi Copper plate of Bhāskaravarman, etc., wherein it has been stated that/king made land-grants after taking a bath in the sacred river Gaṅgā⁵⁶. Not only that, even in certain inscriptions like the Gañjām plates of Śaśāṅkarāja, the Gaṅgā has been called as the river of Gods, and the story of its origins has been also related⁵⁷. It has been stated that the Gaṅgā issued from the sky, and she was brought down on the earth by Bhagīratha. This certainly refers to the Bhāgīrathī. In many verses of the Rāmācharita, the Gaṅgā has been referred to as a sacred river⁵⁸. In all other literary accounts as well the sacredness of the river Gaṅgā has been largely acknowledged. This would be evident from all that is known about the Bhāgīrathī.

(ii) The Bhāgīrathī :

In ancient times, the Bhāgīrathī was the main channel connecting Bengal with upper India. In the Rāmāyaṇa and the Matsyapurāṇa, the mythical story of Bhagīratha who is said to have brought down the Gaṅgā to the earth has been narrated in details⁵⁹. It has been also stated that the Gaṅgā flowed into the sea passing through the countries of the Kurus, ^{the} Bharatas, the Pāñchālas, the Kauśikas, the Māgadhas, the Brahmottaras, the Vaṅgas and the Tāmraliptas⁶⁰. This account furnishes direct information regarding the courses of the Ganges. ^{Epic and} The Vaṅgas and the Tāmraliptas were undoubtedly peoples of Bengal, ^{Purāṇas} and the main flow of the Ganges thence passed perhaps by the side of Tāmralipta, i.e., near modern Tamluk. Here, the Ganges flowing by the side of Tāmralipta obviously denoted the Bhāgīrathī which was once the principal branch of the Ganges as described in both the Mahābhārata and the Rāmāyaṇa.

In the account of Megasthenes (4th century B.C) and the Periplus of the Erythraean Sea (1st century A.D.), the Ganges is referred to as the eastern-most course⁶¹. According to Arrian, the Ganges was the mightiest of the rivers in India⁶². Megasthenes has also specifically stated that the Ganges is much larger than the Indus^{62a}. From the account of Megasthenes it appears that the Greek ambassador probably referred to the Bhāgīrathī. The Periplus has given

an account of the Ganges, perhaps also of the Bhāgīrathī as : "The Ganges is the largest river in India. It has the annual increase and decrease like the Nile, and there is on it a mart called after it Gange, through which passes a considerable traffic consisting of betel, the Gangetic spikenard, pearl and the finest of all Gāṅgā in muslins, those called Gangetic. In this locality, there is said to be a gold mine and a gold coin called chryse (golden) which lies directly under the rising sun and the extremity of the world towards the East"⁶³.

This account in the Periplus refers no doubt to the river Bhāgīrathī. In one passage, Diodorus states that the "Ganges which is 30 stadia broad, flows from north to south forming the eastern boundary towards the east of the tribe of the Gangaridai"⁶⁴. This account relating to the course of the river running from north to south perhaps indicates the ancient flow of the river Bhāgīrathī.

The Greek geographer Ptolemy who flourished in the first half of the 2nd century A.D. records the five mouths of the Ganges as : (i) the Kambyson, the most western (Long 144°30', Lat. 18°15'); (ii) Mega (145°45', 18°30'); (iii) the Kamberikhon (146°30', 18°40'); (iv) Pseudostomon (147°40', 18°30') and (v) Antibole (148°30', 18°15'). The distance between the two extremes of the mouths has been said to be 4° degree of latitude which corresponds to the distance between Tamluk and Chittagong⁶⁵. Ptolemy also adds that the country about the mouths of the Ganges is occupied by the Gangaridai with the city Gange (146°, 19°15')⁶⁶. It appears from the accounts of Ptolemy and Hiuen Tsang (2nd and 7th Century A.D.) that the main branch of the Ganges flowed into the sea near the present Tamluk in the district of Midnapur⁶⁷. Further, while describing the boundary of India Ptolemy speaks of the Ganges as well. He says that India is bounded on the east by the river Ganges⁶⁸. Thus Ptolemy appears to have meant the mouth of the Bhāgīrathī as the easternmost boundary. But a more detailed account of the Bhāgīrathī as the Ganges is to be found in the travel accounts of the Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsang. He speaks of many creatures in the river, and her water is described as pleasant and sweet. This water is called Fu-Shui, i.e., happiness water or water of religious merit. It has been stated that all sins are effaced by taking a bath in this river, and those who drown themselves in her water are re-born in heaven, and if the bones of the dead are consigned into the river that one does not go to a bad place⁶⁹.

That the Bhāgīrathī was the principal flow of the Ganges is also proved by the very fact that in ancient times it served as the only means of communication between Bengal and upper India. It is learnt from Nidhanpur Copper plate inscription (7th century A.D) that Bhāskarvarman, the king of Kāmaṇḍapa, proceeded with a large navy through the Bhāgīrathī and pitched up a military camp on its bank at Karṇasuvarṇa⁷⁰. This Copper plate was actually issued from the Jayaskandavāra at Karṇasuvarṇa. Sometime by about 642 A.D. Bhāskaravarman proceeded with his army consisting of elephants, 20,000 in number, to meet Harsha at Kajaṅgala near Rājmaḥal, and his 30,000 ships passed along the Ganges to the same destination. This is a clear testimony to the navigability of the Bhāgīrathī near Rājmaḥal in the 7th century A.D. The river Bhāgīrathī and her navigability have been specifically referred to as : Sa-khalu Bhāgīrathī-patha pravartamāna nānāvidha nauvāṭaka sampādita in several inscriptions like the Khālīmpur Copper plate of Dharmapāla, the Monghyr Copper plate inscription of Devapāladeva, Bāṅgaḍ Copper plate inscription of Mahīpāla I, Nālandā stone slab inscription of the time of Mahīpāladeva, the Bhāgalpur plate of Nārāyaṇapāla, etc⁷¹. In all these inscriptions, the aforesaid expression is almost identically stated, and the reference to the Bhāgīrathī-patha is significant enough to indicate her navigability. Besides, the Tirumalai inscription of Rājendra Chola speaks of the navigability of the Bhāgīrathī in the 11th century A.D⁷². In several other inscriptions, the Bhāgīrathī has been described as the limit of the conquest made or as boundary of the country. As for instance, according to the Tirumulai inscription, Rājendra Chola had to cross the Bhāgīrathī to enter into Vaṅgāladeśa ruled over by Govindachandra⁷³. It thus appears that Vaṅgāladeśa lay on the east of the Bhāgīrathī. This is further supported by the Śāktipur Copper plate of Lakshmaṇasena which refers to Vaṅga as lying to the east of the Bhāgīrathī⁷⁴. In the Pāikor inscription, the river Bhāgīrathī is again mentioned as the limit of the conquest of Karṇa, the Kalachuri king⁷⁵. In the Muslim account of Tabāqāt-i-Nāsirī of the 2nd half of the 13th century A.D., the Bhāgīrathī has been stated as the main channel of the Ganges, and Rai (Rāḍha) is described to have been situated on the western side of the river Gāṅg. (Ganges)⁷⁶. Even the very name Ādigāṅgā, the river course flowing by the side of Calcutta, is an indication of the earliest course of the Ganges. This is also evident from the Śāktipur grant of Lakshmaṇasena, which refers to the flow of the Bhāgīrathī, south of Calcutta, via., Uluberia and Gaṅgāsāgar⁷⁷. It appears from this record that the present course of the Bhāgīrathī has remained unchanged for about 1000 years, at least from c.1025 A.D.

That the Bhāgīrathī was the main flow of the Ganges is also proved by the very fact that all ancient ports of Bengal were situated on its bank. In this connection, a particular reference may be made to Tāmralipti which continued as the greatest port-town of Eastern India at least up to the 8th - 9th century A.D. Ptolemy places Tāmralipti on the bank of the Ganges, and Hiuen Tsang refers to it as lying near the sea⁷⁸. The ancient Tāmralipti has been generally identified with the modern town Tamluk on the basis of synonymity of names and literary references, though tangible record for the same is yet unavailable.

Tāmra-
lipti
port It may be, however, contended that the Bhāgīrathī reached the sea near the present area of Tamluk. In this context, Majumdar has referred to the conclusion of the Stevenson Moore Committee which reports about the Sarasvatī (a branch of the Ganges) flowing into an estuary near modern Tamluk⁷⁹. But subsequently, the Sarasvatī shifted towards the east, and Tamluk lost its importance, and its place was taken up by Sāt-gāon or Saptagrāma by about the 13th century A.D. Saptagrāma was the first Muslim capital of Bengal, and it became a flourishing city by the 14th century A.D.⁸⁰. Yet, Tāmralipta continued as a small market-town, and ^{the}Portuguese made it one of their principal settlements. In some Persian works of the 17th century, Tamluk is actually mentioned as a centre of slave-trade. Even the Feringis and the Maghs also used the present Tamluk area as a slave-market. According to Valentyn, Tamluk continued also as a Portuguese settlement even upto 1724 A.D.⁸¹.

After the decline of Tāmralipta, Hijli became a great centre of maritime trade. In the 16th century A.D. Ralph Fitch recorded that many ships anchored Hijli at this port for loading various kinds of merchandise. Hijli became also an important centre of the Portuguese traders. By 1636 the Portuguese were, however, ousted from this place by the Mughals. Subsequently, in 1687 the British agent Job Charnock captured Hijli⁸².

Hijli could not, however, turn out to be a great centre of maritime trade as did Saptagrāma which became the Muslim capital of Bengal in the 14th century A. D. Several archaeological relics discovered from the present Ādi-Saptagrāma, lying at a distance of about 27 miles from Calcutta, speak of the identification of the ancient Saptagrāma with it⁸³. The Portuguese made their first settlement for trading purposes at Saptagrāma in the fourth decade of the 16th century. That Saptagrāma was a great centre of trade and a port-town

appears from the very fact that it contributed no less than 30,000 rupees annually Saptagrāma to the Mughal treasury during the reign of Akbar. The importance and of Saptagrāma as a trading centre has been also aptly described in other ports the Chandī-Kāvya⁸⁴. But unfortunately, because of the silting of the river Sarasvatī, the importance of Saptagrāma declined, and the place was abandoned by the Portuguese who in preference made Huglī on the bank of the Bhāgīrathī their main trading centre. In 1586, Ralph Fitch gave an account of many other ports on the Bhāgīrathī like Baklā, Tandā, Śrīpura, etc⁸⁵. Another port-town of great importance was Gauḍa which maintained commercial links with many foreign countries. In this context, it is very significant to note that relics of old masts have been discovered from some villages in the neighbourhood of Pāṇḍuā through which the Mahānandā used to flow. These relics certainly speak of the maritime trading vessels of ancient times.

As large vessels could no more sail upto Saptagrāma, the Portuguese diverted their shipping operation to Huglī on the bank of the Bhāgīrathī. In 1567, Caesar Fredrick wrote : "In the Hooghly river large ships of the Portuguese came into Bator (Shibpur, Howrah) whence smaller ships sailed upto Satgaon (Saptagrāma) and loaded all sorts of merchandise". Even the great Mughal emperor Akbar granted all sorts of facilities to the Portuguese for establishing trade settlements at Huglī that gradually turned into a most flourishing, populous and rich centre. By the 17th century the Portuguese power started declining because of the Mughal intervention. Afterwards, the Dutch, the French and the English traders appeared as great competitors of the Portuguese. By the middle of the 17th century the English traders established settlements in the vicinity of Huglī, and the British company's agent Job Charnock carried on devastations at Huglī in 1686, and subsequently, Charnock (in 1687) took refuge at Sutānati on the other side of the river Bhāgīrathī which proved to be very much attractive and strategic to him⁸⁶. Being encouraged by the local traders and bankers Charnock made British settlements at this place⁸⁷. These settlements crippled considerably the importance of Huglī as a port and market town. Moreover, the silting of Huglī the river prevented large vessels from sailing up to Huglī at a quick speed and gradually the Huglī port sank into insignificance, and the other side of the Bhāgīrathī proved to be more attractive for shipyards and trading settlements. The present Huglī river, the lower Sarasvatī, was connected with the Ādi-Gaṅgā by a canal near the present Khidirpur. When the river Sarasvatī was silted up,

the river Hugli. took the present shape by depriving the Ādi-Gaṅgā the supply Sutānati of voluminous water. As a result, the Ādi-Gaṅgā became narrower and narrower. Even the map of De Barrows in the middle of the 16th century shows the Ādi-Gaṅgā and the Sarasvatī as the two most important rivers, and on the banks of these two rivers were located a large number of ports and market-towns which were indeed the most important places in mediaeval Bengal⁸⁸. In the Bengali literary works of the 15th and 16th centuries, i.e., the Chandī Kāvyas and the Manasāmaṅgala there are detailed accounts of these important places on both sides of the river Bhāgīrathī like Saptagrāma, Garifā, Andalpārā, Nowpārā, Teliāpārā, Other ports and market-towns Nunaighāt, Mahesh, Sulkiyā, Betaḍ (Howrah), Khardaha, Kōnnagar, Chitpur, Kalikātā, Bhātpārā, Kākinārā, Mulājod, Jāguliā, Pāikpārā, Ichhāpur, Śrīpāt, Rishrā, Kāmārhatī, Āriādaha, Kālighāt, Bāruipur, Huliā, Chatrabhōg, Māthinagar, etc.⁸⁹. All these places are not far away from the city of Calcutta that was turned out to be the very nerve centre of all early and late medieval market-places and port-centres along the Bhāgīrathī. Accordingly, it can be said that in the medieval period the importance of the Bhāgīrathī as a great channel of trade did not diminish. But it was again from the medieval period that the Bhāgīrathī started silting, and as a result, its navigability was gradually lost.

The Bhāgīrathī, however, continued to be navigable throughout all seasons at least upto the 13th century A.D. It was only after this century that the river started drying up, perhaps due to a continuous process of silting. There are indeed some authentic records testifying to the silting up of the river. It is learnt from a letter of the French traveller, Travernier, dated 6th January, 1666, that Bernier had to travel overland from Rājmaḥal to 'Cossimbazar' because the river was not navigable⁹⁰. He has also referred to the river as a simple channel. In 1683, Hedge wrote about the river above Nadiā as full of shoals and as such, he had to travel by land route⁹¹. Rennel in 1783, 1788 and 1793 actually described the Bhāgīrathī as dry during October and May⁹². In 1787, Colebrook recorded that the river was navigable in 1796, but not in 1797⁹³. Colebrook noted also that near Suti, the great river, obviously the Ganges, had encroached within a mile of that place and the 'Cossimbazar river' (Bhāgīrathī) was gradually silted or closed up by a mound of sand⁹⁴. Thus, it caused the diversification of the principal stream into another channel. Colebrook referred to this fact in the following words : "From Bogwangole the river turns eastward and

the stream strikes with peculiar force upon a steep and crumbling bank⁹⁵. In 1813, the Bhāgīrathī deserted its old course, and Stewart in 1847 recorded that the river was navigable only by boats during the rainy season only⁹⁶. He also pointed out that the navigation of the Bhāgīrathī was closed at Suti, and therefore, the Padmā branched off from the Gaṅgā just to its south⁹⁷.

The operations of both natural and human agencies were primarily responsible for the gradual silting and drying up of the Bhāgīrathī. Of the natural agencies, particular references are to be made to raising the river bed and the general level, normal geological formation and natural decay of the river due to silt-depositions. Canalization, raising of embankments, chocking of the mouth of the Bhāgīrathī by artificial means, construction of railways, bridges, etc., are various other factors created by the human agency. All these factors were primarily responsible for the gradual drying of the river Bhāgīrathī⁹⁸. Hence was the diversion of the flow of the Ganges, and thereby the present river Padmā became its principal flow.

(iii) The Padmā :

Today, the Padmā carrying the main volume of water of the Ganges is the eastern branch of the Gaṅgā. Previously, the region through which the Padmā flowed was in sea-bed. After throwing off tributaries like the Jalāṅgī, Māthābhāṅgā, Ichhāmatī Bhairab, Navagaṅgā and the Gorāi, the Padmā is joined by the Brahmaputra. Then the Padmā and the Brahmaputra flow into the Bay of Bengal as the river Meghnā. The Delta bounded by the Bhāgīrathī-Hugli. and the Padmā-Meghnā is indeed the Central Delta or the well-known Delta of the Gaṅgā.

Legendary accounts of the origins of the river Padmā are to be found in the Mahābhāgavata-purāṇa, Vṛhaddharma-purāṇa and Kṛittivāsa's Rāmāyana⁹⁹. But the dates of these texts are uncertain, and as such, it is very difficult to trace the antiquity of the river Padmā. In 1930 William Willcocks expressed the view that the Padmā has been always the main channel of the Ganges, and the Bhāgīrathī was excavated for the irrigation purpose¹⁰⁰. But the Stevenson Moore Committee reports that the Bhāgīrathī continued as the principal channel of the Gaṅgā till the 16th century A.D. As already stated, it is only after this century that the Gaṅgā took a south-easterly turn along the Padmā.¹⁰¹ This will

be evident from the very fact that in all early Sanskrit texts, the Ganges from the Himalayas up to the sea is called Bhāgīrathī, and this appellation is never applied to the river Padmā. Such common names as Jāhnavī and Bhāgīrathī or Gaṅgā applied to the river flowing from the Himalayas to the sea certainly speak of the very fact that the Bhāgīrathī was the main channel of the Gaṅgā. Besides, the inscriptions belonging to the 11th - 13th century specifically refer to the Gaṅgā, Bhāgīrathī as the Gaṅgā or Jāhnavī¹⁰². Even Dhōyī in his Pavanadūtam (verse 33; 12th century A.D.) speaks of the Bhāgīrathī as the Gaṅgā¹⁰³. Again, the Bhāgīrathī has been always recognised as a holy river, i.e., the Gaṅgā, but not the Padmā. In the Naihāṭi Copper plate of Vallālasena, the queen-mother is described to have performed a great religious ceremony on the bank of the Bhāgīrathī¹⁰⁴. The Govindapur Copper plate of Lakshmanasena while describing the boundaries of the village refers to Jāhnavī on the east (Pūrvē-Jāhnavī), i.e., Gaṅgā (Bhāgīrathī)¹⁰⁵. That the present river called the Hugli was also called Jāhnavī (Gaṅgā) is proved by the very fact that it "flowed by the village of Betaḍ" which has been taken as Bator (Sibpur). If it be so then the river-course which later on became known as the Sarasvatī was the main channel of the Bhāgīrathī. Even in De Barros' Map Bator figures on the Hugli river, a little above its junction with the Sarasvatī. It has been already pointed out that the Bhāgīrathī was the main channel of navigation from very ancient times. This is further proved by the very fact that all ancient trading settlements of Bengal stood on the bank of the river Bhāgīrathī. It is, however, to be admitted that in some later texts, the Padmā has been also referred to as the Gaṅgā. This will be evident from the following discourse on the legendary origins of the Padmā.

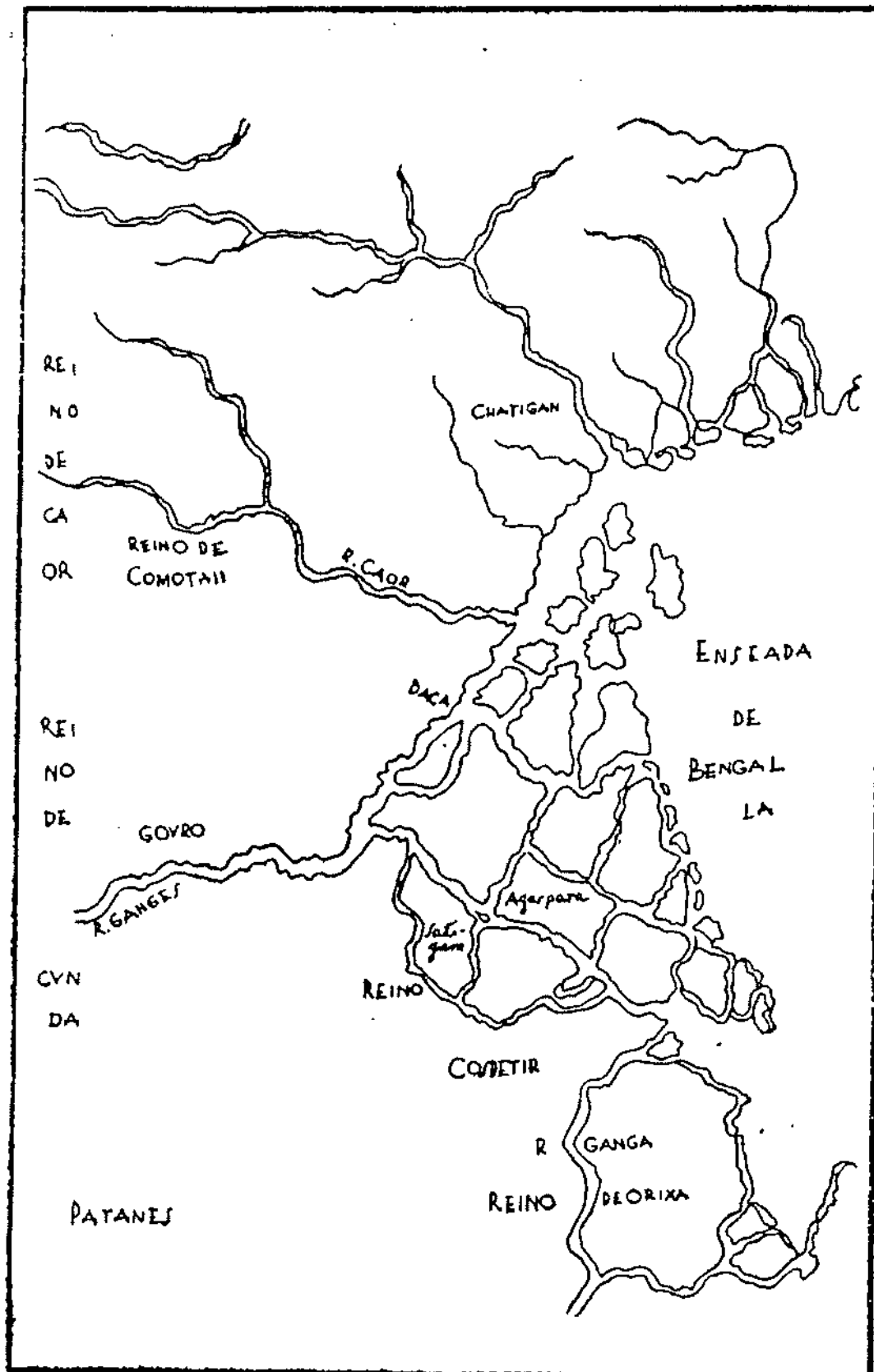
It is narrated in the Devī-Bhāgavatam that the course of the Ganges and the Padmā originated from the course of the Goddess¹⁰⁶. The Rāmāyana mentions the old Padmā as Nalini, one of the seven flows of the Gaṅgā¹⁰⁷. The Ganges is referred to in the accounts of Megasthenes, the Periplus of the Erythraean Sea and in the Geography of Ptolemy¹⁰⁸. But no specific reference to the Padmā is to be found in all these accounts. Even in the 7th century A.D., the Padmā does not figure in any one of the accounts attributed to the Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsang. In the travel accounts of Hiuen Tsang there are positive references to the crossing of the Ganges and the Karatōyā by him¹⁰⁹. But no reference to the Padmā is found in the texts when Hiuen Tsang continued his journey to

Samatāṭa and Kāmarūpa¹¹⁰. But this does not, however, conclusively prove the non-existence of the Padmā as a river in the 7th century A.D. There are, however, certain indications or indirect references by which the existence of the Padmā can be inferred. It is true that Ptolemy does not make any specific reference to the Padmā, but the mention of Kamberikon identified with the Kumāra river is very significant. There are again certain other indirect references which may prove the existence of the river Padmā at an early period.

The literary texts cited above refer to the Padmā. But these are not very old. It is, however, the Edilpur Copper plate of Śrī Chandra (11th century A.D.) which refers to the grant of land in a village situated in Satatapadmāvatī and the Mandala Kumāra-tālaka within it¹¹¹. The expression Satata-Padmāvatī perhaps refers to the river Padmā, and the Kumāratalaka possibly denotes the Kumāra river. This would accordingly prove the existence of the two rivers at least in the 10th - 11th century A.D. The inscription (11th century A.D.) of Govinda-
 Antiquity chandra makes, however, a specific reference to the Padmā¹¹². Govinda-
 and early chandra is described to have recrossed the Padmā and entered into
 refe- Uttara-Rādha (Mursīdābād and Bīrbhūm districts) and reached the
 rences bank of the Bhāgīrathī. Further, the Kumāra river, as already stated,
 to the appears to have been referred to by Ptolemy as Kamberikon, the third
 Padmā mouth of the Ganges¹¹³. There are again some other indications about the existence
 of the Padmā in a still earlier period. But positive evidences are lacking. While
 indicating the locality called Gaur (Gauda), the river Padmā is, however, mentioned
 in Sobhārāmpur plate of Dāmōdaradeva¹¹⁴. It is to be noted in this context that
 the Tabaqat-i-Nāsiri (13th century A.D.) refers to Rādha and Varendra lying
 on both sides of the Ganges, implying thereby the Bhāgīrathī¹¹⁵. It may be therefore
 contended that even up to the 13th century the Bhāgīrathī was the principal
 flow of the Ganges.

It is only from the 14th century that frequent references to the Padmā may be cited. Ibn Batuta who visited Bengal in the 14th century A.D. speaks of Sadkawan as a 'big place on the sea shore'. Then he refers to the rivers like the Ganges and the Jun. Yule identified Sadkawan with Chittagong, the Ganges with the Padmā and Jun with the Yamunā. But these identifications are not acceptable to all. Majumdar thinks that there are good grounds for identifying Sadkawan with Saptagrāma and the two others with the Bhāgīrathī and the Yamunā¹¹⁶. In fact, in some maps of the 17th century Sātgaon has been also shown as close to the sea-shore. It thus appears that even by the 14th century

Map. No. 5.



JAO DE BARROS MAP OF BENGAL (1550 A.D.)

A.D., the Padmā can not be said to be the main channel of the Ganges. From the 16th century A.D., the Padmā, however, began carrying the bulk of the water of the Ganges. This is fully corroborated by the Portuguese records. De Barrow's Map of Bengal (C 1550 A.D.) shows the Padmā as the main channel of the Ganges¹¹⁷ (Map. 5) Manrique while describing his voyage to Hugli. in 1628 Latter says : "We entered the mouth of the large and far-famed old Ganges"¹¹⁸. The name Ganges has been also applied to the Padmā by Abul Fazal¹¹⁹. According to the Stevenson Moore Committee Report, the Padmā first flowed past Rāmpur Boāliā through the Chālān-Jhil, the Dhaleśvarī and the Burigāṅgā rivers¹²⁰. The same report records that the Padmā flowed past Dacca into the Meghnā¹²¹. This course is also shown in De Barrow's map (C 1550 A.D.) in which Dacca is distinctly located on the northern bank of the river Padmā¹²² (Map. 5). Again, in De Barrow's map, the town of Sonārgāon is placed to the south-east of Dacca on the Southern bank of the Padmā¹²³. Majumdar, however, does not agree with the view of the Moore's Committee¹²⁴. De Barrow's map refers also to a river called Caor which fell into the Padmā near a town known as Bandar or port¹²⁵. In this context, it may be again noted that the name Gaṅgā was even applied to the Padmā by the foreign travellers of the 16th century A.D. In fact, they recognised the Padmā as the main channel of the Ganges. It has been upheld by some that the river Kośī fell into the Ganges, and the combined waters of the two opened the course of the Padmā¹²⁶.

Further, the river Padmāvatī as described by Tavernier in his account and by the Boharistan-i-Ghysbi indicates roughly the course of the river Padmā in the 17th century A.D.¹²⁷. It appears that in the 17th century A.D. the course of the Padmā ran along the Dhaleśvarī channel or a parallel channel, the "Isamutty" (Ichhāmatī¹²⁸). By about the middle of the 18th century, the Padmā being thus strengthened by the waterflow produced new channels cutting right across the line of the Bhairab¹²⁹. In the later half of the 18th century A.D. during Major Rennell's survey, the lower course of the Padmā flowed further southwards¹³⁰ (Map. 7). It seems that the river Dhaleśvarī (Burigāṅgā) probably represents the earliest and most northerly course of the Padmā. In the 18th century the Āriākhān was perhaps its most southern course flowing through the districts of Faridpur and Bākhargānj and joining the Meghnā estuary just above the island of Dakshin-Shāhbāzpur, about 25 miles south of Chāndpur¹³¹. Flowing by the side of the city of Rājnagar, the river Kāligāṅgā connects the

Padmā with the Meghnā river. Thus the lower course of the Padmā is joined by the Brahmaputra and the Meghnā, and these combined rivers form the mighty Meghnā estuary. In the middle of the 19th century the main volume of the Padmā flowed through the Kīrtināsā.

Thus the Padmā became more and more extensive in size and superseded the united flow of the Ichhāmātī and the Brahmaputra. Gradually, the Padmā adopted its present course as the Yamunā carrying the main volume of the waters of the Brahmaputra meets her near Goāṇḍa. The mighty Padmā causes great havoc and creates terror and is hardly looked upon with great veneration like the Bhāgīrathī. The Padmā does not bear any traditional religious sanctity.

(iv) Other Important Rivers :

It thus follows from the above that the Bhāgīrathī was originally the principal and the oldest branch of the Ganges. When the Bhāgīrathī started drying up, the Padmā began to carry the main volume of water of the Ganges, and being fed by waters of other rivers, the Padmā became transformed into a principal river of Bengal. Besides the Bhāgīrathī and the Padmā, there are many other rivers which are mostly fed by them. The Bhāgīrathī in its upper course taking the waters of the Bānsloi, the Pāglā, the Brāhmaṇī, the Dvārakā, the Mor or Mayūrākshī and the Ajay became separated into three branches at Tribenī. These are : (a) The Sarasvatī on west, (b) the Yamunā on east and (c) the Hugli in the centre. Abul Fazal has referred to the three streams of the Bhāgīrathī as Sarsuti (Sarasvatī), Jamna (Yamunā) and the Ganges¹³². The junction of these three streams is called Tribenī (3 hair-braids). It has been observed by Wilford that waters of these 3 rivers do never mix¹³³. The waters of the Yamunā are blue, those of the Ganges, muddy-yellowish colour and those of the Sarasvatī, white. There are again some other rivers which played significant role in the history and cultural setting of the people of Bengal. An account of some these important rivers of ancient Bengal is presented here for a proper understanding of their historical and cultural import.

(a) The Sarasvatī :

The most ancient course of the Sarasvatī is closely linked up with the history of two ports of ancient Bengal, Tāmralipti (Tamluk) and Saptagrāma (Sātgaon). The Sarasvatī once flowed into an estuary near modern Tamluk and received not only the waters of the Rūpnārāyaṇa and the Dāmodara, but also of many other streams issuing from the hills of the Santal Parganās. That Tāmralipta

continued as a flourishing port till the 8th century A.D. was all due to the great
 Tāmra- flow of the river Sarasvatī. Sometimes after the 8th century A.D.
 lipti the port of Tāmralipta lost its importance on account of the silting
 up of the mouth of the Sarasvatī and the consequent shifting of its course towards
 the east.

In the beginning, the Sarasvatī was the main channel of the river
 Bhāgīrathī, and gradually it splited up into three main streams at Tribenī. Because
 of the drying up of the Sarasvatī, Tamluk lost its importance, and its place was
 ultimately taken up by Sātgaon or Saptagrāma situated a little higher up. Sātgaon
 Saptagrāma was the capital of South-western Bengal in the 14th century A.D.
 and the Sarasvatī flowed in its south-west direction¹³⁴. In the 16th
 century A.D., the volume of the waters of the Bhāgīrathī began to flow through
 the Hugli, and the Sarasvatī ceased to be its main channel¹³⁵. Sātgaon lost
 its importance from the 16th century A.D. and gradually its place was taken
 up by the Hugli, and subsequently by Calcutta. This is clearly borne out by the
 Portuguese records¹³⁶.

The Portuguese selected Hugli for their settlement (1580 A.D.) in
 lieu of Sātgaon, because the main stream of the river Bhāgīrathī no longer flowed
 through the Sarasvatī. From the settlement records made by Ceasar Frederick
 in 1565 A.D. it becomes evident that the Sarasvatī above Bator (Śibpur) was
 very shallow and big ships could no more enter into the port of Sātgaon¹³⁷.
 Again, the Sarasvatī also started decaying because of the construction of an
 Decaying artificial canal which connected the Hugli channel below Calcutta
 of the through Garden Reach with it at Sāñkrail¹³⁸. The Hugli deserted
 Sarasvatī the old Ādi-Gaṅgā channel and flowed through the lower course of
 the Sarasvatī at Sāñkrail. Gradually, the Sarasvatī was piled high above the sea
 level. Now the Sarasvatī is a dead river leaving only its traces at different places
 of its old course.

(b) The Yamunā and other Rivers :

The eastern branch of the Bhāgīrathī, i.e., the Yamunā was not a promi-
 nent river in ancient times. It does not find any mention even in Rennell's map.
 Its lower portion is referred to as Yamunā (Jubna) and its upper portion as
Ichhāmutty (Issamet) in Rennell's map¹³⁹. The Yamunā flowed south-east down
 its present bed. Among many other western tributaries of the river Bhāgīrathī,

the Kapiśā or Kāñśāi, the Rūpnārāyaṇa, the Dāmodar, the Suvarṇarekhā and the Ajay are to be described as other ancient rivers of Bengal.

(c) **The Kapiśā :**

The river Kapiśā (Kharabhā) or Kāñśāi has been referred to in the early texts as a large river of great importance. As early as the 2nd century A.D., Ptolemy refers to Kambyson which has been identified with the river Kāñśāi or Kapiśā on the bank of which stands today the present district town of Midnapur^{139a}. Even in some early texts, the river Kapiśā is mentioned. Kālidāsa in his Raghuvaṃśa while describing Raghu's Digvijaya refers to Kapiśā. It is narrated that after crossing the river Kapiśā or Kharabhā, the victorious hero entered into the territory of the Utkalas¹⁴⁰. From the description given by Kālidāsa it follows that the southern portion of the river Kapiśā was adjacent to Utkala, i.e., Orissa. The Mārkaṇḍeya-purāṇa also refers to this river under various forms as Kapiśavati or Kāñśavati, i.e., modern Kāñśāi which now flows through the districts of Bāñkurā and Midnapur and falls into the river Rūpnārāyaṇa¹⁴¹.

(d) **The Rūpnārāyaṇa :**

The Rūpnārāyaṇa is an ancient river which flowed by the side of Tāmra-lipta (modern Tamluk). Tamluk was linked up with the Bay of Bengal by a channel of the Rūpnārāyaṇa river. The disappearance of the channel linking Tamluk to the sea had a far reaching effect on the history of Bengal, and this was largely responsible for the decline of this ancient sea port-town which failed to maintain its contact with the world outside. When the river Sarasvatī was the main channel of the Bhāgīrathī, the Rūpnārāyaṇa was, most probably, a branch of the Sarasvatī. The course of this river has been actually shown in Rennell's map which bears a number of channels connecting it with the Dāmodara¹⁴² (Map. 7). The southeasterly channel of the Rūpnārāyaṇa can be also traced in the maps prepared in the 16th and early part of the 17th century. But in the later part of the 17th century A.D. it was silted up. Even today the tidal basin of the Rūpnārāyaṇa plays a very important role in feeding the Hugli. river below and above its junction at Geoñkhāli and also in relieving the flood congestion of the plains of lower Dāmodar, Śilāi and Kāñśāi. Besides the Hugli., the port of Calcutta as well as the flood plains of the Dāmodar, the Dvārakeśvar, the Śilāi and the Kāñśāi are also largely dependant on the Rūpnārāyaṇa. They run more or less from west

to east, each independent of the other, through wide alluvium filled troughs. These are mere trickles in the greater part of the year, but with the advent of the monsoon-rains they become unformidable, violent and destructive.

(e) **The Dāmodar :**

The Dāmodar, the sacred river of the primitive Santals, rises in the Chhotanāgpur-watershed and after a south-easterly course of about 350 miles falls into the Hugli. The river has, however, changed its ancient course below Burdwan. In Van Den Broucke's map of Bengal dated 1660 A.D., the Dāmodar or at least a major branch of it flowed almost due east of Burdwan and fell into the Hugli near Kālā¹⁴³ (Map. 6). The river Dāmodar flowing through the Burdwan district is also referred to in inscriptions like Jayarāmpur Copper plate inscription of the time of Gopachandra¹⁴⁴. This course of the Dāmodar is indicated in Rennel's map as well by a small rivulet and is referred to in the Manasār-Bhāsān by Kshemānandadās (C.1640 A.D.^{144a}).

(f) **The Ajay :**

The Ajay originating from the Chhotanāgpur hills drains a large portion of the southern and western slopes of West Bengal. The bed of the river is sandy, annually inundating its banks. Hunter urged that the name Aja is a derivation from the Sanskrit Ajaya meaning unconquerable¹⁴⁵. The Ajay, one of the tributaries of the Bhāgīrathī, has been identified by Wilford with the Amystis of Arrian¹⁴⁶. The Ajay flowing by the side of the town of Kantadupa (may be identified with Katwa) fell into the Bhāgīrathī by the north of Navadvīpa. Rājendra Chola appears to have crossed the Ganges (Bhāgīrathī) near the Ajay river as learnt from the Tirumalai inscription¹⁴⁷. In the Śāktipur Copper plate of Lakshmanasena it has been stated that the river Ajay separated northern Rādhā from its southern part¹⁴⁸. This contention is supported by Dubi plate of Bhāskavarman¹⁴⁹. In the Śāktipur Copper plate it is also mentioned that northern Rādhā was bounded by the Ajay on south and the Bhāgīrathī on east¹⁵⁰.

(g) **The Suvarṇarekhā :**

The Suvarṇarekhā is also an important river in ancient Bengal. Ptolemy has referred to Kambyson as the westerly mouth of the Ganges¹⁵¹. This Kambyson of Ptolemy has been identified either with the Hugli or the Suvarṇarekhā called the Jellāsūr river by Wilford¹⁵². The river Sarasvatī joined the Suvarṇarekhā near Danton in Midnapur District. If the identification of the western mouth

of the Ganges with the Suvarṇarekhā is accepted, the second mouth of the Ganges called the Mega by Ptolemy may be equated with the Hugli.¹⁵³ This river Suvarṇarekhā is mentioned in the Irda Copper plate of the Kamboja king Nayapāladeva¹⁵⁴. While describing the extent of the Dandabhūkti-maṇḍala it is stated that the same comprised at least the southern and south-western portion of Midnapur district including the lower reaches of the Suvarṇarekhā river, but not the portion of the Balasore district itself¹⁵⁵. The sea was near the mouth of this river as is known from Jayarāmpur Copper plate inscription of the time of Gopachandra¹⁵⁶. It is also known that near the mouth of this river there was a chance of forming delta in course of geological movements in both sea and land in this coastal country¹⁵⁷. Among other rivers mention is to be made of the river Mora which has been identified with the modern Mor or Mayūrākshī which flowed through the district of present Bīrbhūm as learnt from Śaktipur Copper plate of Lakshmanasena¹⁵⁸.

V. Rivers of the Central Delta

Among the important rivers in the deltaic region lying between the Bhāgīrathī-Hugli and the Padmā mention may be made of ^{the} Ichhāmāti, the Jalāṅgī, the Māthābhāṅgā and the Garāi, the Betnā, the Kobedak, the Bhadrā, the Rūpsā, etc. Besides, the Kumār and the Bhairab are also supposed to be very old rivers in Central Delta.

(a) The Bhairab :

When the silting of the Bhāgīrathī was complete, her accumulated waters took easterly trend through the channel known as the Bhairab. Thus the Bhairab became the main outlet for the waters of the Ganges. There is another opinion regarding the origin of the Bhairab. According to this opinion, at one time the Ganges found its way to the sea along the course of the Bhāgīrathī, and in those days, before the Padmā broke its way eastward and intersected the drainage of the Darjeeling Himalayas there must have been some earlier streams to carry that drainage to the sea, of which the Bhairab is said to have been one¹⁵⁹. Thus the Bhairab has been turned into a distributary of the waters of North Bengal. When the Padmā began to carry the main volume of the waters of the Ganges, the Bhairab became the main outlet of the waters of the Padmā. Once the Bhairab was a mighty channel of the Padmā, opposite Rāmpur Boāliā right upto her discharge in Haringhātā estuary. The intervening tract between the Bhāgīrathī and the Bhairab was gradually raised up by the alluvium thrown

by the Jalāngī and the Māthābhāṅgā and many other intervening redistributaries like the Yamunā, the Churnī, the Ichhāmatī, the Betnā, the Kobedak, the Bhadrā, the Rūpsā, etc. All these rivers may be described as belonging to the Bhairab system. Gradually, the region was elevated higher and higher. Then the Padmā being the main flow of the Ganges shifted further eastwards throwing its waters through the channel, the Māthābhāṅgā. Thus the flow of the Padmā was divided among the three streams, viz., the Bhairab, the Jalāngī and the Māthābhāṅgā. Therefore, the Bhairab lost its importance and gradually became a dead river.

(b) **The Māthābhāṅgā and the Kumār:**

With the decline of the Bhairab, the Māthābhāṅgā became prominent. The Kumār was the first redistributary of the Māthābhāṅgā. According to Majumdar, the Kumār appears to be an older channel than the Māthābhāṅgā which was formed on the decay of the Bhairab¹⁶⁰. Moreover the Kumār, the Navagaṅgā and the Chitrā were the redistributaries of the Māthābhāṅgā. The course of the Māthābhāṅgā usurped the channel of the Bhairab from below Sukalpur to Sultānpur and then proceeding further south transmitted its waters into the Churnī and the Ichhāmatī. The Māthābhāṅgā along with her system of redistributaries, the Kumār, the Navagaṅgā, the Chitrā, etc., extended the deltaic region and raised the general level eastwards up to the furthest end of Faridpur at least up to the border of the Āriākhān. However, both the Bhairab and the Māthābhāṅgā were important distributaries in early times, but the Garāi did not attain any importance.

(c) **The Garāi and the Madhumatī:**

The Garāi flowed as a cross-channel between the Ganges and the Kumār. When the Kumār began to silt up, the Ganges poured more and more of its waters down the Garāi which then began to swallow up the Kumār. The development of the Garāi, in the opinion of Majumdar, "was due to the diversion of the Brahmaputra through the Yamunā channel meeting the Ganges at Goālanda, thereby heading up the Ganges flood to a certain extent and forging it to find some other outlet higher up".¹⁶¹

The river Barisā was one of the channels of the Kumār. Being a narrow river, it was unable to carry off the influx of water and opened up a new western channel called the Alanghali. The Barisā and Alanghali being united formed the river known as Madhumatī as described by O' Malley.¹⁶² During the end of the 19th century A.D., the river Madhumatī, writes O' Malley, was a beautiful stream

of clear water navigable by large vessels all the year round¹⁶³. The Madhumatī brought down the great quantity of the Ganges water to the sea. On the basis of O' Malley's statement it has been held that the Garāi and the Madhumatī, comparatively new rivers, became important after a series of disastrous floods in the early part of the 19th century A.D.¹⁶⁴. The Garāi-Madhumatī channel is now raising up the deltaic portion built up by the Āriākhān system. During Rennell's time, the Chandanā was the most important river of all the distributaries of the Ganges flowing through Central Bengal¹⁶⁵. It was navigable throughout the year. Rennell did not, however, refer to the Garāi because of its insignificance. In Rennell's time another important river was the Jalāngī¹⁶⁶.

VI. Rivers of the East

Thus originated the flows of the Ichhāmātī, the Bhairav, the Kumār, the Bhadrā, the Kabadak, the Garāi, the Madhumatī, the Barisā, the Alanghali, the Jalāngī, the Chandanā and others in Central Bengal. It is, however, to be noted that all the rivers described above were not equally active in carrying waters and in forming the delta. When the rivers in the west of the delta were active, those in the east were in their infancy, and when the rivers in the east were adollescing, those in the west became senile. The most important rivers of the east are the Brahmaputra and the Meghnā.

(a) The Brahmaputra :

Of the three principal rivers, the Padmā, the Brahmaputra and the Meghnā of Eastern Bengal, the Brahmaputra is undoubtedly the most important and ancient one. The river Brahmaputra is also known as Lauhitya which is a Sanskrit derivation of the Indo-Mongoloid word Luhit¹⁶⁷. The term Luhit is still used to denote the easternmost branch of the Brahmaputra which is now flanked by Mishmi (North Assamese), Singpho or Kachin (Burmese-Kuki-Lolo) and Khamti speakers¹⁶⁸. Originally, the area of the Luhit river appears to have been inhabited by the Bodo people¹⁶⁹. Dihāng is the name of the Dihāng-Brahmaputra. Sesirī and the Dibāng are the names of two other branches from the north. The Luhit is the main feeder from the east which, beyond the eastern frontiers of India, is known as the Zayul¹⁷⁰.

The name Lohit was once used for the entire river now known as the Brahmaputra. The name Lohitya or Lohini to denote the Brahmaputra is also mentioned in the Purāṇas¹⁷¹. The Brahmaputra, originally a small stream, became a formidable river of the Ganges when it joined with the Tsanpo of Tibet through its tributary the Dihong (in Upper Assam) and with the Tistā¹⁷². Till the middle of the 14th century A.D., the Brahmaputra did not play any vital role in the economic life of Bengal as it poured into the sea near the port of Chittagong. It is in the 17th century A.D. that the main channel of the Brahmaputra passed through the district of Dacca. But it also gradually decayed and changed its course. Sometimes, the river flowed towards the west and then again moved towards the east in a zigzag course. A definite westward flow of the Brahmaputra began from the middle of the 18th century A.D. Then the river Brahmaputra flowed through the channel of the Dhaleswarī. Again, after the Tistā floods of 1789, Old and the Brahmaputra changed its course towards the Yamunā¹⁷³. Thus new courses the old course of the Brahmaputra curbing round the Gāro hills on the west took a south-easterly course near Dewāngañj and flowing by Jāmālpur, Mymensing and the neighbourhood of the Madhupur jungle in the district of Mymensing ran through the eastern part of the Dacca district. At this point, the Brahmaputra threw off a branch called Lakhmiyā and then passing by Nāngalband to the south-west of Sonārgāoñ fell into the Dhaleswarī¹⁷⁴. The Lakhmiyā runs almost parallel to the main course. Then passing by Nārāyaṅgañj, the Lakhmiyā met the Dhaleswarī and flowed into the main stream of the Brahmaputra. This course of the Brahmaputra was deserted in the 18th century when it began to flow further east and joined the Meghnā near Bhairab-bazar in the Mymensing district, and below the confluence, the river became known as the Meghnā¹⁷⁵. In the first quarter of the 19th century, since the time of Rennell's survey, many square miles of the country between the Brahmaputra and the Tistā have been swept away by the former.

Like most of the rivers the Brahmaputra also formed the boundary mark between two countries. According to Yoginī-Tantra, the country lying to the east of the Brahmaputra was called Kāmarūpa (Kāmarūpe mahāpūjā sarva-siddhi-siddhi-phala-prajā, Nepālasya Kāñchanādrim Brahmaputrasya saṅgamam¹⁷⁶...). In some inscriptions, the river Lohitya is mentioned. The Mandasor inscription of the 6th century A.D. records that Yaśodharman extended his sway as far as Lohitya (Brahmaputra¹⁷⁷). The river Lohitya (Brahmaputra) is also mentioned in the Apsad inscription of Ādityasena of the 7th century A.D. According to this inscription Mahāsenagupta emerged victorious out of a struggle with

Susthitavarman, and the glory or fame of Mahāsenagupta was sung on the bank of the river Lauhitya (Brahmaputra¹⁷⁸). The river Lauhitya/Brahmaputra also

Early marked the eastern limit of the kingdom. The Bāghāūrā (district
refe- Tippera) Nārāyaṇa Image inscription (Year 3) refers to the Lauhitya or
rences Brahmaputra river as a boundary mark between the two countries¹⁷⁹.

Mymensingh and Dacca districts remained to the east of the Brahmaputra. In the Sobhārāmpur plate of Dāmodaradeva (Śaka 1158) as well the river Brahmaputra is mentioned¹⁸⁰. It is known from this inscription that Susthitavarman transferred his capital to a new city built by him on the bank of the holy river, i.e., the Brahmaputra¹⁸¹. From this inscription, it appears that the old capital was not exactly on the Brahmaputra. The capital city built by the king Susthitavarman is usually identified with the modern city of Gauhāṭi on the Brahmaputra¹⁸². The older city may also have been situated not very far from Gauhāṭi. All these references certainly speak of the antiquity and importance of the river Brahmaputra as a boundary mark between the ancient kingdoms of Kāmarūpa and Bengal. Like the Ganges the Brahmaputra is also recognised as a sacred river and thousands of pilgrims take their bath in the muddy pools near Nāngalband.

(b) ~~The Meghna~~ :

The river Meghnā, however, does not either drain such extensive areas or carry much silt like the Ganges or the Brahmaputra. During Rennell's time, the Lower reach of the Brahmaputra or the Meghnā was four to five miles wide. Towards the end of the 18th century the importance of the river Yamunā increased, and since 1850, it became the main channel of the Brahmaputra. The present course of the Brahmaputra runs further west flowing by the side of Mymensingh town. The Dhaleśvarī, the Burigangā and the Lakhmia (Lakhya) are the important streams which flow in between the Yamunā and the Meghnā. Amongst these three rivers, the Lakhya is a comparatively steady river.

Unlike the Ganges and the Brahmaputra, the Meghnā is primarily fed by rain-water. Excessive rains on the southern slopes of Meghālaya in the Eastern Hills and the Surmā valley find their way into the Meghnā-channel and thereby making it a formidable river. The presence of a number of large alluvial lakes locally known as Bāors along the course of the Meghnā tends to make the flow more uniform than that of the Ganges and the Brahmaputra¹⁸³. To

the east of the Meghnā, the only river of importance is the Karnaphulī, the mouth of the maritime outlet of East Bengal. The river Meghnā was also the natural boundary between Dāmodaradeva's territory and the dominion of Vāṅga as is recorded in the Mehar Copper plate of Dāmodaradeva of the year 4 dated 1156 Śaka¹⁸⁴.

VII. Rivers of North Bengal

Rivers in North Bengal flow either into the Padmā or the Brahmaputra. Among the rivers in North Bengal, the Tistā, the Karatōyā, the Mahānandā, the Ātrāi and the Punarbhabā deserve special treatment. The North Bengal plains are bordered on the east by the Brahmaputra and on the south by the Ganges-Padmā and on the west by the Kōśī and across them flow the Tistā, the Mahānandā, the Punarbhabā, the Ātrāi, the Karatōyā and other streams.

(a) The Tistā;

The Tistā is an ancient river which has very often changed its course. Even at present, the most important river of North Bengal is the Tistā which flows down the slopes of the Himalayas and passes through the plains to discharge its waters finally into the Brahmaputra.

Originally, the Tistā flowed into the Brahmaputra. Then it changed its course and became a tributary of the Ganges. But the Tistā deserted her old flow and took the course falling into the Brahmaputra. In its second stage, from Jalpaiguri the Tistā flowed towards south and bifurcated into three channels, namely, the Karatōyā to the east, the Punarbhabā to the west and the Ātrāi in the centre. These three streams have been appropriately named Trisrota (trisrota, i.e., tri or three and srota or flowing current; Tri+srota = Trisrota or three flowing streams in three channels). The term Trisrota has been actually transformed into Tistā.

In the maps of Rennel, the Tistā is shown as flowing through the North Bengal plains in several branches like the Punarbhabā, the Ātrāi and the Karatōyā¹⁸⁵. All these streams flowing southward joined with the Mahānandā, the westernmost river in North Bengal. The current of these combined rivers was known as the Hoorsāgar which finally discharged into the Padmā at Jaffargāñj near modern Goālnanda¹⁸⁶. It is to be noted that in Rennel's time the lower

course of the Hoorsāgar used to run almost parallel to the Ganges for nearly 150 miles¹⁸⁷. The Hoorsāgar river is still extant. It is the combined outfall of the Borāl, a spill-channel of the Ganges, the Ātrāi, the Yamunā or Yamuneśvarī (not the main Yamunā through which the Brahmaputra now flows) and the Karatōyā. The Hoorsāgar falls into the main Yamunā, a few miles above the confluence of these two rivers at Goālanda¹⁸⁸.

Hunter has pointed out that due to high flood in 1787 A.D. the Tistā suddenly changed her course and rushed south-east and ran into the Brahmaputra near Bahādurābād¹⁸⁹. Before its diversion by about 1787, the Tistā used to discharge her waters through the Punarbhabā, the Ātrāi and the Karatōyā into the Ganges. After the diversion of her course, most of the channels of the Tistā are gradually creating waterlogging due to inadequate drainage. This diversion of the Tistā into the Brahmaputra-course by about 1787 led to a relative decline in the old course of the Brahmaputra, east of Dacca, already ponded back by waters brought from the Surmā valley by the Meghnā¹⁹⁰.

However, since the diversion of the Tistā, most of the rivers of North Bengal have been deprived of sufficient waters and are now dying out. The Māhanandā is the only exception. But even this river shows a tendency to leave its present bed and take to new westerly channels. The river Māhanandā also formed the boundary line of Varendra on west and the Karatōyā on east¹⁹¹. The Karatōyā, the Ātrāi and the Punarbhabā are the three principal channels of the Tistā.

(b) **The Karatōyā:**

The name Karatōyā is derived from Kara, i.e., hand and toyā, i.e., water. According to a mythical story, Karatōyā signifies that the river was formed by water which was poured on the hands of Śiva when he married the goddess Pārvatī¹⁹².

In ancient times, the Karatōyā was recognised as a big and sacred river of North Bengal. In the Rāmacharita of Sandhyākaranadī, the Karatōyā is mentioned as a glorious river flowing through Varendrī¹⁹³. Its sanctity is also recognised with reverence in this treatise. Even today, the work Karatōyā-Māhātmya bears testimony to its sanctity. In the list of the rivers given in the

Mahābhārata, the Karatōyā is mentioned as the eastern boundary of the Pundra country and is noted for its sanctity¹⁹⁴. The Amarakōsha and Hemachandra's Abhidhāna-Chintāmaṇi give the synonym of Karatōyā as Sadānīrā, i.e., always with water or 'never dry'¹⁹⁵. But in the Mahābhārata, the Sadānīrā appears to be different from the Karatōyā¹⁹⁶. The sacred river Karatōyā is also mentioned in the Laghubhārata (Vrihatparīśarapunya Karatōyā Mahānadi)¹⁹⁷. It is also learnt from the same work that the Karatōyā demarcated the boundary between Gauḍa and Vaṅga^{197a}. Hiuen Tsang (7th century A.D.) in course of his travel in Bengal and Assam refers to two big rivers crossed by him¹⁹⁸. He crossed the Ganges near Rājmaḥal in order to reach North Bengal, and a large river, probably the Karatōyā which he crossed over to Kāmarūpa (Assam¹⁹⁹). The Karatōyā was a big river in the 7th century A.D. If it is presumed that the Kuśī and the Mahānandā formerly joined the Karatōyā, the wide expanse of the river can be easily gleaned. Hunter has actually noted that the Kuśī flowing through the Tejpur-Parganā continued its easterly course and met the Karatōyā²⁰⁰. Then the Karatōyā on its way received waters of the Ātrāi and the Tistā as well. The wide expanse of the river may be further proved by the fact that for crossing the river ten kāṇa of cowris were required²⁰¹. It may be, however, contended that this heavy charge might have been a sort of embargo for passing from one kingdom to another separated by the river.

In the 3rd century B.C. the ancient city of Pundravardhana stood on the bank of the river Karatōyā²⁰². The ruins of the city of Pundravardhana have been discovered at Mahāsthāngarh, a few miles from Bogra, and the decaying Karatōyā still passes by the side of the ancient city. The course of the river in this region may be regarded as a fixed landmark in the shifting of the Bengal rivers. The old riverbed has been nearly filled up and is no longer a territorial boundary. Like other rivers, the Karatōyā is also mentioned as a boundary-mark in the inscriptions. As for instance, the Sobhārāmpur plate of Dāmodaradeva records that the Gauḍas established their suzerainty over North Bengal at least upto the river Karatōyā in the east²⁰³. But the Karatōyā is more remarkable for the demarcation of two distinct kinds of soil²⁰⁴. On its west, Bogra is a veritable land of Edom, the soil being almost as red as blood, but at the same time very hard and tenacious²⁰⁵. The peasants even today build their huts with this earth. The old rampart known as the Bhīmjaṅgal still runs along its western side. But the soil on its east is full of sand and alluvium. Gradually, this mighty

river has turned into an insignificant stream. It becomes dry in winter and is scarcely navigable except in the rainy season.

(c) The Kuśī.

The Kuśī is another ancient river of North Bengal. The Sanskrit name of the present Kuśī is Kauśika who is said to have been a river-nymph worshipped on its bank²⁰⁶. The ancient city of Pundravardhana was bounded on west by the river Kuśī. It has very often changed its courses, and now, it flows through the district of Purnea into the Ganges, much higher up above the Rājmaḥal²⁰⁷. But originally the Kuśī ran east-west and fell into the Brahma-putra.

In the Epics and the Purāṇas the present river is represented by the name Kauśikī. The Mahābhārata (Vanaparva) refers to Trisrota-Kauśikī, i.e., three courses or three rivers²⁰⁸. Both the Mārkaṇḍeya and the Vāyu Purāṇas refer to the river Kauśikī; the former mentions the river after the Gaṇḍakī as flowing from the slopes of the Himalayas and the latter Pūrāṇa, however, contains the expression : Kauśikī cha tritīyā tu²⁰⁹. Again, there are also references to Sapta-Kauśikas which include the main river and its tributaries, such as, the Tambra, the Tamrā, the Āran or Eran, the Dudhkōśī, the Likhu Kōśī, the Tambā Kōśī and the Bhotia Kōśī²¹⁰.

According to Hunter (1877), the Kuśī in its eastward course first met the Karatōyā which received waters of the Ātrāī and the Tistā²¹¹. He has further stated that the Kōśī and the Mahānandā formerly joined together and brought about considerable changes in the physical set up resulting in depopulation of Gaur²¹². Leaving its eastern course, it passed through the Kālindi, a channel known as the Marā-Kuśī (dead Kuśī) and rushed into the Ganges. Numerous marshes lying near Maldah bear traces of the river Kōśī. Fergusson suggested that the Kuśī discharged its water through the Ātrāī and Ursāgar into the Brahma-putra²¹³. It has been pointed out by Buchanan Hamilton that the channel of the Kuśī in the past joined with the Mahānandā released a volume of water to the Ganges and passed through the Padmā.²¹⁴ It flows south of Tejpur-Parganā, passing through the Kālindi and strikes against Gaur.²¹⁵ Shillingford thinks that the Kuśī flowed to the north and east, and the Haringhāṭṭā is the channel by which the Kuśī was swelled by many tributaries flowing into the Brahmaputra.²¹⁶

It has been pointed out by Hirst (1903) that the Kośī is a river flowing at different times over the land along the junction of the Ganges and the Brahmaputra plains (roughly longitude 87° East²¹⁷). According to Bhattacharyya, the river crossed by Hiuen Tsang in the 7th century A.D. during his sojourn to Kāmarūpa was the Tistā which is the eastern channel of the Kośī²¹⁸. He refers to two inscriptions, Nidhānpur Copper plate and Tejpur grant in this context. The former refers to some areas west of this river and the latter to Trisrōtāyāh paśchimatata and to Chandrapuri on the Tistā²¹⁹. Thus the Nidhānpur Copper plate refers to the dying Kośī²²⁰. But this identification of the Tistā with the Kośī cannot be accepted. An old channel was noticed by Rennell in the district of Purūnea, and Barua identifies it with the Śushka-Kauśika (marā Kōśī)²²¹.

It is indeed very difficult to determine the old courses of the river Kośī with any amount of precision, nor possible to locate its position at a particular age. It may be, however, contended that the Kuśī throughout its course formed a sort of ethnic boundary line of Bengal between the people of the south and those of the north like the Kōch and the Kirātas²²².

(d) The Ātrēyī :

Another ancient river of North Bengal is obviously the river Ātrēyī. Mention of this river is to be found in the Sabhāparva of the Mahābhārata as : Karatōyā tathātreyī Lauhityasva Mahānandāh²²³. The river Ātrāi is also mentioned in the Kalāikuri (Dist. Bogra) inscription of the year 120 (Gupta Era²²⁴).

(e) The Vātānadī :

The Vātānadī mentioned in Kalāikuri (Dist. Bogra) inscription (Gupta year 120) is another ancient river of North Bengal²²⁵. According to this inscription, the village Dhānyapaṭalikagrāma was bounded by the river Vātā and by the borders of Gulmagandhikagrāma²²⁶. The river Vātā flowed through the Śrīngavera-vīthi as is stated in the inscription with the present Baranai flowing west to east through the southern part of the Rājsāhi district²²⁷. Śrīngavera-vīthi has been again identified with the modern Singra police station in the Nātor Subdivision of Rājsāhi district, situated about 10 miles to the north-east of the junction of the Baranai and the Ātrāi²²⁸.

(f) The Balabhī and the Kāli :

The Balabhī and the Kāli are the two excessively weak rivers of Varendrī or North Bengal as recorded in the Rāmacharita of Sandhyākaranandī :

(Balabhīnādī Kṛśātarā cha yā Kālinādī²²⁹). These two rivers have not yet been identified properly.

VI. Observation

The above brief review of the rivers of Bengal, past and present, relates more particularly to the principal rivers flowing (or once flowed) in different directions and finally falling into the Bay of Bengal. Besides the principal rivers, there are also many other large/small rivers/tributaries of the former. Towards lower Bengal nearing the sea, there are numerous rivulets issuing out of the Bhāgīrathī, the Padmā and the Brahmaputra. Further, numerous canals and streamlets coming out of these rivers abound all over Bengal. In fact, a network of rivers, large and small, has been from hoary antiquity the most characteristic features of Bengal. The river system of Bengal has been from very early times the very bedrock of Bengal's cultural attainments including her distinctive ways of life and thought bearing a marked stamp of her own. This would be evident from a brief reference to the influence of the rivers on various aspects of the life of the people of Bengal.

VII Influence of Rivers

Bengal has been through centuries a veritable plain landmass with innumerable rivers, broad and narrow, perennial and intermittent. Three principal rivers of Bengal, namely, the Bhāgīrathī, the Padmā and the Meghnā, have again numerous tributaries and branches. All these rivers having their winding and changing courses and flowing sometimes swiftly or slowly pour their waters either into the big rivers or into the Bay of Bengal. The rivers in Bengal have been constantly changing their courses resulting on the one hand in the continual emergence of new land mass and on the other, in complete or partial devastation of the areas which had formerly been important centres of trade and administration. Some of the rivers, once noted for their volumes and sizes, have become gradually silted up or reduced to the shape of small streams, standing as strange and disappointing relics of their former grandeur and majesty. The role of the rivers in forming the landmass and in moulding the nature and character of the people and their cultural patterns is indeed worthnoting. From times immemorial, both physical and cultural changes in Bengal have been greatly conditioned by the rivers. The constant shifting of the river-courses, erosions, accretions and innundations have always produced significant changes

in the history and culture of the Bengali people. The rivers have indeed left distinct marks upon every sphere of Bengal's life : political, social, economic and cultural.

Rivers in Bengal have frequently changed their courses through centuries, some of which have completely disappeared leaving only faint traces of their ancient flow. The Ganges rolled down through the Bhāgīrathī-Huglī channel, and the Padmā has now become her main outlet due to the shifting of her principal course towards the East. The Tistā, the Karatōyā, the Kuśī, the Brahmaputra and the Meghnā have also changed their courses several times. As a result of the diversion of the courses of the rivers, sometimes new streams have come out. Thus emerged the Bhairab, the Garāi, the Chandanā, the Madhumatī and the Kumār. Again, many rivers have ceased to flow due to heavy silt deposition and deterioration of the river-beds. The constant silt-deposition makes the river-bed flat, and its continuity for decades creates obstructions on its flow. Therefore, such a river is bound to change its course or it gradually becomes dried up. Once, the main current of the Bhāgīrathī flowed through the Sarasvatī-channel which is now dead leaving only faint traces of its previous flow.

Frequent changes in the courses of the rivers have been largely responsible for the ruination of many old places and the rise and development of new ones. Many flourishing cities and thriving marts, harbours and ports have been made and unmade by such changes. Sometimes even the whole landscape of an area has undergone wholesale transformation. Constant shifting of the river beds has been largely responsible for disfiguring continuously the face of Bengal. Because of the absence of any other physical barriers, the rivers have always played a significant role in the demarcation of the territorial units of Bengal. Again, with the fluctuation of the river beds, the extent of the various territorial divisions did also undergo considerable changes.

The very existence of the villages or cities depended/depends largely on the shifting of the courses of the rivers. The shifting of the river-courses brought about the ruination of many ancient cities like Karnasuvarṇa, Tāmrāipti, Saptagrāma, etc. It is also believed that the shifting of the beds of the river

Kośī gave rise to swamps and floods which at last brought about the destruction of the city of Gauda²³⁰. The capricious Padmā has engulfed many old cities and villages. Sometimes many flourishing cities, towns, ports and villages have been wholly or partly washed away or engulfed by the rivers. It is the shifting of the river-beds that makes the habitation places unhealthy and inaccessible. The diversion of the course of the river also creates havoc and disasters.

The deltaic plains of Bengal, its alluvial soil and geological and topographical character, physical features, climatic condition and rainfall, aridity, population and settlement are also largely dependent on the river-system. Deltas have been formed by the vast deposition of silts carried by the rivers. The Delta between the river Bhāgīrathī and the Padmā has been solely formed by silt-depositions. From very ancient times, this process of forming landmass has been going on. This process has again brought about distinct changes in the physical aspects of Bengal to a great extent. In some areas, because of the deposition of silt the level of the land has been considerably raised and in others, it has become comparatively low and waterlogged. Thus, the rivers of Bengal concentrated their activities in the construction and reconstruction of landmass. In Northern Bengal, the old rivers have been silting up their beds for some decades, and large areas which were once ancient seats of civilization are now water-logged.

Sometimes, inundations cause the rivers to overflow her banks and adjacent lands, and water recedes leaving alluvial deposits. As a result of this alluvial deposition, a greater portion of Bengal, particularly the deltaic plains, has become extremely fertile. Where the rivers are still actively performing their original functions the land is fertile. But the places where the rivers are deteriorating, the land has become arid, dry and unproductive. The promotion of the fertility of soil is a veritable contribution of the rivers. In fact, it is the fertility of soil that has made Bengal agriculturally prosperous from times immemorial. The rivers of Bengal like the Ganges or Bhāgīrathī, the Brahmaputra, the Meghnā and their host of tributaries have largely contributed towards the agricultural affluence of Bengal. Besides agricultural bountifulness, Bengal's economy has been also largely augmented by industry and trade. The network of rivers has been sometimes considered as deterrent to industrial growth. But

in reality, ancient Bengal was a key centre of many industries which supplied some primary needs to other regions of the subcontinent and different parts of the world. This is so in respect of the textile industry. The textile products of Bengal have been through ages considered as prized possessions. Again, the rivers of Bengal have made the Bengalees daring, adventurous and proficient in navigation and water transports. The rivers thereby made the Bengali people more and more commercial enterprisers in carrying out riverine and maritime trading, both internal and foreign. Literary texts contain many references to such trading with different parts of the sub-continent as well as of the world and also to a number of big merchants/traders who often lost their fortunes including merchandise. Not only that, even the foreigners came and traded with various parts of Bengal through the river channels. In fact, the rivers of Bengal have from very early times been promoting and fostering both internal and foreign trade. Bengal's agricultural bounty and prosperous industry and trade have been all the most veritable gifts of her river system. Plentiful agricultural produces, refined industrial outputs and flourishing trade have been largely responsible for economic prosperity in Bengal. It follows that the economic wellbeing of the people of ancient Bengal has been largely due to her elaborate river system. The river valleys have been always very congenial and healthy resorts for human habitation. But the diversion of the river course or drying out of the river causes great havocs on the human life. In fact, many parts of Bengal have lost their importance in respect of both people's health and soil-fertility. The drying beds of the rivers and marshy lands have created unhealthy condition. In such areas, the breakout of epidemic diseases like malaria, cholera, etc., have become the inevitable results. It may be mentioned in this connection that the decline of the Ātrāi, the Karatōyā, the Ichhāmatī and others has caused the break out of malaria and other diseases in the neighbouring regions of those rivers.

Along these river-beds of Bengal the ancient human settlements grew and thrived. All primary settlements are to be invariably found in the valleys of the old rivers. Gradually, human settlements extended and villages and cities sprang up in different ages, obviously by the side of the rivers. Indeed the rivers played the most significant role in respect of the origins and development of both rural and urban centres of ancient Bengal.

The river valleys have been always the veritable resorts of the people. Accordingly, the population density is glaring in the river valleys. Thus the

percentage of density of people in East Bengal is higher than that in West Bengal. In fact, the basin of the active rivers swarms with people. Hence, a high population density forms a continuous belt running from North to South²³¹. In the past as well, the density of population depended primarily on the fertility of soil. It is also noticeable that in ancient times human settlements arose invariably by the river sides. It is only in modern times that sometimes settlements have grown up in places away from the river. This is one point of difference between the ancient and modern settlement patterns. Sometimes, the river deserted its old course and took a new turn. In such a case, the people also left their old habitation and took refuge in a congenial region adjacent to the river-bed. So, it is found that changes in the river-courses and their constant silting ceased displacement of settlements as well. In this way, many ancient settlements have been engulfed by the river or deserted or gone under earth.

Communications by both land and water have been quite well-known from ancient times. Because of innumerable rivers, the ~~non~~-existence of regular roadways in Bengal is quite but natural. Accordingly, the rivers have been the principal means of communication. Both internal and external trade and commerce were and are being carried out through the rivers. There are positive evidences of an active riverine trade and commerce in ancient Bengal. This becomes evident from the Arthaśāstra of Kauṭilya and the Periplus of the Erythraean Sea (1st century A.D.²³²). The four big rivers, the Bhāgīrathī (Ganges), the Padmā, the Brahmaputra and Meghnā were all navigable even in ancient times. Since bygone days, Bengal's rivers and canals have been always magnificent channels of inland water-transportation. The Bhāgīrathī in ancient times served as a great navigable trade-channel between Bengal and upper India. Even in medieval times, when the river Bhāgīrathī began decaying, the foreigners made this river their main channel of trade, and many trading settlements grew up on its bank. But with the drying of the Bhāgīrathī this riverine trade also declined. Now again, attempts are being made to divert the flow of the Gaṅgā into its old channel by the construction of a barrage at Farakkā.

The rivers and their channels also served the purpose of an elaborate drainage system. The rain-water including other waste-water is being drained through ages into the rivers which again release their surplus waters into the

sea. The Jalāṅghī, the Māthābhāṅgā, and the Churnī served the purpose of draining the eastern parts of Murśidābād, Nadiā and Jessore even in the 19th century²³³.

Bengal has become a well fortified area because of its intersection by so many large and small rivers, their tributaries and canals. Therefore, Bengal has been largely inaccessible to unknown or foreign peoples. In fact, the rivers have always given natural protection to the interiors of Bengal. In this context a reference may be made to the pass at Sikrigully which has a great strategic importance. It was because of the networks of rivers that Bengal, more particularly Eastern Bengal, could hardly be easily conquered by the undaunted foreign invaders. Again, despite this riverine protection, invasions and infiltrations from outside were not less frequent. In fact, many external invasions into Bengal were carried through the Ganges and other rivers. There are indeed many references to naval expeditions into Bengal. Through these rivers, the foreigners could also make their access into the interiors of Bengal. Gradually, the foreign invaders succeeded also to secure a firm foothold on the soil of Bengal and thereby displaced the indigenous peoples. Sometiems, the outsider forcibly displaced the original settlers and established their own habitats. Thus the original inhabitants being defeated took refuge in the forest or marshy and swampy lands in East, West and South Bengal. These peoples again had to struggle constantly with the animals living in the forest and river for their very existence. Yet, they have made veritable contributions towards augmenting the agricultural prosperity of the country. It is again through the rivers that the people belonging to different racial and linguistic groups entered into Bengal from North, West and East. The so-called Aryans and Mongoloids followed the routes along the Ganges and the Brahmaputra respectively. Even in subsequent periods all invasions/migrations have taken place following the river courses.

The rivers in Bengal indirectly fostered an independent and regional spirit among her inhabitants. The people of Bengal could retain their regional independence for a long time because of the special advantages offered by her river-system. It was because of the rivers that the Mughal army was repeatedly defeated by the Bāro-Bhuñiās of Bengal. The political integrity of Bengal has been thus zealously guarded to a certain extent by her

rivers. This has again helped the Bengali people to maintain their cultural integrity and individuality.

The role of the rivers has been also very significant in the field of religious life and activities of the Bengali people. In Bengal, from times immemorial, rivers are being worshipped for their sacredness. Even now, the Bhāgīrathī, the Karatōyā, the Brahmaputra and many other old channels are well-known for their sanctity. Thousands of people even today take their sacred bath for earning religious merit. Many river-sides were again the most hospitable resorts of the followers of the different religious sects of Buddhism, Jainism, Brahminism, etc. Most of the ancient religious establishments are also to be found most significantly on the river sides. All popular religious beliefs and practices centre round the rivers as well.

The rivers have also played a fundamental role in moulding the nature and character of the Bengali people. Frequent changes in the river-courses gave birth to individualism instead of social and group behaviour patterns. Again, the rivers have made the people more accommodating to new or alien manners, customs and behaviour instead of strictly adhering to the traditional ones. This explains the changing patterns of the Bengali culture from bygone days.

In general, it can be said that from hoary antiquity, the life of the people of Bengal is closely associated with the rivers. The livelihood of the people is also largely dependent on the rivers. Food-stuffs of the Bengali people have been largely conditioned by the rivers which nourish fishes and many other water animal species. Abundant supply of fishes and the like by the rivers has made the Bengalees veteran fish-eaters. Even today the Bengalees are largely dependent on the rivers for supplying their main food-stuffs. Sometimes, the diversion of the river-courses has brought considerable changes in the livelihood patterns of the people. The rivers have been always active in invigorating and strengthening the life of the Bengalis. The rivers have also made the people more and more adventurous. At the same time, sharp intellect and creative acumen are also the very gifts of the rivers. The imaginative power, romantic mind, softness in character and deep affection characterising the Bengalis are the varitable gifts of the rivers. Love of nature and broadness of mind are also the contributions of the rivers. In reality, the rivers have made the Bengalis

more dynamic and loosened the traditional social bonds paving the way for cultural adaptations, assimilations and acculturations. Moreover, erosions and changes in the courses of the rivers have very often compelled the people to shift their settlements from one place to another and thereby resulting in cultural acculturations and admixtures. At the same time, the Bengali culture has always maintained its own individual character. The rivers have given the Bengalis the vigour to retain their individuality in respect of their cultural attainments. Again, the rivers have also served as the medium for a cultural synthesis. The destructive and creative nature of the rivers in Bengal is the very fountain of history and culture of Bengal. As a result of the destructive nature of the rivers, many villages, cities, towns, ports, harbours and old settlements have been engulfed or washed away. Many brilliant chapters of Bengal's history are now hidden beneath the bosom of the rivers. At the same time, it is noticeable that the continuity of the culture of Bengal is also due to the perennial flow of the rivers.

Thus, the rivers in Bengal contributed largely not only to the land-formation, but also to moulding the political, social, economic, religious and cultural life-patterns of the Bengali people. The Bengali culture is indeed the veritable gift of rivers, more particularly of the Ganges. In reality, the riverine nature has left its mark upon every aspect of Bengal's life, inspiring her poets to sing her incomparable beauty, wealth and prosperity. The Charyyāpadas speak also highly of the influence and contributions of the rivers to the making of the history and culture of Bengal²³⁴. Even the principal philosophical thoughts and secret magico-religious performances have their vivid manifestations in Bengal's seas, rivers and canals. In reality, most of the characteristic traits of the people and culture of Bengal are indeed the veritable gifts of her innumerable rivers.

VII. General Observation

The above resume on the physical landscape of Bengal reveals that there has not been any substantial transfiguration/transformation of her physical features from determinable ancient times. This is so, more in respect of hills and rocks, forests and landmass, deltas and soils, distinctive seasonal and climatic variations, excluding of course her river system which has from bygone days undergone considerable changes in regard to the river courses, drying out of rivers and emergence of new outlets for drainage. The physical features as

outlined above have made Bengal a well fortified geographical entity having at her disposal all vital resources needed for human existence and progress. Alluvium, fertile soil and adequate seasonal rainfall have made Bengal Sujalā and Suphalā with bountiful agricultural crops and fruits. Excepting some days of hot and humid summer, all other seasons of Bengal are not only soothing and pleasing, but also invigorating. Besides, the rivers of Bengal, perennial and non-perennial, have been through centuries the very life-streams of her people providing all primary needs of man and other subsidiaries to be created by human efforts and machinations. It is because of her natural bountiness and other material resources along with her seasonal and climatic characteristics that Bengal has been from remote antiquity the most coveted and much sought after resort or refuge for human settlements and also a veritable centre for the advancement of the creative faculties of man and their enrichment by adapting, assimilating and synthetizing new ideas and ways of life that crept into and also by moulding them in her own fashion and thereby giving them a distinct stamp of Bengaliness.

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CHAPTER - THREE

SETTLEMENTS : VILLAGE AND CITY

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A. VILLAGE

Since bygone days, India has always been a veritable land of villages. Throughout the courses of the Indian history, the village has been always the lowest and smallest socio-economic-cum-political unit. Originally, the village or Grāma was a Svajāta or kin-group, more particularly on move led by its leader called Grāmanī. In course of time, new modes of production made the kin-group settled in a particular field and thereby formed the nucleus of a village. Such a village settlement was indeed a self-sufficient and self-contained unit. Today the Indian village demonstrates no doubt a grim picture of poverty and helplessness. Though a village is now rarely a self-contained or self-sufficient unit yet through ages it has been the very nucleus and nerve centre providing the very base of the Indian culture.

Sufficient data regarding the village establishment in ancient Bengal are not available. Whatever materials are available from both literary and archaeological sources have been coalesced to present a complete picture of the village and its life-patterns in ancient Bengal. Some valuable information about villages is furnished by the later epigraphic and literary records, from which it may be presumed that the village settlement in Bengal came into existence with the introduction of food-producing economy. The jungles were cleared, burnt and prepared for shifting cultivation before the introduction of cultivation by plough. Even the shifting cultivation required a kind of settlement to look after plants and their yields. But these settlements arising out of the introduction of shifting cultivation were all temporary habitats. Even such a conglomeration of habitats forming a primary village used to be always on move as required by the shifting cultivation patterns.

I. Growth of Village

With the introduction of plough-cultivation the settlement pattern changed considerably. The same plot of land could thence be cultivated persistently producing yields years after years. The inevitable result of this plough-cultivation was the permanent settlement made by the cultivators. Such a settlement was in early times very small, and it was no better than the habitat of a small kin-group. Gradually, with the expansion of the kin-group the village became larger and larger. It reached its climax when such a Svajāta settlement began to accommodate other peoples including even non-agriculturists, such as, the artisans whose products were essential requisites for the village economy. From very early times, such settlements or a cluster of settlements grew up primarily along the river valleys. Reasons are quite obvious. The land along the river valleys has been always fertile for agricultural production, and the rivers supplied not only perennial water, but also some other basic necessities of subsistence.

The village in ancient Bengal, as in the rest of the country, has been always a compact area composed of various types of land, such as, Vāstu (high and hard land, i.e., habitat), Kshetra (low land or arable land), Ushara (barren tract), Go-charanabhūmi (natural meadow land) and wood-land or forest areas etc., as described in the early Indian texts and inscriptions¹. Manu has given a description of a village by saying that it is on the back of a tortoise, i.e., on a high land, and on its four sides is the Gocharanabhūmi covering 400 cubits and beyond it are agricultural fields². Similarly, in the Pāla and Sena inscriptions, the most commonly recorded expression is Trinapūti-go-charaparyantah³.

With the growth of population, there, however, arose a great demand for both dwelling sites and agricultural fields. Both literary and epigraphic records furnish information regarding the establishment of villages by clearing forests and bringing waste lands under cultivation. It becomes also evident that dwelling plots and agricultural fields were no doubt separate, but these were mostly contiguous and as such, the compactness of the village settlement was always maintained⁴. In this context, it may be pointed out that at the initial stage of the establishment of the village-settlement there were not many dwelling sites and agricultural fields. But with the growth of population the primary

settlement expanded, and the physical compactness of the village and the solidarity of the people became essential for the purpose of its protection or defence against all odds. In the beginning, the establishment of such a village-settlement along with subsisting agricultural fields had indeed a primitive tribal base.

II. Village Types

It is learnt from the Arthaśāstra that a village should consist of one hundred to five hundred families.⁵ The Jātakas, however, refer to villages containing thrity to one thousand families⁶. In the Vinayapitaka we are told that a village consisted of one or two or three or four Kutis⁷. All these were perhaps no better than hamlets. In the Brihatkathā-kōsha (11th century A.D.) there are various terms denoting a village-settlement, such as, Grāma, i.e., a small unit with a fence, Kheta, i.e., surrounded by rivers and hills, Kharvata, i.e., lying on the outskirts of the hills, Matamba, i.e., a collection of 500 villages, Pattana, i.e., with diamond mines or a town like village, Drona-mukha, i.e., lying on the sea-coast and Sanniveśa, i.e., lying on the hills. All these categories of village are not, however, to be found described in the available records of ancient Bengal.

Besides the above types of village, there are also references in early literatures to another kind of village-unit called Ghōsha⁹. In the Pāli-texts there occurs the expression Gonishādi-nivishṭa-Grāma^{9a}. This may refer to a pastoral settlement. Actually, in the Amarakōsha the term Ghōsha is defined as a small village of the cowherds (Ābhīras¹⁰). Excavations at Utnur and Kupgal revealed such neolithic pastoral settlements¹¹. For ancient Bengal, the primary concern is, however, with the agricultural village, the very base of habitation with some smaller hamlets. Even in ancient times, there were large and small villages. A large village used to contain several quarters or parts. This is indicated by frequent references to Pātaka (pādā) which may mean either a small village or a quarter of it¹². According to Hemachandra, Pātaka refers perhaps to one half of the village. In the inscriptions, there are also references to Chaturaka meaning perhaps a unit of four villages. It is very significant to note here that the modern Bengali word Pādā might have been a derivation from Pātaka¹³. But Pādā in Bengal today denotes a part or a quarter of a village.

III. Size and Boundary

As to the size of a village in ancient Bengal there are some specific references in inscriptions. According to Kauṭilya, the size of a village varies from one Kroś to two Kroś containing 100 to 500 houses¹⁴. The territorial size of a particular village can be easily determined from the measurements of land given in epigraphic records. It has been stated in the Dāmōdarpur Copper plate inscription of Buddha Gupta (482 A.D.) that the land measuring 8 x 9 reeds adjacent to the village Vāyigrāma formed a village.¹⁵ In the same manner, the Govindapur Copper plate of Lakshmaṇasena (12th century A.D.) refers to the village Viddāraśāsana containing land measuring 60 bhū-dronas and 17 unmānas according to the standard Nala consisting of 56 cubits¹⁶. Again, the village named Dāpaniyā-pāṭaka comprised 100 bhūkhādis and 91 khādikas of land as recorded in the Mādhānagar Copper plate of Lakshmaṇasena¹⁷. The Tarpandighi Copper plate of Lakshmaṇasena tells us that the village Velahishṭi consisted of 120 ādhāvāpas and 5 unmānas of land according to the particular Nala standard prevalent in the locality¹⁸. In the Naiḥāṭi Copper plate of Vallālasena there is a vivid account of the area of the village of Vallāhittā as consisting of 7 bhūpāṭakas, 9 dronas, 1 ādhaka, 34 unmānas, 3 kākas, etc., measured according to Śrīrshabhaśāṅkaranala.¹⁹

Not only from the measurements of land as recorded in the inscriptions, the size of a village can be also determined from the number of plots of land belonging to it. It is learnt from the Guṇāighar inscription of Vainya Gupta that the village named Kānteudaka contained five plots of land. This inscription also refers to the area of each plot of land as can be gleamed from its measurements²⁰. The first plot of land measured 7 pāṭakas and 9 dronavāpas, the second 28 dronavāpas, the third, 23 dronavāpas, the fourth, 30 dronavāpas; the fifth, 1½ pāṭakas of land forming 11 pāṭakas of uncultivated lands in five plots belonging to the village Kānteudaka falling within the jurisdiction of northern territorial division²¹. From these measurements of different plots of land, it appears that the total area would be about 11 pāṭakas, each pāṭaka being composed of 40 dronavāpas of land (first plot - 7 pāṭakas and 9 dronavāpas; second plot - 28 dronavāpas; third plot - 23 dronavāpas; fourth plot - 30 dronavāpas and fifth plot - 1½ pāṭakas²² = 11 pāṭakas). According to the Sundarvan Copper plate

grant of Lakshmaṇasena the land used to be measured by unmānas, kākinīs, khādikā, bhūdrōṇa, etc.²³. A plot of land might have been measured by 3 bhūdrōṇa: 1 khādikā, 23 unmānas and 2.1/2 kākinīs according to the standard of 32 cubits = 1 unmāna and 1 cubit = 12 āṅgulas²⁴. Even there are references to a particular plot of land well-marked by boundaries and measurements as in the Dāmōdarpur Copper plate inscription of Buddha Gupta (482 A.D.²⁵).

In the Guṇāighar inscription, the specific boundary-marks of different plots of land have been also given. The first plot has been described as : "...to the east existed the boundary of the village of Guṇēkāgrahāra and the land in possession of the carpenter Viṣṇu; to the west, the land belonged to Śurī, Nāśī, etc., to the north, was the tank temporarily in possession of Doshi and to the south, the land belonged to the jurisdiction of the village Miduvilāṭa"²⁶. In this way, the boundaries of different plots of land have been also clearly recorded²⁷. Moreover, the Guṇāighar Copper plate inscription of Vainva Gupta Boundary (Gupta year 188 or 507 A.D) furnishes also information regarding the boundary-marks of low water-logged, waste and rent-free lands of the village Kānteudaka²⁸. The boundaries of the low land also have been noted as : "...to the east was the channel between the two ports at Cuḍāmaṇi and Nagaraśrī; to the channel opened to boats and connected to the lake; to the west, the end of the land attached to the temple of Pradyumnēśvara and to the north, the navigable channel"²⁹. The boundary marks of the water-logged, waste and rent-free lands belonging to the monastery have been also recorded as : "...to the east, the boundary-limit of the land attached to the temple of Pradyumnēśvara; to the south, the end of the field belonging to the monastery of the Buddhist monk Āchārya Jītasena; to the west, the dried rivulet Hacāta and to the north, the tank of Daṇḍa"³⁰.

Again, each village in ancient Bengal had well-defined boundary-marks. This is clear from numerous references in the Copper plate grants. It is learnt that every village had well-marked boundaries fixed by trees, rivers or rivulets, lakes, marshy lands, tanks, ocean, embankments, temples, orchards, houses, cattle-tracks, public roads, boundary walls, ditches, lanes and adjacent village peripheries or plots of land belonging to another village. In the boundaries of the inscriptions, peripheries of the adjacent villages have been described as forming boundaries. In all cases, the boundaries of the four quarters of a village have been clearly stated. While describing boundaries, the name

of the village and the peripheries of the adjacent villages have been also clearly indicated.

Rivers also very often formed firm boundary-lines of many villages. This will be evident from a large number of inscriptions like the Khālimpur Copper plate of Dharmapāla, Naihāṭi Copper plate of Vallālasena, Govindapur Copper plate of Lakshmaṇasena, Madanapāḍā Copper plate of Viśvarūpasena and Sāhitya Parishat Copper plate of Viśvarūpasena, etc³¹. In the Khālimpur Copper plate of Dharmapāla, it is mentioned that the village Krauñchaśvabhra in Mahanta-prakāśa-vishaya attached to Vyāghryataṭi-maṇḍala of Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti was bounded on the west by a perched rivulet (Krauñchaśvabhra nāma grāmoasya cha sīma paśchimena gaṅginikā³²). The village Mādhasālmaligrāma in this record was also bounded on the north by a perched rivulet³³ (Uttareṇa gaṅginikā sīmā). Again, the same record refers to the village Pālitaka as bounded on the east by the river Kaṇṭhiā and on the north by the perched rivulet (Pūrveṇa Kaṇṭhiā srōtaḥ-uttareṇa Gaṅginikā³⁴). In the Naihāṭi Copper plate of Vallālasena there is a reference to the river Siṅgatiā flowing to the north of the village to Khāṇḍayillā and also to the same river flowing to the north of Nāḍichā and to the west of the village Ambayillā (Khāṇḍayillā śāsanōttara sthita Siṅgatiā nadyu-ttarata Nāḍichā Śāsanottarastha Siṅgatiānadi Paśchimattarataḥ Ambayillā śāsana paśchimasthita Siṅgatiā³⁵...). From the Govindapur Copper plate of Lakshmaṇasena, it is known that the village Viddārasāsa in Vetaḍḍachaturaka of Paśchimakhāṭika in Vardhamāna-bhukti was bounded on the east by the sacred river Jāñhabī (Ganges) (Pūrvve Jāñhabī (sra) vantiardhasīmā³⁶). The Barrackpur grant of Vijayasena refers to a village called Ghāsasambhogabhāṭṭabādā (in Khāḍi-vishaya) was partly bounded on north, west and south by the stream of Rivers as marshy land of Tikshahaṇḍa. (Khāḍi-vishaya Ghāsasambhogabhāṭṭabādā-grāmē Tikshahaṇḍa-jal-ārdha-sīmā-dakshina-paśchim-ōttarataḥ³⁷). boundary marks

Again, from the Sāhitya-Parishat Copper plate of Viśvarūpasena, it is known that village Deulhastī in Lāuhaṇḍā-Chaturaka in Vikramapura has been indicated by a river Rājahitā which ran from east to west (Deulhasthām nadi-pūrvva-paśchimē Rājahitā-sa eva³⁸). In the same record, while defining the boundaries of the village Rāmasiddhipāṭaka in the Nāvya region of Vaṅga in Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti, it is stated that its northern boundary was formed by a river, the name of which has not been given³⁹. It is also known from this record that the north and south of Vaṅgālvadā was indicated by the river.

(Vaṅgālvadā-bhūh sīmā paśchime nadi sīmā uttare tathā nadi sīmā⁴⁰). It is thus evident that the rivers have been frequently mentioned as forming firm boundary-marks of the villages.

Not only the rivers, there are even specific refernces to the sea as forming the boundary-mark of a village. It has been stated in the Sāhitya-Parishat Copper plate of Viśvarūpasena that the village Vinayatilaka was bounded by the sea to the east (Vinayatilakagrāmē pūrvē samudrasīmā). It is quite apparent that this Samudra evidently refers to the Bay of Bengal. This village thus appears to have actually stood on the sea coast⁴⁰. Again, tanks also sometimes served as village boundary-marks. This becomes evident from the Sāhitya-Parishat Copper plate wherein it is stated that on the south-east of the village Rāmasiddhi-
 Sea and tanks as bounary marks pātaka lay the Varāhakunda, i.e., the tank of Varāha⁴¹. In the Tarpandighi Copper plate of Lakshmaṇasena it is stated that the southern boundary of the village Velahishti was formed by a tank named Nichadahāra (belonging to Nichada-āhāra) and on its west was Nandiharipā-kundī (tank belonging to Nandiharipā⁴²). In the Bhuvaneśvara inscription of Bhaṭṭa-Bhavadeva, a tank is referred to as lying on the waterless outskirts of a village, probably Siddhala in Rādha⁴³. Similarly in the Guṇāighar Copper plate of Vainyagupta a tank formed the boundary-limit of the plot of land in the village Kāntaudaka^{43a}.

Even embankments have been referred to as bounary-marks. In the Naihāṭi Copper plate of Vallālasena it is stated that the village Vinayatilaka was bounded on the south by an embankment⁴⁴. In the same way, the Madanapāḍā Copper plate of Viśvarūpasena refers to the embankment of the village Aṭhapaga
 Embank- as forming the boundary of a village named Piñjōkāshti. Another embank-
 ments ment of the village Vīrakāṭṭi as forming the boundary is also mentioned in this record⁴⁵. From the same record, it is also known that the village Pālitaka was bounded on south by Kāṇā sand-band (Pālitaka sīmā dakshinena kāṇā-dronikā⁴⁶). Again, it is learnt that the village Krauñcaśvabhra was bounded on north-east by a dike constructed by the prince Devaṭa and on its east, by another dike Viṭaka as described in the Khālimpur Copper plate of Dharmapāla (Pūrvvotta-rena rāja-putra Devaṭa-kritāṇi pūrvvena viṭakāṇi khātaka khānikā (m) gatvā pravishṭā⁴⁷).

Not only that, even lakes and marshy lands are often referred to as village boundary-marks. In this connection, a reference may be made to the Madanapāḍā Copper plate and Khālimpur Copper plate inscriptions⁴⁸. While describing the boundaries of Mādhāsālmāṭṭrāma, a reference has been made to a lake as forming its western boundary⁴⁹. In the Mādhānagar inscription the expression is : "Dāpaniya-pātaka Kāntāpura vṛttau rāvanasarasi"⁵⁰. Thus the boundary was indicated by a lake named Rāvaṇa. Regarding the marshy land it is recorded that the village Gopippalī was bounded on the south by a marshy land (Jolakah ⁵¹).

Sometimes, ditches and canals have been also mentioned for denoting boundary-marks. As for instance, in the Khālimpur Copper plate, the village Gopippalī in Sthālīkaṭṭa-Vishaya within the Maṇḍala of Āmrashaṇḍikā is described to have been bounded on the west by a ditch named Besānika⁵². In the Tarpaṇḍighi Copper plate it is stated that to the north of the village Velahishṭi there was a ditch named Mollāna-Khāḍi ⁵³. (Khāḍi is at present the name of a Parganā in Diamond Harbour Sub-division). From the Sundarvan Copper plate of Lakshmaṇasena it is known that the southern boundary of the village Maṇḍalagrāma in Kāntallapura-chaturaka of Khāḍi-maṇḍala in Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti was formed by a canal named Chitāḍi (Chitāḍikhāta ⁵⁴). Even now there is a canal called Chitāḍi-khāl in this region.

Not only that, even public roads, boundary-walls and lanes have been mentioned as boundary-marks of a village. In the Chittagong Copper plate inscription of Dāmōdara, it is stated that the village Kāmanapiṇḍiyā was bounded on the east by a public road (Kāmanapiṇḍiyā-grāmē pūrvvē rājapathasīmā ⁵⁵). From the Khālimpur Copper plate it is learnt that the village Gopippalī was bounded on the north by a narrow land demarcating the boundary of Udragrāmamaṇḍala ⁵⁶. Sometimes, Gocharaṇabhūmi and cattle-tracks have been also mentioned as boundary-marks (Uttareṇoudrogrāma-maṇḍalasīmā vyavasthita gomārgo ⁵⁷). In the Naihāṭi Copper plate there is a reference to the cattle-path (Gopatha) on the south and north of Āūhāgaḍḍiyā village⁵⁸. In the Chittagong Copper plate, the village Keṭaṇgapāla was bounded on the west by the cattle-track. (Paśchimē gopathasīmā ⁵⁹). Not only that, even the bullock-cart road is also mentioned as a boundary-mark. Houses also sometimes formed village boundary-lines. A significant reference may be made to Chittagong Copper plate wherein it is

stated that in Dāmbārdāma to the south of the village Kāmanapiṇḍiyā there was a house named Lavanotsavaśrama (Dakshinē Lavanōtsavaśramasamvādhavātī⁶⁰). Roads, walls, etc. It may be presumed that this house was named after salt produced in that area. In certain inscriptions, walls and sand-banks have been referred to for delineating the boundary of a village as described in the Khālimpur Copper plate, Madanapāḍā Copper plate and Naihāṭi Copper plate inscriptions. Even the cremation ground has been mentioned as indicating the boundary of a village⁶¹. In the Khālimpur Copper plate a cremation ground at the extremity of the village Jenandāyikā (Etadgāma sampārōnaparakarmakrdvīpah) is mentioned⁶².

In many other inscriptions, orchards of pomegranates, mango and other tree gorges have been specifically noted as village boundary marks. In the Khālimpur Copper plate of Dharmapāla there is a reference to date palm and also to mango and other trees on the south of the village Kālikāśvabhra (Paśchimē dālimbakshē-Orchards trasīmā⁶³). In Mallasārul Copper plate we have the expression: Āmrāgartikā-sīmā (Paśchimasyām diśi ardhenā āmrāgartikāsīmā⁶⁴). The Govindapur Copper plate of Lakshmaṇasena refers to an orchard of pomegranates on the west of the village Viddārasāsana (Paśchimē dālimbakshētrasīmā⁶⁵).

Lastly, temples are also mentioned as boundary-marks. In the Govindapur Copper plate there is a reference to Maṇḍapa of Leṅghadeva on the south of the village Viddārasāsana (Dakshinē Leṅghadevamāṇḍapasīmā)⁶⁶. Again, in the Khālimpur Copper plate of Dharmapāla it is stated that the northern boundary of Temples Krauñchaśvabhra was formed by a temple of Sarasvatī or Goddess of Learning (Uttareṇa Kādamvarīdevakulikā)⁶⁷. Even the monastery is mentioned as the demarcating line of a village or of a plot of land. As for instance, the royal monastery or Vihāra (Rāja-vihāra Kshettrañcha) formed the southern boundary of the first plot of land in the village Kānteudaka as described in the Guṇāighar Copper plate inscription of Vainya Gupta⁶⁸. The Tarpaṇḍighi Copper plate of Lakshmaṇasena refers also to a Buddhist monastery as forming the boundary mark (Pūrvvē Buddha-vihāridevatānikaradevām)⁶⁹.

It is thus evident that in ancient Bengal the area of each village was clearly demarcated by various sorts of boundary-marks as noted above. In this respect, the boundary-marks of a present day Bengali village hardly differ from those prevailing in the past.

IV. Constituent Parts

Both literary and epigraphic records furnish information regarding the constituent parts and characteristics of a village. It is known that each village comprised homestead land, arable land, high and low land, agricultural land, Gocharaṇa-bhūmi (cattle tract) and betel-leaf, betelnut, coconut, jack-fruit and mango plantations, orchards, etc. Besides, each village or a cluster of villages had tanks, ditches, lakes, marshy lands, temples, monasteries, markets, etc. As for instance, the title deed of a village named Ajikulā as recorded in the Sāhitya Parishat Copper plate of Viśvarūpasena presents a clear picture of the constituent parts of a village of ancient Bengal⁷⁰. It is known from this record that the villages like Ajikulā, Deulhastī, Ghāgharakāṭṭi, Pātilādivikā, etc., contained homestead lands along with betelnut-groves, coconut trees, forests and branches, pits and barren tracts, land and water, waste and arable lands (sa-vāstu ... sajalasthalāsajhāta-vitapā sagartaisharā sakhilanālā saguvākanārikelā ... varaja guvāka...⁷¹). Some villages again were very near the sea (Vinayatilaka grāme pūrvvē samudrasīmā⁷²). The rivers also flowed through and surrounded the villages. The villages were also studded with tanks, temples and embankments (devakulapushkarīṇyā⁷³).

There are indeed ample evidences of various categories of land in almost all inscriptions belonging to the Gupta, Pāla and Sena periods. The homestead (vāstu) land was meant for the purpose of dwelling and gardening. The Baigrām Copper plate inscription (448 A.D) refers to the donation of one Dronavāpa of homestead land in Śrigohālī for the purpose of dwelling and gardening (Śrigohālyāḥ sthala-vāstunī dronavāpam⁷⁴). Besides, there are also references to tanks, lakes, embankments, temples, etc., as constituting integral parts of a village. It is known from the same record that three Kulyavāpas of fallow land in Trivṛta was granted to Bhoyila (Trivṛtāyām khilakshetra⁷⁵). A specific mention of arable land and homestead land has been made in the Sāhitya-Parishat Copper plate of Viśvarūpasena⁷⁶. It refers to the homestead land on the south-west of Varāhakunḍa⁷⁷. This tank might have been a sacred one because of its association with Varāha (boar ; Boar incarnation of Vishṇu). Sometimes, embankments were raised for the protection of a village against inundation. In fact, there is a specific reference to such an embankment on the north-east of the village Krauñchaśvabhra which was constructed by the prince Devaṭa⁷⁸.

Again, in each village there were Brahmanical temples, Buddhist and Jaina Vihāras as well. In the Baigrām Copper plate inscription there is a reference to the temple of Lord Viṣṇu (Govindasvāmina⁷⁹). The Khālimpur Copper plate records that there was a temple of the Goddess of learning or Sarasvatī (Kādamvarī-devakulikā) in the village Krauñchaśvabhra⁸⁰. The Govindapur Copper plate of Lakshmaṇasena refers to the Maṇḍapa of Leṅgadeva in the village of Viddāraśāsana Religious centres (Leṅgadevamāṇḍapī⁸¹). Besides, other references to temples are also to be found in a large number of inscriptions. For instance, lofty houses of gods, i.e., high temples are referred to in the Deopārā inscription of Vijayasena⁸². One of the temples named Pradyumneśvara, the abode of the playful union of the beloved of Lakshmi, is also mentioned in this inscription⁸³. A vivid description of this temple has been also given as : 'A lofty edifice of Pradyumneśvara, the wings, the plinth and the main structure occupied several quarters. On the top of the temple a golden jar was placed (tadā-Ghata ...suvarṇa-kumbhasya⁸⁴). A temple of Viṣṇu is also referred to in the Bhuvaneśvara inscription of Bhaṭṭa-Bhavadeva⁸⁵. This inscription refers to the installation of a stone image of Nārāyaṇa along with Ananta and Nṛisimha (Nārāyaṇāntanṛisimha) in a temple and also of the engagement of one hundred damsels in the service of the god⁸⁶. There were a tank and a beautiful garden in front of this temple⁸⁷. A similar reference to a temple is also to be found in the Tarpaṇḍighi Copper plate of Lakshmaṇasena (Devagopāthādyasārabhuvahī⁸⁸). Besides, there are also references to the Buddhist and Jaina temples and Vihāras. The Tarpaṇḍighi Copper plate of Lakshmaṇasena refers to a Buddhist monastery⁸⁹. A significant mention in this context is to be found in the Pāhārpur Copper plate inscription wherein it is stated that a Brahmin Nāthaśarman and his wife Rāmī living in the village Vaṭagōhālī purchased or acquired the land by gift for the worship and maintenance of the Jaina Vihāra of Vaṭagohāligrāma⁹⁰. There are some other inscriptions which record the granting of land to the Buddhist monastery⁹¹. Even the name of the Āchārya of the Buddhist monastery has been mentioned in the inscriptions. Thus we know that Jitasena was the Āchārya^{monk} of a Buddhist monastery⁹².

In reality, just like the modern villages of Bengal their ancient counterparts also centered round the place of worship. Even today each village has its own Sthāna or the site of religious worship wherein the villagers assemble together for the performance of their socio-religious rites and ceremonies. The same was the practice in ancient times as well. Without making any discrimination whatsoever, the followers of different religious sects participated together in all socio-religious

observances at those places of worship. Even the kings never pursued any policy of religious intolerance. On the other hand, the king was to patronise, irrespective of his own personal religious beliefs, all prevailing religious rites and practices. This becomes evident from references to Brahmanical temples, Buddhist monasteries and Jaina Vihāras flourishing side by side in the same village. In this context, it is very significant to note the information supplied by the Dhullā Copper plate of Śrīchandra which relates that a Buddhist king like Śrīchandra could take active part in Brahmanical observances like Adbhuta-śānti during the Hōmachatushtaya or the Four Homas⁹³. It implies that the villagers of ancient Bengal had always lived in perfect religious harmony.

Moreover, for the regular worship and maintenance of temples, the villagers used to set a part of their income from market-places and palm-groves. Such an evidence is to be found in the Khālimpur Copper plate of Dharmapāla which states that the village contained market-places and palm-groves for the worship and maintenance of the venerable supreme lord Bhagavān-nara-nārāyaṇa⁹⁴. Even a temple used to have its own tank. Such a reference is to be found in the Bhuvaneśvara inscription of Bhaṭṭa-Bhavadeva⁹⁵. We are told that the tank in front of the Viṣṇu temple was a unique emporium of the world for earning merit, and its water was shady and as transparent as emerald displaying in its midst the wonderful temple of Viṣṇu, which on account of false imagery caused the anxiety of the brood of serpents⁹⁶.

Villages in arid zones used to have reservoirs of water or tanks. From the Bhuvaneśvara inscription of Bhaṭṭabhavadeva a vivid description of such a reservoir in a village situated in an arid region in Rāḍha is found (Rāḍhāyāma-jalāsujāṅgalapathagrāmōpakāṇḍa-sthalisīmāshu⁹⁷). It has been stated that such a reservoir of water (or tank) 'gladdens the soul and mind of the company of tourists sunk in fatigue and whose beds of lotuses have become devoid of bees as they are fascinated by the reflections on its surface of the lotus-faces of beautiful damsels engaged in bath'⁹⁸.

Besides a few villages contained also large and lofty buildings. It is learnt from the Edilpur Copper plate of Keśavasena that the villages were crowded with lofty buildings and joyful on account of the sweet and melodious sound made by the geese restlessly sporting about on the river banks. These villages had smooth fields growing excellent paddy⁹⁹. Not only reservoirs, the villages also contained lakes. The Mādhānagar Copper plate of Lakshmanasena

refers to a lake named Rāvana in Dāpaniyā-pātaka in the direction of Kāntāpura¹⁰⁰.

Thus with tanks, lakes, reservoirs, temples, gardens, embankments, etc., each village in ancient Bengal was a composite unit. This picture of rural settlements reveals that villages of ancient Bengal had all the physical and natural requisites necessary for subsistence and also for leading a self-contained life-pattern.

V. Agronomy & Agronomic Produces

Since Neolithic times, agronomic products of all kinds have been the mainstay of the people of Bengal. It has been generally upheld that food-producing economy was introduced in different parts of the world by the people belonging to the Neolithic stage of Culture¹⁰¹. Like other parts of India, the Neolithic people of Bengal might have been also actively associated with the production of food-articles. Wanderings and settlements of the Neolithic people in different parts of Bengal and its neighbourhood are clearly borne out by the discovery of polished stone tools made and used by them. In many parts of West Bengal, more particularly in the districts of Burdwan, Bāñkurā, Bīrbhūm and Midnapur, the supposed antecedents of neoliths, i.e., microlithic tools have been also discovered in large numbers from various sites¹⁰². But unfortunately, no stratified digging has been made at any place for ascertaining their chronological and cultural sequences excepting Microlithic stage at one site in the district of Burdwan. This is the famous site of Bīrbhānpur that yielded substantial records relating to chronology and hydrographical condition prevailing there at that time¹⁰³. Microliths from Bīrbhānpur have been assigned to pre-pottery stage. But a late dating has been attributed to it, i.e., not later than the 4th millenium B.C.¹⁰⁴. There is, however, no indication or evidence as to whether these peoples were actually associated in any way with the food-producing economy.

The succeeding Neolithic cultural stage in Bengal is simply attested to by the finding of Neolithic tools and implements from various parts of Bengal. But unfortunately, not a single Neolithic settlement site has yet been detected Neolithic stage or excavated for widening our knowledge about the economic activities of these people. Most of the Neolithic tools and implements so far obtained are stray-finds, but their wide distribution in Bengal, more particularly in the valleys of the Ajay, Dāmōdar, Kāñsāi, Rūpnārāyaṇa, Suvarṇarekhā and Būrhāvālaṅg, all originating from the Chhotanāgpur high lands, certainly project an indication of the movement of the Neolithic people in Bengal¹⁰⁵. Even the

lower Gangetic valley yielded also neolithic tools. But these tools might have been washed out of the high lands or carried by the rivers falling into the Ganges. A few excavated historical sites also yielded Neolithic tools. At Bāngarh (Dinājpur) neoliths were found below Śūnga level and at Tamluk, neoliths with ill-fired pottery belonged to the second century B.C.¹⁰⁶. These neoliths of historical periods were perhaps ritual objects. In spite of widespread distribution of neoliths, nothing positive is known about the agronomy of those people. It may be, however, suggested that they might have carried out a very primitive type of agronomic operations for producing some food grains.

It is, however, in the next stage of culture, i.e., Chalcolithic, when the use of metal (copper or bronze) was introduced for the first time that we have positive evidence of food grains. Fortunately, the excavation at Pāṇḍurājārdhibi in the district of Burdwan yielded significant results in respect of Chalcolithic cultural complex including its agricultural produces. Digging in 1962 revealed certain Chalcolithic records relating to the oldest inhabitants of this site who appear to ^{stage} have been simple agricultural people living in mud houses and making hand-made pottery^{106a}. A few of these sherds were found to bear impressions of paddy husk. From a scientific analysis of this paddy-husk impressions it has been found out that this is a variety of cultivated paddy, namely, *Oryza sativa*¹⁰⁷. As to the exact dating of the period producing pottery with husk impressions, it may be noted that charcoal sample from the cemetery level of Period II was subjected to radio-carbon analysis which attributes B.C. 1012 ± 121 as its date¹⁰⁸. It implies that the Period I at the site is to be assigned to a still earlier period. In other words, it may be suggested that the earliest evidence of the cultivation of rice goes back to the second millennium B.C. The discovery of carbonised rice from Mahisdal (Bīrbhūm) is also very important in this respect. Carbon - 14 analysis of samples from the site attributes datings to it as 1380 ± 855 B.C.¹⁰⁹. There is no other early authentic evidence of the presence of rice in Bengal. Regarding the production of food articles all other records belong to the early historical periods only.

It may be suggested at the very outset that agricultural operations were first carried out by the semi-nomadic Neolithic people who perhaps practised a very primitive type of shifting cultivation. With the advancement of agricultural techniques and the growth of population, there was, however, a tremendous demand for more and more agricultural fields. The water-logged areas, waste lands and forests were all accordingly exploited for cultivation of food-grains. This would

be evident from a large number of inscriptions belonging to a period ranging from C. 5th to 7th century A.D. It is learnt from all these epigraphic records that even waste-lands and water-logged areas were either purchased or donated, invariably for cultivation. The Guṇāighar grant of Vainya Gupta records that five plots of land were donated to a Buddhist monastery as Śunya-pratikara-hajjika-khila-bhūmi (water-logged and waste-land paying no taxes¹¹⁰). There are also clear references to deforestation. The Tippera Copper plate furnishes details regarding the settlement of a community of Brāhmaṇas in a forest area which was the resort of deer, buffaloes, boars, tigers, serpents, etc.¹¹¹. But this task of clearance could have been most effectively done with the help of iron implements alone. We are not, however, sure as to when iron was first introduced into Bengal. There is, however, little doubt that in the post-Christian period iron tools were largely used for agricultural operations and deforestation. This is amply borne out by archaeological records unearthed so far from various sites. In fact, it may be said that by about 3rd and 4th century A.D. wide areas of ancient Bengal were brought under cultivation by plough.

Agri-
cultural
land

Agriculture has been always the mainstay of the people of Bengal because of her many river valleys and consequently of immense fertility of soil. Bengal has been from the dawn of history a potential field for bumper agricultural productions, and has been producing all sorts of food-crops by cultivation and plantation. This is amply borne out by both literary and epigraphic records as obtained from Bengal. A glowing record of all sorts of agricultural operations and productions has been left by the Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsang in the 7th Century A.D. He has stated that the country-side of Bengal was regularly and assiduously cultivated and produced grains, flowers and fruits in abundance.¹¹² In the Rāmcharita as well there is a vivid account of various kinds of agricultural produces.¹¹³ Not only that, even the epigraphic records bear ample testimony to all sorts of agronomic products. Here, it would be profitable to refer to some agricultural produces as can be gleaned from both literary and epigraphic sources at our disposal.

Early
accounts

i) Dhānya and Yava ;

Of all agricultural produces, the cultivation of paddy or dhānya (Oryza-sativa) is the most important one. There are numerous references in ancient records regarding different agricultural operations relating to sowing of seeds, germination of seeds and nursing of plants, reaping, threshing, etc. As to sowing of seeds various methods

have been referred to, such as, broadcasting, drilling and transplanting. All these agricultural operations appear to have been similar to the prevailing ones. Kālidāsa in his Raghuvaṃśa while describing Raghu's conquest of the Vaṅga country states that the conquerer uprooted and replanted (utkhātapratirōpita) the kings like rice-plants^{113a}. The Rāmacharita contains a beautiful account of a threshing floor where the reaped crops were spread out and threshed by means of bullocks moving round and round over them (Sostu khalō yadnugame vigupena gavā kṛtapravandhānām vahulōkrte hitaphalaḥ sañchāro lokadhānyatō dr̥ṣṭaḥ^{113b}). From the verse : Khalah dhānyamarddanasthānām Khāmāreti ... in the Rāmacharita it appears that the present Bengali word Khāmār, i.e., treading place of paddy, occurs in the text for the first time^{113c}. In this connection it may be noted that the earliest reference to paddy in Bengal is to be found in the Mahāsthāngarh inscription^{113d}. (C. 3rd century B.C.). Many other later inscriptions and the early texts also refer to paddy and paddy-plants.

There are also references to varieties of paddy grown. Kautilya in his Arthaśāstra refers to different kinds of paddy as śāli, vrihi, kodraya^{113e}, etc. Again, varieties of rice are also mentioned. Hemachandra in the Abhidhānachintāmaṇi refers to seventeen kinds of Dhānya which was perhaps used to denote grains in general^{113f}. The Rāmacharita mentions various kinds of paddy-plants grown in Varendrī (Vahunāni vahuvidhanām dhānyarājānām dhānyaśreshtānām ...etc.) that looked lovely and beautiful^{113g}. The Saduktikarnāmr̥ita (2/84/3) contains a beautiful account of the wonderful growth of paddy-plants as a result of abundant water-supply. It is stated : Vr̥ihīḥ stamvakāriḥ prabhūta payasaḥ^{113h}. The same work (2/136/5) also refers to the accumulation of bundles of śālidhānya-plants in the courtyard, brought from the field (Śālichchheda-samr̥ddha¹¹³ⁱ). There is also a specific reference to śālidhānya in the Raghuvaṃśa of Kālidāsa. It has been stated that the peasant sitting under the shadow of sugarcane plants used to guard the fields producing śālidhānya^{113j}. But we are not sure as to whether this reference particularly relates to the fields of Bengal. In the Charyyāpadas there are references to another kind of paddy called Kāgani. From the Charyyāpada No.50, it is learnt that by making fences with strips of bamboos the Śavaras protected the fields producing kāgani, i.e., paddy¹¹⁴.

Inscriptions of the Sena period speak of smooth agricultural fields growing excellent paddy. In the Anuliā Copper plate inscription of Lakshmaṇasena there

is a reference to the abundant growth of Śālidhānya in the fields of the donated village (ratīśāyī-śālivāsudhānārāma¹¹⁵ ...). The Edilpur Copper plate of Keśavasena refers also to agricultural fields and growth of excellent paddy-plants¹¹⁶. Even sincere prayer and ardent appeals of the heart of the Bengalees for paddy (dhānya) are clearly stated in the Maṅgalācharan-ślokas like Dhyānābhyāsa-samīraṇō as recorded in the Ānuliā, Tarpaṇḍighi, Govindapur and Śaktipur Copper plates inscriptions of Lakshmaṇasena¹¹⁷. In the Ānuliā and Tarpaṇḍighi inscriptions there is a specific mention of the full-bloom Śālidhānya in the month of Hemanta, i.e., Autumn (Hemantah sphuṭameva, kshetraudha-puṇyāvalī śāliśādhya¹¹⁸ ...). Not only that, there are also references to the granary of paddy, i.e., dhānya and its earliest reference, as already observed is to be found Yava in the Mahāsthāngarh inscription of the 3rd century B.C. which refers to a granary of paddy at Puṇḍranagara¹¹⁹. Another important agricultural product is Yava (barley) mentioned in the early literary texts. But the cultivation of Yava in ancient Bengal has been hardly referred to. It is, however, the Saduktikarṇāmrīta (2/136/5) which contains a positive reference to Yava : nīlōtpala snigdha śyāma yava¹²⁰. Besides barley, Godhuma or wheat was another agronomic product. But unfortunately, cultivation of wheat does not appear to have been very common in ancient Bengal.

In this context of the discussion on paddy and granary, a particular reference may be made to a very significant archaeological discovery made at a site named Rājibāḍidāṅgā in the district of Murśidābād. A big granary containing solid deposition of burnt grains of rice and wheat was unearthed. It appears that the granary caught fire and was completely burnt¹²¹. Scientific analysis of recovered burnt grains revealed that the deposition contained both wheat and rice (Oryza sativa). Three major varieties of rice (superfine, fine and coarse) could be identified¹²². It has been pointed out that wheat of this deposition belonged to the North Indian variety. Accordingly, it may be affirmed that wheat-cultivation in this region was perhaps introduced from upper India¹²³. This granary at Rājibāḍidāṅgā has been attributed to Culture Period II at the site, and radio-carbon analysis of burnt grains attributed to it a precise dating as 1200± 80, i.e., 8th and 9th century A.D.¹²⁴ This is the first authentic datable record of the cultivation of rice and wheat. It may be noted further that hardly any reference to the production of wheat can be found in the early epigraphic and literary records of Bengal.

(ii) Sugarcane .

Next important food-crop cultivated in ancient Bengal was of course sugarcane (Ikshu/paundra or saccharum officinarum). The classical writers like Aelian and others

made a particular reference to the cultivation of sugarcane, and they described it as a kind of honey extracted from reeds grown amongst the Prasioi¹²⁵. Lucan has specifically stated that the people near the Ganges were in the habit of quaffing sweet juices from tender reeds¹²⁶. It is therefore, quite evident that in the lower valley of the Ganges sugarcane was largely cultivated. In this connection, a particular reference may be made to varieties of sugarcane as described by Śūsṛuta, one of which is called Paundraka¹²⁷. This kind of sugarcane has been perhaps named after the Paundra country wherein it largely grew. That the Paundra country or North Bengal used to produce sugarcane is also attested to by the Rāmācharita which refers to sugarcane-plants in Varendrī. It is stated : Tatra jāta ikshuviśeṣaḥ Paundrakanāmnā¹²⁸... The Saduktikarnāmrta (2/84/3, 2/136/5) contains also references to abundant growth of sugarcane-plants in the fields, and even to sounds created by the Ikshuyantra for making molasses (dhvanadikshuyantramukhaḥ āgrāmya gudāmōdinah)¹²⁹.

It is very interesting to note in this connection that the modern vernacular names of sugarcane like paundia, paunda, pundi, etc., cultivated in different parts of Bengal even today appear to have been derived from the ancient name Paundraka¹³⁰. Words like Ishu or Śar plausibly formed the term Ikshu commonly used in Bengal for sugarcane. Ikshu's name is Paudā or Pudā which bears affinity with the term Paundra, the most ancient name for sugarcane, and the people who cultivated and produced this plant were indeed the Paundras or Pundras¹³¹. Even today sugarcane (ākḥ in dialectical Bengali) is largely produced in different parts of Bengal.

(iii) Coconut and Betelnut :

Next to sugarcane, a particular reference is to be made to Nārikela (coconut or cocosmucifera) and Guvāka (betelnut or supāri or areca catechu) plantations. These two kinds of plants were largely grown by the side of the rivers like the Ganges, Padmā, Brahmaputra and Karatōyā and in the creek of the Sundarban area of the Nāvya region of Vaṅga or in the swampy lands of lower Bengal. There are frequent references to coconut and betel-nut plantations in both literary and epigraphic records. Nārikela and Guvāka are very commonly referred to in the epigraphic records of Bengal from C. 8th to 13th century A.D.¹³². In most of the inscriptions the expression occurs : Saguvākanārikela, i.e., the village being granted along with these plantations. In the inscriptions like the Barrackpur Copper plate of Vijayasena, Rāmpal Copper plate of Śrīchandra, Ānuliā Copper plate, Govindapur grant of Lakshmaṇasena, Sāhitya Parishat grant of Viśvarūpasena, Madanapādā Copper plate grant of Viśvarūpasena and Belavā Copper plate of Bhojavarman, etc., there are references to both Nārikela

and Guvāka in connection with the gift of land and garden¹³³. In the Āshrafpur grant of Devakhaḍga, it has been stated that the donee would enjoy the granted land by the cultivation of betelnut and coconut, i.e., Guvāka (supāri or areca catechu) and Nārikela (cocosmucifera)¹³⁴. In the Edilpur inscription of Keśavasena, it is stated that Guvāka and Nārikela were the chief products of a village named Talapāḍāpāṭaka in the Vikramapurabhāga of Vaṅga¹³⁵.

There are also frequent references to Guvāka and Nārikela (Saguvāka-nārikela) in the literary texts¹³⁶. In this context, it is significant to note that the Rāmacharita has specifically stated that Varendrī possessed the most suitable soil for coconut plantation¹³⁷. The region around Varendrī produced abundant crops and the beauty of this land with crops and water was enhanced by the groves of Sudhā or the milk hedge plants and Aśana, areca-nut and coconut trees. (nārikelāvāsinyēsheti jagati and guvākānām yāni udyānāni upavanāni¹³⁸). But North Bengal or Varendrī is not at present a potential area for the production of these plants. On the other hand, lower Bengal or more particularly the coastal areas now produce coconut and betel-nuts in abundance.

(iv) Betel leaves (pān):

Besides betel-nut plantation, betel-vines (Varajas), i.e., betel-leaves (pān) were also cultivated in different parts of Bengal¹³⁹. Even today betel-leaf (pān) production and selling are done by a particular community called Bārujivī or Bārai¹⁴⁰. Betel-leaves (pān) are often referred to in the Charyyāpas. It is interesting to refer to the Śloka from the Charyyāpada: hi-a-tāmbōla-mahāsukhēkapura khāi¹⁴¹. Here the word tāmbula is used for the Bengali word pān. Betel-leaves are to be found in abundance, more particularly in the Nāvya areas of the Vaṅga country. From Vāsudeva Image inscription of Govindachandra it is learnt that the betel-leaf cultivators lived in the village of Pāikpārā, and that they derived their wealth from the sale of betel-leaf¹⁴². The Sāhitya Parishat Copper plate grant of Viśvarūpasena refers to betel-leaves plantation thriving in Bengal during the Sena period and thereby augmenting the wealth of the people¹⁴³. In the same record the expressions are: utana-varaja, varaja-guvāka, etc., which certainly speak of the existence of betel-vines. Varaja perhaps refers to betel-leaf plantation¹⁴⁴. The land containing Varajas was regarded as a source of wealth. The same inscription also records a statement of income from seven Varajas¹⁴⁵. It thus follows that the donee Halāyudha had a lucrative income from betel-nut and betel vines¹⁴⁶.

There flourished also a lucrative trade in respect of exporting betel-nuts and betel-leaves to other parts of India¹⁴⁷. Bengal and Malabar regions have been the traditional betel-leaf growing areas in India, and it may be reasonably contended that these products were perhaps sold at exorbitant rates. In the Pratāpgarh inscription of Mahendrapāla of Kanauj there is an incidental reference to the sale of betel-nuts¹⁴⁸. As Bengal, particularly lower Bengal, has been the region par-excellence of betel-nut plantation from hoary antiquity, it may be most reasonably upheld that betel-nuts were largely exported to other parts of India, and thereby the people of Bengal did certainly carry on a lucrative trade.

(v) **Miscellaneous Products :**

Besides coconut and betel-nut, many other fruits like Āmra (mango, mangifera indica), Dālimba (pomegranate, punica granatum), Kadali or kalā (plantain, musa paradisiaca), Madhuka (honey, bassia latifolia), Kharjura (date, phoenix sylvestris), Vija (citron), Panasa or kāñthāl (jackfruit, or artocarpus integrifolia), Parkati (fig, ficus cunes), etc., were also cultivated in abundance. This is clearly borne out by the expression āmrapanasa in a large number of inscriptions¹⁴⁹. Āmrāphala (mango) has been highly spoken by Umāpatidhara¹⁵⁰. Both Āmra and Panasa (i.e., mango and jackfruit) have been most popular fruits in Bengal from very early times. The Khālimpur inscription refers to both mango and Panasa groves¹⁵¹. In the Bāngarh grant of Mahīpāla, Monghyr and Bhāgalpur grants, Irdā Copper plate of Nārāyaṇapāla, Rāmgāñj plate of Īśvaraghoshā, Manahali grant of Madanapāla, etc., there are references to saāmramadhukah¹⁵².

In most inscriptions, mango and jackfruit, i.e., Āmrāpanasa have been mentioned together as in the Rāmpal grant of Śrīchandra, Belāva Copper plate of Bhojavarman, Naihātī Copper plate of Vallālasena, etc.¹⁵³. The Chinese Pilgrim Hiuen Tsang in the 7th century A.D. has given a detailed account of the abundance of the highly esteemed Panasa (jackfruit) in Puṇḍravardhana¹⁵⁴. Like Panasa, Kadali or Kalā (plantain) was another popular fruit in ancient Bengal. Kadali is not, however, frequently mentioned in inscriptions. But plantain-plants and plantains are to be found well represented in terracotta plaques at Pāhārpur and Maināmatī¹⁵⁵ and also on sculptures and the Chandī images preserved in the Rājasāhi Museum¹⁵⁶. In this context, it is interesting to note that the plantain-plant and its fruits are not only essential food articles, but also bear magico-religious import of great significance, and therefore, from remote antiquity both have been essential ingredients in all socio-religious performances of Bengal.

Other fruits like yīja (citron), Kharjura (date), Dālimba (pomegranate), etc., are also mentioned in a large number of inscriptions like Khālimpur Copper plate of Dharmapāla, Govindapur Copper plate of Lakshmaṇasena, etc.¹⁵⁷. One Dālimba-kshetra or an orchard of pomegranates is referred to in the Govindapur Copper plate¹⁵⁸. Parkati (fig) is also mentioned in the Koṭālipādā plate of Dharmāditya¹⁵⁹. Madhuka (honey, bassia latifolia) was also widely cultivated as referred to in the Bāngarh, Manahali, Irdā, Monghyr, Bhāgalpur, Rāngaṅj plates of Śvaraghosha and others¹⁶⁰. It is also to be noted that the Rāmacharita contains a beautiful account of the cultivation of Madhuka-(madhurena) trees in Varendrī¹⁶¹. The same treatise also states that Varendrī possessed a cluster with a nice symmetry of Madhuka-trees which could not be counted by words¹⁶². It may be, however, noted here as a side reference that the cultivation of most of these fruit-plants were introduced from South-east Asia as discussed in the following pages.

It is indeed very significant to note that ancient Bengal produced also various kinds of spices. This is amply borne out by the account of the Periplus of the Erythraean Sea (first centry A.D) wherein it is specifically mentioned that Malabathram and Spikenard were exported from the Eastern region, most probably the region of the Eastern Himalayas forming parts of Bengal¹⁶³. The Rāmacharita also mentions vast fields growing fine ela-(cardamom) plants¹⁶⁴.

Another important agronomic product of ancient Bengal was Sarshapa or mustard (Brassica juncea (L) czern). The Vappaghōshavāṭa grant of Jayanāga refers to the existence of a Sarasapayānaka, i.e., mustard-channel in the Audamvarika-vishaya of Karṇasuvarṇa¹⁶⁵. It has been also stated that this expression might also refer to fields on both sides of the road full of mustard-plants¹⁶⁶.

(vi) Cotton :

Besides food-crops grown in ancient Bengal, there are also references to the cultivation of cotton-plants, the flowers of which supplied ingredients for weaving clothes. That Bengal was once a great cotton fabric-manufacturing centre is well attested to by the statement made by Kauṭilya¹⁶⁷. In the inscriptions of Vijayasena it is stated that even the ordinary rural folk were well-acquainted with the seeds of cotton (Gossypium arboreum Bombax, ceiba Linn¹⁶⁸). The early Charyyāpadas of Bengal also refer to cotton cultivation. The Charyyā-gītis contain : Sukara ēverē kapāsu phutilā, tailā vādīr pāsere jhñā vādī tā elā¹⁶⁹... The Saduktikarṇāmṛta similarly refers to :¹⁷⁰

Kārpāsāthiprachayanichitā nidhana śrōtriyaṇām I
yeshām vātyāpravatata kuṭīprāṅgaṇāntā vabhūvuh II

In this context, a particular reference may be made to the statement made by Marco Polo who says that "the people of Bengal grow cotton in which they derive a great trade"¹⁷¹. It implies that the people of Bengal used to export cotton to different parts of the world. That this cotton-trade of Bengal was most flourishing in ancient times is amply borne out by the testimony of the Periplus, Pliny and other classical writers as well¹⁷².

(vii) Flowers :

It is indeed remarkable to note that flowers were also cultivated largely in ancient Bengal. In literary texts like the Rāmacharita, Gīta-Govinda of Jayadeva and Pavanadūta of Dhōyī and in epigraphic records there are innumerable references to the cultivation of flowers like Keśara, (jussiaea repeus), Kadamba (Anthocephalus indica), Ketaka, (paudamus fascicularis), Kanaka, (pterospermum accrifolium), Mādhavī, (quisquabis indica/Hiptage madablata), Mallikā, (jasminum sambac), Nāgakeśa, or Nāgakeśara (mesua ferres), Vakula (minusops elengri), Mālati (savannah or agauosma caryophyllata), Padma (lotus, i.e., nelumbium speciosum), Pārijāta (Erithrina indica), Śirisha (albizzia lebbek), Kumuda (nymphaea lotus)¹⁷³, etc. Specially, in the Rāmacharita and Gīta-Govinda there are beautiful descriptions of these flowers. In the Rāmacharita it is stated that Varendrī had Keśara-trees near which bees hovered on account of their sweet fragrance and which were reddish-white like lotus palms and which also possessed a cluster with a nice symmetry of Madhuka¹⁷⁴. Again, that the beauty of Varendrī was greatly enhanced by a slightly opened Kanaka (i.e., dhustura or champak) and Ketaka flowers (Kanaka-ketakānām) has been also portrayed in the Rāmacharita. In fact, the land was most favourable to the growth of flowers of endless varieties and of plenty of lotuses, red and blue¹⁷⁵. It has been further stated that the elevated land of Varendrī produced large Mālati, fine Nāgakeśara and excellent Vakula-plants. The country also presented excellent fragrance diffused by Madhu, Āśoka, Pārijāta and Lavaṅga creepers with their fine foliages¹⁷⁶. The Gīta-Govinda also narrates that the country was well decorated with plants and flowers like Tamāla (garcinia xanthochymus), Chuta, Āśoka, (saraca indica), Vakula (mimusops elengi), Kimśuka, (butea frondosa), Vañjula, (or Āśoka or saraca indica), Vāsanti (lindebergia urticaefolia) and Lavaṅga (luvunga scandens) creepers¹⁷⁷, etc. The Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang also refers to abundant flowers and flowery groves in all places visited by him¹⁷⁸.

(viii) Plants and Creepers

Further, creepers and various other plants were also cultivated. It is stated in the Rāmacharita that the country produced Priyaṅgu (or aglaia roxburghiana), Lavaṅga (or cowslip creeper or luvuṅga scandens or perugularis odoratissima) and Priyālā plants¹⁷⁹, etc. It is further stated that water was enclosed by Priyālā-plants which were unique and the land was adorned with the Karunā, Aśana and Nāgaraṅga trees¹⁸⁰. Regarding Nāgaraṅga, it is stated in the Rāmacharita that the exquisite beauty and charm of the country was enhanced by these trees¹⁸¹. The country produced also Priyaṅgu-creepers in abundance¹⁸². The land of Varendrī also had excellent gardens having sweet Āmalaki (or embelic myrobalam or phyllanthus emplica or emblica officinalis) trees¹⁸³. Even the cultivation of the Mahuā (madhucalatifolia or bassica latifolia) plants has been referred to¹⁸⁴. In the Irdā Copper plate of Nayapāladeva it is stated that the village Chhattibannā at Danton in the district of Midnapur was famous for the cultivation of Mahuā trees¹⁸⁵. Even bamboo plantation was quite common. The Rāmacharita refers to the clustered bamboo clumps increasing the beauty of the land of Varendrī¹⁸⁶. Besides bamboo, Tāla (Borassus flabellifer) or Parkati and large Gajāri trees are also found mentioned in the Rāmacharita¹⁸⁷. The Faridpur Copper plate of Dharmāditya refers to the Parkati (Ficus infectoria) tree¹⁸⁸. Further, the Gīta-Govinda gives a beautiful description of shades of the entwining foliage of the Tamāla (garcinia xanthochymus) plants¹⁸⁹.

(ix) Observation ;

It would thus be evident from a perusal of all available source materials that ancient Bengal produced various kinds of food-grains, innumerable varieties of fruits in plenty and various sorts of beautiful and fragrant flowers, creepers etc. Of all food-grains, the most important one was of course paddy. The Chinese pilgrims Hiuen Tsang and I-tsing also have left accounts containing references to all sorts of agronomic products of Bengal like rice, wheat, mango, Madhuka, coconut, jackfruit, grape, sugarcane, pomegranate, etc. Besides the cultivation of food-grains and fruits, various parts of ancient Bengal were also adorned with flowers of different colours and wonderful fragrance. The beauty of the land was further enhanced by excellent creepers and plants. A beautiful description of the agronomic products of ancient Bengal is to be found in the Rāmpāl Copper plate of Śrīchandra which describes the land of Bengal along with its grass, puti-plant, pastures with bottom and surface with mango, jackfruit, betelnut and coconut trees, salt-land and water with pits and barren tracts¹⁹⁰ : "Yathōparilikhitabhūmiriyāḥ khaśīmāvachchhinnā tṛṇaputigōcharaparyantā satalā sajalasthalā sagartaiusharā sadaśāparadhā".

VI. Crafts

Each village in ancient Bengal was basically an agronomic unit. Indeed from immemorial times agriculture has been the very life-stream of the people of Bengal. It is, however, to be noted in this context that cultivation and various agronomic products of Bengal were perhaps introduced by the non-Aryan Austro-Asiatic language speaking peoples from South-east Asia. This would be quite evident from an analysis of Sanskrit and Bengali names of various agronomic products of ancient Bengal as discussed in the following pages. However, it is to be remembered that the villages of ancient Bengal in the past were not lagging behind in respect of crafts or home industries for supplying the day-to-day necessities of life and also for exporting the surplus productions to other villages and towns and even to foreign lands. Generally, all requirements of the village were met by the village craftsmen. It implies that a village did not absolutely belong to the peasants or agriculturists. On the other hand, non-agricultural craftsmen and craftsmen-cum-agriculturists also lived in the villages for meeting all requirements of the rural people.

That there were various sorts of crafts practised in a village of ancient Bengal becomes evident from both epigraphic and literary records. It is noticeable that all crafts referred to in those records relate more particularly to agricultural needs of the people. Amongst various crafts and industries, those made of bamboo, cane, wood, clay, cotton, stone and metal may be referred to. An account of all these crafts or industries will no doubt project a glowing picture of the rural products and the composite nature of the village of ancient Bengal.

(i) Textiles :

Amongst various crafts of ancient Bengal the most important one was of course textile, cotton and silk, produced from cotton-flower, plant-fibre and yarn created by larva of a species of worm, moth or insect. Cloth and garments (vāsa) are, no doubt, described in the Vedic and other early Indian literary texts¹⁹¹. But nowhere in the early Vedic and post-Vedic texts Bengal figures as a great manufacturing centre of textile of all sorts. It is only in the Arthaśāstra of Kāuṭilya that a graphic account of the textile products of ancient Bengal has been given¹⁹². In the works of both Pāṇini and Patañjali there are specific references to raw materials of cloth-making and also to various sorts of textile. Pāṇini refers to Umā or auma (linseed),

Aurna (wool), Kārpāsa (cotton), Bhaṅgā (hemp) and Tūlā (cotton-flower). Besides, he also refers to Śālmali (silk) cotton tree or Bombax Malabaricum¹⁹³. Various kinds of textiles Similarly, Patañjali refers to Kārpāsa (cotton), Ūrnā (wool), Kauśeya (silk fabrics), Vastra, Umā (flax), Bhaṅgā (hemp), Kārpāsa (cotton), Panya-Kambala (standard blanket) and Pāṇḍu-kambala (white woolen garment)¹⁹⁴. It is thus evident that to both Pāṇini and Patañjali various ingredients for cloth-making were quite well-known. But names of textiles and their centres of production are not always mentioned excepting a few like Kauśeya, Vastra and Kambala. It is very significant to note that various textile products mentioned by Kaṭilya have been actually named after the centres of their productions. Kaṭilya has made a particular reference to a variety of such products as Kārpāsika, Dukūla, Kshauma, Patrōrṇa and Kauśeya¹⁹⁵. Manu also while describing the consequences of stealing speaks of different kinds of cloth, such as, Kauśeya, Kshauma and Kārpāsa. Again, when entailing taboos on the Brāhmaṇas regarding selling of articles in times of need, Manu refers to woven clothes from Śaṇ (hemp), Kshauma and Kambala (rug) made of sheep's hair¹⁹⁶. In the Amarakōsha all these varieties of fabrics have been elaborately enumerated as : Kshauma, Kārpāsa, Śaṇ, Kauśeya, Patrōrṇa, Dukūla¹⁹⁷, etc. Kālidāsa also refers to Dukūla, Kauśeya, Vāsa¹⁹⁸, etc.

Of cotton fabrics, i.e., Kārpāsika, those produced in Vaṅga and six other regions have been mentioned as the most excellent ones (Madhurā ... Vaṅgakan kārpāsikam śreṣṭhamiti¹⁹⁹). Seven countries producing cotton cloth are considered best, and Vaṅga is one of them. That Vaṅga was a great centre manufacturing fine cotton fabrics is also proved by the testimony of the Mānasollāsa which furnishes a long list of fabrics for the use of the king along with the places of their origins. Cotton textiles In this list of places, Vaṅga and Kaliṅga of Eastern India figure²⁰⁰. The Dukūla textile was, however, made of a kind of silk. Cowell and Thomas translate the word Dukūla as "bark-silk"²⁰¹.

In the earliest stage of culture man simply wore leaves and subsequently plant-fibre was made soft by beating or thrashing. A visual representation of Vākal-cloth is to be found on the Sāñchi railings as worn by the Sādhus²⁰². With the advancement of culture yarn was taken out of these beaten fibres and clothes were woven. This was done from fibres of Śaṇ (hemp), Pāt (jute) and denche plants²⁰³. Cloth thus produced from plant-fibres was called Kshauma, and its finer variety was called Dukūla. That is why in the Amarakōsha, these two words have been used as synonyms²⁰⁴.

Again, on the basis of texture and colouration, the Dukūla variety of textile consists of three types, namely, Śveta, Śyāma and Suvarṇa, i.e., white, dark and red or golden colour, produced in different parts of Bengal and her adjoining regions. Thus, the most pleasing soft and white coloured Dukūla was produced in the Vaṅga country, soft and Śyāma (dark or green) in colour like that of the surface of a gem in Puṇḍra country and soft and red in colour like that of the Sun in Suvarṇakudya, i.e., in South, East and North Bengal or Kāmarūpa or Burma or Suvarṇadvīpa²⁰⁵. (Vāṅgakam śvetaṁ snigdhaṁ dukūlaṁ Paundrakam śyāmaṁ maṇisnigdhaṁ, sauvarṇakudyakam sūryavarṇam maṇisnigdhōdakavānaṁ, chaturaśravānaṁ vyāmiśravānaṁ). It has been further pointed out that the red Dukūla was woven with wet mixed yarns²⁰⁶. Three types of Dukūla have been also distinguished on the basis of techniques of weaving : (1) Maṇisnigdhōkavānaṁ, (2) Chaturaśravānaṁ and (3) Vyāmiśravānaṁ, i.e., mixed texture or made with yarns of different colours²⁰⁷. An interesting point that emerges from the account of Kauṭilya is that all these types of the Dukūla fabrics have been actually named after the centres of their production as Vaṅgaka, Paundraka and Sauvarṇakudyaka, and the quality and nature of each have been also enumerated. The identification of Suvarṇakudya is a matter of dispute. Generally speaking, Suvarṇakudya is taken to be Kāmarūpa. But Sastri argues in favour of its identification with ancient Karṇasuvarṇa in the district of Murśidābād which is still famous for the production of its fine varieties as Reśam or silk cloth²⁰⁸.

The Kshauma textile is a coarse variety of linen mixed with cotton or made of flax²⁰⁹. It has been already pointed out that in the Amarakōsha, Kshauma and Dukūla have been made synonymous. It is stated in the Amarakōsha : "Kārpāsam vādaram prāktvaṁ Kshauma dukūladyañcha bālikalam dhauta tasarayastraṁ patrōṇnam kshaumiti pattavastra"²¹⁰. The most famous variety of this textile has been specifically called Paundraka (Paundrakāñcha kshauma vyākhyātam)²¹¹. It follows accordingly that the best Dukūla-linen was produced in Puṇḍra country only.

The Patrōṇa-linen (washed Kauśeya) was manufactured from leaves as the name denotes. This is made of yarn of saliva obtained from the spider's thread. In the Harshacharita, it is described as Lālātantujai, i.e., made of yarn of salva or of spider thread²¹². It is further learnt from the Arthaśāstra that the Nāgavriksha (a kind of plant being a resort of serpents), Likucha (coral tree, i.e., Antocarpus Lakucha), Vakula (mimusops Elengi) and Vata (Ficus Indica or Ficus benghalensis) trees are the primary sources from which fibres or yarns were extracted (nāgavriksha-likucho-vakula-vata)²¹³. This description of Kauṭilya is also confirmed by Kshīrasvāmī, the commentator on the Harshacharita. While commenting on Patrōṇa Kshīrasvāmī says : Lakuchavatāḍipatreṣu

kumilālō-rṇakritam patrōrṇam²¹⁴. But Kshīrasvāmī speaks of Lakucha and Vata plants only. Kauṭilya further refers to different colours of these fabrics, such as, pīta or yellow from Nāgavriksha, wheat colour from Likucha, śveta or white from Vakula and butter-colour from Vata and others (pītikā nāgavrikshikā gōdhūmavarṇā laikuchō Patrōrṇa śvetaṇakulō śeshā navaṇātavarṇā²¹⁵). The Patrōrṇa-fabrics used to be manufactured in different places of the country, such as, Magadha, Puṇḍra and Suvarṇakuḍya (Māgadhikā Paṇḍrikā Sauvarṇakudyakā²¹⁶). It has been also clearly stated that the most excellent variety of Patrōrṇa was produced in Suvarṇakuḍya (tāsām Sauvarṇakudyaka śreshthā) which may be identified with Kāmarūpa (Assam or Burma or Suvarṇa-dvīpa or Karṇasuvarṇa²¹⁷). In this context, it may be noted that red silk-cotton tree grew largely in Assam. The Nowgong Copper plate grant of Balavarman of the 10th century A.D. refers to Suvarṇavata-vriksha and also to Śālmali-vriksha denoting red silk cotton tree, i.e., Bombaz Malabaricum²¹⁸. But Sastri, as already stated, is of opinion that Suvarṇakuḍya was no other place than Karṇasuvarṇa in Murśidābād district wherein the aforesaid plants abound and wherein even today a fine variety of silk is produced²¹⁹.

Another variety of fabric is called Kauśeya, i.e., silk cloth manufactured from the aforesaid plant fibres (taya kauśeyam)²²⁰. From the account given in the Arthaśāstra it would appear that Kauśeya ^{linen} was manufactured by fibres obtained from silk worms. Besides, Bāṇa refers to some other kinds of fabrics like Amśuka, Netra and Vādara. Kauśeya The former possibly denotes vastra in general, perhaps made from a particular material. Cowell and Thomas, however, translate the term as muslin. The ^{and other fabrics} term Netra perhaps means shot-silk garment. But the Amarakōsha speaks of it as a synonym of Amśuka²²¹. The Vādara may be translated as simply cotton cloth. In the Amarakōsha the expression is kārpāsam vādaram, i.e., of cotton. The Amarakōsha also gives meanings of other textiles as well²²². Some other textiles mentioned by Bāṇa are Pulakabandhu (gaily coloured garments) and Pushpapatta (flowered silk)^{222a}.

It would be evident that out of several kinds of fabrics described by Kauṭilya at least four, i.e., Dukūla, Kshauma, Patrōrṇa and Kauśeya were varieties of silk-cloth made with yarn produced by worms. It is generally believed that silk was introduced in all countries from China. But the way Kauṭilya speaks of Chīnapatta (tayā kauśeyam chīnapattascha chīnabhūmija vyākhyātaḥ) does not justify such a contention that the cultivation of silk-worm was introduced into Bengal or in any other parts of India from China²²³. In the first place, it is to be noted that in China Reśam (silk) was produced from Tuft-plant, i.e., mulberry (mulberry worm), but in India, i.e., ⁱⁿ Magdha,

Puṇḍra and Suvarṇakudya, Reśam was obtained from a number of trees enumerated above excluding of course mulberry plants. Secondly, the Chinese Reśam is white, and it is to be dyed, if necessary. But in Bengal, Reśam of different colours are obtained from the leaves of various trees as described above. It naturally follows that the Reśam-cultivation in Bengal or India might have an indigenous origin. In a later period, i.e., after Kauṭilya, the Reśam-cultivation might have begun in other parts of India as well. An interesting reference in this context is to be found in the Mandasor inscription of the 5th century A.D. wherein it has been recorded that the traders in Reśam from Saurāshtra established trading settlements in Mandasor and raised subscriptions for the construction of the Sun temple²²⁴.

From the account given by Kauṭilya in his Arthaśāstra it would be quite evident that the villages of North, South and East Bengal were well-known centres of manufacturing varieties of textile. This is also clearly borne out by the testimony of the Periplus of the Erythraean Sea of the first century A.D. The Periplus speaks of the great market-town Gange "through which passes a considerable traffic consisting of betel, Gangetic spikenard, pearl and the finest of all muslins—those called the Gangetic"²²⁵. The word Muslin (a foreign nomenclature) derived perhaps from Mosula city on the river Tigris in Iraq is mousseline denoting finest variety of linen manufactured in the Gangetic valley, largely exported to the Roman world where it was in great demand and highly prized, a graphic account of which has been given by Pliny in his Natural History. While speaking about the source of this linen, Pliny refers to a tree from which the people make linen for clothing and that this tree grew in the plains and no other plantations add more to the beauty of the landscape²²⁶. Pliny gives also a vivid account of the export of this linen to the Roman world. He says : "...in no year does India drain out empire of less than five hundred and fifty millions of sesterces (£ 1400, 000 sterling), giving back her own wares in exchange, which are sold among us at fifty one hundred times their prime cost"²²⁷. Consequently, the Roman emperor had to pass a decree prohibiting the use of Indian Muslins.

The identification of the market-town Gange referred to in the Periplus is as yet uncertain. Diverse opinions have been expressed and various places suggested²²⁸. But it would appear from the account given in the Periplus that Gange was a great port and market-town in the lower Gangetic valley. In a wider sense, it might have included also parts of East Bengal as well. This may be presumed from the very fact that in the subsequent periods there are ample evidences regarding the production of the finest variety of this linen in regions centering round Dacca, which came to be known as Dacca Muslins²²⁹.

The Muslins are the most delicate of all fabrics, "an ancient specimen of which was a piece to be drawn through a finger-ring". These fine Muslins were also known under such names as "Textile Breeze", and "Evening Dew or Running water". In the Roman empire these Muslins were also known under the names of Ventus textiles or Nebula. That this muslin industry in India was once highly organised and regulated by the State becomes evident from the Manusamhitā which enjoins : "Let a weaver who has received 10 palas of cotton-thread give them back increased to 11 by the Early rice-water and the like used in weaving; he who does otherwise shall pay references to muslin a fine of 10 panas²³⁰. Kālidāsa also refers to very fine cotton and silk cloth which can be blown away by breath (niḥśvāśahāya). This certainly refers to Muslins²³¹.

The manufacture of silken linen has been also referred to in some early literary texts of Bengal. By the 7th century A.D. Kshauma cloth of the Puṇḍra country was quite well-known in upper India as referred to by Bāṇa in his Harshacharita wherein there is a graphic account of various kinds of fabrics : "The palace was arranged in textures flashing on every side like thousands of rain bows, textures of linen (Kshauma), Vādara (cotton), bark-silk (Dukūla), spider's thread (Lālātantuja or Patrōrṇa), Muslin (Amśuka) and shot silk (Nētra) resembling sloughs of snakes, soft as the unripe plantain fruit swaying at a breath, imperceptible except to the touch. Some were being made by ancient city matrons. Countless and thousands of canvas and cloth pieces, divided up for various uses, awanings bright with soft, freshly dyed bark silk, manauées, whose roofs were covered all over with garments and posts swathed in strips of variegated silk, all these gave to the court an aspect of brilliance, attractive, exciting and auspicious"²³². Even the Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang speaks of various materials of which textiles were made, and in I-tsing's account there is a reference to the Buddhist monks wearing silk cloth²³³. Here, a particular reference may be made to the Rāmacharita of Sandhyākaranandī wherein Lakucha, Śrīphala, Nāgakeśarī and Vakula plants supplying raw materials for linen have been mentioned. The Rāmacharita also refers to "variegated costly garments and youthful heavenly courtesans wearing their veritable apparels"²³⁴. Besides, in still later works like Śubhaṅkara's Saduktikarnāmrīta and the Charyyāgīti there are poetic descriptions of raw materials and weaving of textiles²³⁵.

Some Arab geographers and merchants from the 9th to the 11th century A.D. made also several references to various sorts of excellent textile products of Bengal. The Arab merchant of the 9th century A.D., Sulaiman, noted that Rahma produced such light and fine linen that a robe made of that cloth could be passed through a

fingerring²³⁶. Ibn Khordabad of the 10th century A.D. made a specific reference to Muslims in Rahma (Rahmi) country manufacturing a variety of cotton fabrics which used later accounts - to be exported to the Arab world²³⁷. The identification of this Rahma country Arabs is uncertain. It has been vaguely identified with the Pāla kingdom²³⁸. Most probably, the name was used to denote Bengal as a whole. If it is accepted, Bengal thence must have produced textiles of unique fineness, which were exported to the foreign lands. Towards the end of the 13th century A.D. Marcopolo reported in his account that Bengal was a great centre of manufacturing cotton fabrics which were exported to different parts of the world²³⁹. He speaks of five or six kinds of cotton fabrics, "one of which called Pi-chi was of soft texture. Another yellow fabric called Man-Cheti was also produced²⁴⁰. In the 14th century, Ibn Batu-tah referred to Bengal producing very fine cotton cloth, and that a fine piece of such a cloth could be purchased at a very cheap rate of 30 cubits long for 2 silver coins²⁴¹. It may be very easily presumed that this excellent quality of cotton cloth was possibly a variety of Muslin²⁴².

Accounts of the Arab travellers regarding the textile products of Bengal are also attested to by the Chinese accounts of the medieval period. The cotton fabrics of Bengal have been enumerated by the Chinese writers Wang-Ta Yan and Fei-Hsin of the 14th and 15th century A.D. and also by Barboss of the 16th century A.D. It is because of their excellence that the fabrics of Bengal found ready markets at Malacca and other ports²⁴³. Besides, the Chinese pilgrim Ma-Huan who came to Bengal in the 15th century A.D. has given a vivid account of the textile products of the country. Muslins, "Of cotton fabrics they have Pi-pu of several colours. It is called Pi-pu and etc. in it is over 3 feet long. It is as fine as glossy as if painted. There is a ginger Chinese accounts yellow cotton stuff called Man-che-ti which is 4 feet broad and over 50 feet long, it is very closely woven and strong. What is called Sha-na-fu is 5 feet broad and 30 feet long; it is like Shong-lo and Pulo-tu-lo (cotton gauze). What is called Ki-pai-li-ta-li is 3 feet broad and 60 feet long. This cloth is loosely woven and coarse; it is a cotton gauze. The tuff for turban is called Sha-tu-eul (chāndar); it is five inches broad and 40 feet long and is like our San-so. Ma-hei-ma-lei is a stuff, 4 feet broad and 20 feet long on the wrong side; it is covered with ... half inch long, it is our Tu-lo-kin²⁴⁴. Here the Chinese writer gives a detailed account of various kinds of cloth which were all manufactured in different parts of Bengal.

Besides all these references to textile products of Bengal in literary records, the inscriptions from the 5th century A.D. onwards obtained from different parts of

Bengal contain also casual mention of textiles. The Deopārā inscription of the 11th century A.D. refers to Lord Śiva being dressed with a piece of variegated silken garments Textiles (Chitra Kshauma) in place of elephant's hide²⁴⁵. Not only that, the same in inscriptions inscription refers also to the cultivation of cotton and cotton seeds (kārpāsavīja)²⁴⁶. It is further stated that cotton-seeds were so familiar with the people that no one could easily recognise pearls from their similarity²⁴⁷.

Literary texts contain references not only to textile products, but also to raw materials and techniques of their manufacture. This would be evident from the Charyyāgītis of the 10th - 11th century A.D. and Saduktikarnāmrīta of the 11th - 12th century A.D. In the former, there is a vivid account of the blossoming of cotton-
Raw flowers and their clearing with Dhuni (bow) and also of spinning yarn²⁴⁸.
materials Weaver's loom made of bamboo has been also referred to in the said work²⁴⁹.
and making In the Saduktikarnāmrīta, there is a specific reference to the spinning of
of textiles yarn from cotton-flower by a poor Brahmin lady in the following words²⁵⁰ :

Kārpāsāchhiprachayanichitā nīdhana śrōtriyānām /
Yeshām vātyāpravatata kuṭiprāṅganāntā vabhūvuh //

In another śloka it is stated : Vāsaḥ sūkshmaṁ vapuṣhī²⁵¹.

From the above survey of all references relating to textile manufacture of Bengal, it may be reasonably contended that various sorts of textiles, both cotton and silk, were made in different parts of the country, more particularly in its northern, eastern and southern parts and attained excellence to such an extent that there was a great demand of textiles of Bengal in different parts of the world from remote antiquity. As such, Bengal could once carry on a lucrative foreign trade with various countries. But with the beginning of the British occupation in Bengal this flourishing textile industry had met with a catastrophic end, surviving today only as a relic of a decaying rural
Observ- craft. Even now in certain parts of Bengal, both cotton and silken fabrics
vation under the names of Endi (a variety of silk), Mugā (coarse silk) and Reśam (silk) are manufactured as cottage industries. As in ancient times, even today cotton and silken fabrics are called after the centres of their production, such as, Murśidābād-silk, Vishnupuri silk and Tāngāil, Dhanekhāli, Amarshi cotton fabrics, etc.

(ii) Sugar :

Next to the textile industry, another very common industrial product in ancient Bengal was indeed sugar. Bengal was certainly a great centre of sugarcane-cultivation, a reference to which has already been made. It is interesting to note in this connection Sugarcane: that the modern vernacular names of sugarcane like Paundīā, Paundā, Pundi,
names etc., cultivated in different parts of Bengal appear to have been derived from the ancient name Paundraka. Terms like Ishu or Sar possibly formed the word Ikshu, the most commonly used expression in Bengal for sugarcane. Ikshu's name is pauda or puda which bears similarity with the term Paundra²⁵². The most ancient name for sugarcane and the people who cultivated and produced this plant was indeed the Paundra or Pundra. Śuśruta has made a particular reference to 'Paundraka' sugarcane which yielded sufficient quantity of juice²⁵³. The commentator states that it was so named because of its production in the Paundra country. (tatra jātā ikshuviśeshah Paundrakanāmnā....)²⁵⁴. That the Paundra country or Varendrī in North Bengal cultivated and produced sugarcane on a large scale is fully attested to by the Rāmacharita²⁵⁵. In other parts of Bengal as well sugarcane was produced from very early times and juice used to be extracted from the plants.

The classical writers like Aelian and others have made a particular reference to the cultivation of sugarcane, and they described it as a kind of honey extracted from reeds grown amongst the Prasioi²⁵⁶. Lucan states that the Indians near the Ganges used 'to quaff sweet juice from tender reeds'²⁵⁷. In the Saduktikarnāmrīta there is Sugarcane a significant reference to the abundant growth of sugarcane plants in the
and its fields and also to sounds created by Ikshuyantra. This is clear from the expression
juice 'ikshuyantradhvanimukharita'²⁵⁸. The same work also refers to the cultivation of sugar-plants and the making of molasses²⁵⁹. The villages are stated to have been resounding with the sound of the quaffing machine and fragrance of molasses (dhvanadikshu yantramukharā grāmya gudāmodināh)²⁶⁰.

That sugar or molasses was produced largely in Bengal is also attested to by the account of Marco Polo who has stated that sugar was one of the important exports from Bengal²⁶¹. In this connection, it is very interesting to note that in the 16th century the Portuguese traveller, Barbosa, noted that Bengal was a great competitor of South India in respect of supply of sugar to various parts of India, Ceylon, Sugar or Arabia and Persia²⁶². Even today sugarcane is cultivated and molasses made
Molasses in various parts of Bengal. Molasses or Gur is a common sweet produced and consumed by the common people of Bengal²⁶³.

(iii) Salt :

Manufacture of salt was another basic rural industry in ancient Bengal. Salt is an invariable ingredient of food-articles, but it could not be always produced in all villages. Accordingly, salt-manufacture was confined only to places near the sea-coast. Big holes were dug for storing saline sea-water overflowing the bank. Saline water thus collected was boiled and thereby water was evaporated leaving only salt ingredient. This process of salt-production is continued even today in the sea-coast areas. The coastal regions of Midnapur, Chittagong, Barisāl, Khulnā and Nārāyaṅguñj were the primary salt-producing centres of Bengal²⁶⁴.

In the inscriptions of the post-Christian period there are references to Lavaṇākaraḥ. The Irdā Copper plate (10th century A.D) records the grant of a village with its salt-pits (lavaṇākaraḥ²⁶⁵). Again, in the Rāmpal Copper plate of Śrīchandra (11th century A.D), Belāva Copper plate of Bhojavarman (12th century A.D) and in other inscriptions there are references to the donation of villages along with salt (sa-lavaṇa)²⁶⁶. It is specifically stated in the Belāva Copper plate that a village with pasture ground, with the garden of coconut, mango, jackfruit and with salt, etc., was granted (Triṇaputigōcharaparyantā satalā soddeśā āmra-panasā sa-guvākanālikērā salavaṇā sajalasthalā sagartaisharā)²⁶⁷.

In this context, it is also very interesting to refer to the Chittagong Copper plate of Dāmōdara which contains a reference to a house named Lavanotsavāsrama-samyādha to the south of the village Dāmbārdama²⁶⁸. It follows that this was a salt-manufacturing area, and the house referred to might have been used for that purpose²⁶⁹. Salt is not, however, frequently mentioned in the land grants of the Pāla and the Sena kings. It has been accordingly presumed that though the manufacture of salt was known and prevalent in certain places from the 10th century A.D., it did not develop into an industry on a large scale in the northern and western parts of Bengal²⁷⁰. Therefore, it has been upheld that dampness of climate and large volume of water discharging through the Ganges and the Brahmaputra might have considerably hampered the development of salt-manufacture²⁷¹. Yet, salt-manufacture continued on a creditable scale. Even in medieval Maṅgalkāvyas there are references to salt as an article of export²⁷². The Bengali merchants used to have rock-salt in exchange of saline-water salt. At the time of the East India company, salt-trade was very lucrative, and there was a heavy competition²⁷³.

(iv) Pottery :

Among other village crafts a particular reference may be made to the making of earthenwares or pottery craft which is as old as the Mesolithic times. In Bengal, scientific excavation at a Microlithic site was conducted at Bīrbhānpur in Burdwan district. This excavation revealed the presence of microlithic industry bereft of any associated pottery finds²⁷⁴. This may imply that the pottery industry was a later introduction into Bengal. But unfortunately, in our ancient records we do not find any detailed account of the pottery-manufacture. Only in certain inscriptions there are positive references to the Kumbhakāra or potter as in the Kamauli Copper plate of Vaidyadeva²⁷⁵. In some other inscriptions like the Nidhanpur Copper plate there is a reference to Kumbhakāragartta, i.e., potter's ditch.²⁷⁶ These few references no doubt prove that the potter was an important craftsman in the village. Not necessarily that each and every village had potters engaged in making earthenwares. In many early Indian literary texts, as for instance in the Buddhist Jātakas, there are references to the localisation of the pottery-craft and the existence of the potter's guilds²⁷⁷. The Kāman stone inscription refers to a similar guild of potters²⁷⁸. Even today in many parts of Bengal a large village may have only an area at its one end on the river-side being occupied by the potters, and the same area is known as the Kumārpārā. A village peopled by the potters alone was not also unknown in ancient Bengal. These potters used to supply the needs of several villages. Available records from ancient Bengal do not, however, throw sufficient light on the details of making earthen wares and their different types and varieties. It is only in the Deopārā inscription that the poet brings in the simile of the creator with the potter²⁷⁹.

It is, however, quite well-known that in ancient times earthenwares were primarily used as domestic utensils. Accordingly, the potters used to make and supply various kinds of plates, cups, dishes, jars, pitchers, cooking utensils, lamps and even inkpots. These were no doubt the basic needs of a householder of an ancient village. Early literary texts of Bengal do not, however, contain references to this pottery industry. But this lacuna has been considerably filled in by archaeological finds discovered from different sites, namely, Pāṇḍurājār-dhibi, Rājbaḍidāngā, Pāhārpur, Bāngarh, Mahāsthāngarh, Maynāmatī and several other places²⁸⁰.

The most ancient pottery finds belonging perhaps to Chalcolithic period come from Pāṇḍurājārdhibi, Mahisdal, Nānnur and a few other places²⁸¹. This pottery is usually called black and red ware²⁸². But it would be a folly to brand all black and red ware as Chalcolithic. Even in later periods, this kind of pottery was largely made.

Next to this early pottery, there is another variety called Northern Black and Polished ware discovered from excavated sites like Chandraketugarh, Rājibāḍidāṅgā, etc.²⁸³.

Pottery There are two varieties of this kind of pottery : NBP and imitation NBP.
from The latter variety of NBP has been collected from many places of Bengal²⁸⁴.
excavated sites This kind of NBP dating from C. 4th century B.C. continued in this part

of the country till the Gupta or even the post-Gupta period. Besides these two well-marked pottery specimens of the Chalcolithic and early historic periods, excavations at different sites of Bengal have also yielded highly polished red ware and other types and varieties belonging to the post-Christian period²⁸⁵. Even various types of painted pottery specimens have been also discovered from some excavated sites.

Archaeological excavations and explorations have brought to light innumerable varieties of earthen wares and other terracotta objects, perhaps beginning from the 3rd century B.C. onwards. Terracotta objects so far discovered include all sorts of domestic utensils and also other objects like sprinklers, beads, ornaments and various other objects. It is also very significant to note that many excavated sites like Rājibāḍidāṅgā, Maynāmatī, Pāhārpur, etc., have yielded a large number of terracotta inscribed
Pottery seals which were also perhaps made by the potter²⁸⁶. Besides some excavated
objects sites like Chandraketugarh, Pāhārpur and Maynāmatī have also produced a large number of terracotta plaques meant for decorating buildings²⁸⁷. These terracotta plaques can be dated from the post-Gupta period, and this excellent terracotta art tradition continued even in mediaeval times. It is very significant to note that many of the mediaeval temples of Bengal bear wonderful terracotta plaque decorations. This was also undoubtedly an excellent pottery craft.

Again, archaeological excavations at various sites have also yielded a large number of terracotta figurines of man, animal and bird belonging to early historical period from the 4th century B.C. onwards. Other terracotta objects included balls, disc, rings, beads, bangles and many other ritual and domestic objects. All these objects have been also unearthed from different excavated sites in Bengal²⁸⁸. Pottery finds
Terracotta so far unearthed from various excavated sites certainly speak of highly flourish-
figurines ing pottery craft in different parts of Bengal²⁸⁹. Even today this earthenware craft is continued in full swing and occupies a significant place in the cultural life of Bengal. But unfortunately, pottery-making is at present a dying craft. Even in the villages, the pottery utensils are now being replaced by articles made of metals.

(v) Carpentry :

Next to pottery-craft, reference may be made to carpentry, i.e., wood-craft. Boat-making, ship-building, construction of doors, windows, furniture, etc., belong to this craft-category. Bengal is primarily a riverine tract, and as such, water-routes are the only means of communication and the transport media have been always boats, ships and ḍiṅgi, etc. In both early literature and epigraphic records there are abundant ships and materials relating to the use of boats for transport. Kālidāsa in his Raghuvaṃśa describes the Bengali people as Nausādhānodyatāna²⁹⁰. In the Haraha inscription, the Gaudas have been described as samudrāśrayān²⁹¹. It implies that the Gaudas had fleet as well. That there were naval fleet at the disposal of the rulers of Bengal and her neighbouring countries is also clearly borne out by a large number of inscriptions. In this context, a particular reference may be made to the Nidhanpur inscription which records the naval expedition of Bhāskaravarman through the Bhāgīrathī to the Gauda capital Karṇasuvarṇa²⁹². Besides, in the Pāla and Sena inscriptions there are frequent references to Nauvātaka, Nauvitāna, i.e., fleet of boats²⁹³. The term Nauvātaka occurs in many inscriptions²⁹⁴. Kielhorn interprets it 'as a fleet of boat' and equates it with 'Nauvitāna' as mentioned in Deopārā inscription, (pāśchātyachakra-jayakelishu yasva-yāvad gaṅgā-anudhāvatī-nauvitāna)²⁹⁵. In the Kamauli plate of Vaidyadeva 'Nauvātaka' occurs in connection with a battle in Anuttara-Vaṅga (South Bengal)²⁹⁶. It also refers to a fleet of boats. The Rāmacharita refers to the Ganges having been covered over by a fleet of boats²⁹⁷. The expression 'ṭaranī-sambhavena' has been explained as 'Naukā-mēlaken', i.e., a fleet of boats²⁹⁸. The Rāmacharita also refers to a 'Śilānaukā', which denotes a fleet of stone-boats appearing splendid when crossing the sea like bitter gourds²⁹⁹. But unfortunately, the meaning of 'Śilānaukā' is not at all clear. How can there be boats made of stone ? Does it denote boats loaded with stones ? The terms 'Naukā' and 'ḍiṅgi' are very often mentioned and described in the Charyyāpadas³⁰⁰. There are also references to sea-going vessels and also to component parts of a boat, such as, helms, oars, masts, sails, wheels, etc.³⁰¹. Besides, there were ferry services. This is evident from the designation of an officer named Tarika mentioned in the Pāla inscriptions³⁰². He might have been in charge of ferry services and also of other matters relating to the movements of peoples from one place to another³⁰³. That there took place naval battles in ancient times is also evident from the Kamauli grant of Vaidyadeva³⁰⁴. The Bhāgalpur plate of Nārāyaṇapāla records'from the illustrious camp of victory pitched at Mudgagiri where the bridge which is produced by the wall of boats of various kinds proceeding on the path of Bhāgīrathī'³⁰⁵. This certainly refers to a bridge made by a row of boats.

Moreover, some inscriptions also contain references to boats, dock-yards, etc. In the Guṇaighar inscription of Vainyagupta there are clear references to boats plying in inundated areas and also to dockyards³⁰⁶. It also refers to a channel open to boats (naukhāta)³⁰⁷. As to harbours and dockyards we have a significant reference in the Faridpur Copper plate of Mahārāja Dharmāditya³⁰⁸. This inscription refers to Nābātakhenī which has been taken to denote a dockyard³⁰⁹. In the second record of Dharmāditya there is again a reference to Naudandaka which probably implies a shelter of boats or a harbour³¹⁰.

That the ship-building industry flourished in ancient Bengal becomes evident from all available records. Here, it would be also very interesting to note that ancient Bengal had several international ports through which was carried out maritime trade with different parts of the world. In this connection, a particular reference may be made to an inscription discovered from Malay Peninsula dated C. 400 A.D. which records the story of the voyage of the Raktamrittikā-vāsa Mahānāvika Buddhagupta³¹¹. Even the Bhāṭerā inscription of Govindakeśava refers to a Nāvika, i.e., navigator³¹². From these references it is quite but natural to conclude that boat and ship-building industry highly flourished in ancient Bengal and that both the village and city people used boats and ships for transport, navigation, maritime trade and naval warfare.

Besides the making of boats and ships, wood carving and carpentry works also flourished in ancient Bengal. It may be noted that the village-houses were mostly made with perishable materials like bamboo and wood. In the Charyyāgītis there is a significant reference to the fencing of the house with mat made of bamboo-strips³¹³. The rural house-construction was primarily the work of the carpenters and as such, they were in great demand in every village. Wood-carving was also done certainly by the carpenters. In some records there are also references to personal names of the carpenters. For instance, Vishṇu Vardhaki is mentioned as a carpenter in the Guṇaighar inscription of Vainyagupta (507 A.D.)³¹⁴. Even today carpentry is a very common and essential village craft. Wonderful works of wood-craft relating to house-construction, furniture-making, image or doll-making, utensil-making, etc., are the living records of the ancient rural craft of Bengal.

(vi) Stone :

Next to carpentry, reference may be made to stone industry. Precious, semi-precious and ordinary stones were largely used for various purposes. Stone in general was used for making images. In ancient Bengal, stone sculptural specimens beginning

from the Gupta period upto the early mediaeval times are available in plenty³¹⁵. The stone sculptors of Bengal followed a particular technique in image-making during sculptures the Pāla and Sena period, which has been labelled as the product of the 'Bengal school of sculptural art'³¹⁶. Stone images could not have been produced by the ordinary stone cutters. Accordingly, it may be presumed that there were specialised sculptors for making stone images. Even the sculptors are also mentioned in several inscriptions. In the Bodhgayā inscription there is a reference to one named Keśava who was the son of a sculptor (Śilāvid) Ujjvala³¹⁷.

Stones were also used for making domestic utensils which were generally used in ritual practices. Even today stone vessels, dishes, glass, etc., are considered sacred for eating and drinking. The widows of rural Bengal are still very particular in using stone-made utensils only. It is believed that these are free from any contamination and as such, sacred and accordingly used largely for offerings in temples and other ritual practices. Besides, many ornamented objects used for decorative or religious purposes were also made of different stones.

Precious and semi-precious stones were mostly worked out for making ornaments. References to ornaments made of pearls and precious stones are to be found in a large number of inscriptions like Deopārā inscription of Vijayasena, Naihāṭi inscription of Vallālasena, etc.³¹⁸. The Deopārā inscription refers to necklaces of jewellery worn by the ladies of royal blood³¹⁹. The *Rāmacharita* contains wonderful accounts of diamond, lapis lazuli, pearls, emeralds, rubbies, sapphires and other gems as parts of jewellery³²⁰. The Deopārā inscription specifically refers to ornaments of precious stones³²¹. Such references certainly give indications to a highly specialised stone industry in villages or industrial centres of Bengal. It may be added that excavations at various sites in Bengal have also yielded all kinds of stone objects including images, utensils, beads, amulets, etc.³²². In this connection, a particular reference may be made to the discovery of a decorated slate stone plate from the excavated site of Rājibāḍidāṅgā at a depth of 4' 7" below surface. It measures 7.6 x 7.6 sq.cm. and is partly damaged. The plate bears beautiful carved petal-line around the raised border-line of an open circle in the middle, having a diameter of 4.2 cm and exhibits excellence of the art of stone-carving belonging to the 6th-8th century A.D. This plaque might have been used for ritual or decorative purposes³²³.

Even today there are several villages in West Bengal where the stone-cutters/carvers and sculptors are still continuing the age old traditional practice of stone-crafts. But unfortunately, this village craft is also facing deterioration and decline.

(vii) **Metal :**

Ancient Bengal did not lack in metal industry as well. First metals used by the people of ancient Bengal like their contemporaries in upper India were of course copper and bronze. Archaeological finds of copper and bronze objects furnish ample evidences in this regard. It may be noted in this connection that copper and bronze were also used for making vessels, tools and implements. A particular reference in this context may be made to the discovery of copper celts from different parts of West Bengal^{323a}. Archaeological excavations at Pāṇḍurājārdhibi and other places have also revealed a particular stage of culture characterised by the use of copper and bronze preceding the use of iron³²⁴. All excavated sites of Bengal have yielded varieties of copper and bronze objects belonging to both protohistoric and historic periods³²⁵. Besides, images of deities were also made of copper and bronze. Such images have been discovered from all parts of Bengal, and these mostly belong to the Pāla-Sena period. Of such images, particular references may be made to the stratified finds from Rājbaḍidāngā, Maynāmatī and other places³²⁶. It thus follows that the art of copper and bronze smelting attained great excellence in ancient Bengal as well. The making of the images of Aṣṭadhātu is a glowing testimony of the metallurgical skill and excellence of the people of ancient Bengal.

It has been already stated that deforestations and agricultural operations on a large scale could have been possible only with the use of iron tools and implements. The introduction of iron is undoubtedly a very important phase in the development of the Bengali culture. Iron tools are more durable and effective and as such, their demand was greater. This created a specialised craftsmen, namely, blacksmiths who were mostly engaged in making iron tools and implements like choppers, axes, knives, nail-cutters, spades, digging tools and plough-shares which were all made of iron³²⁷. It was also used for making water-container and perhaps also for cooking vessels. This is evident from the Edilpur inscription³²⁸. It is stated in the inscription that water-vessels of the Brāhmaṇas were made of iron³²⁹. Not only that, iron was also used for making all kinds of offensive and defensive weapons like spears, arrow-heads, knives, daggers and even swords³³⁰. The Tippera Copper plate of Lokanātha refers to a great shining sword of iron³³¹.

It is very interesting to note in this connection that the Agnipurāṇa refers to Aṅga and Vaṅga countries as famous for sword-making, certainly made of iron³³². The sword of the Vaṅga country is also said to be more sharp and durable. Sword is also mentioned in the Rāmacharita as Nandaka³³³. The Rāmacharita refers to weapons of war including Khadga as Khadgādilaughavikaro³³⁴. Moreover, it becomes evident from references to the knowledge of weapons and lores (Bala-vidyā and Atibala-vidyā) in the Rāmacharita that this industry of manufacturing different types of weapons thrived in Bengal in the 10th - 11th centuries A.D.³³⁵. In other verses of the Rāmacharita, swordsmen, fearful display of swords, fierce sword and the use of iron weapons are also referred to³³⁶. Again, excavations at several sites like Maynāmatī, Pāhārpur, Rājāḍidāṅgā, Bāngarh, Pāṇḍurājārdhibi, etc., have also yielded various iron objects like nails, rings, spear-heads, utensils, arrowheads, knives, cutters, etc.³³⁷. All these certainly speak of the development of the art of iron crafts.

Besides iron objects, a reference may be made to gold and silver crafts. It is most significant to note in this connection that the Periplus of the Erythraean Sea refers to the existence of a gold mine near the mouth of the Ganges³³⁸. Not only that, it also refers to a kind of gold coin called Caltis³³⁹. Nothing is, however, known regarding the identity of this gold mine. But both literary and epigraphic evidences throw light on the profuse use of gold and silver not only for making ornaments, but also for making domestic utensils. The Rāmacharita refers to many articles made of gold with fine artistic designs³⁴⁰. Even Kanakakalasa (golden pitcher) is mentioned³⁴¹. Moreover, the Rāmacharita describes Rāmāvatī as "full of gold"³⁴². The Deopārā inscription of Vijayasena refers to a fascinating jewellery made of 'precious stones, Gold and Silver necklaces, earrings, anklets, garlands and golden bracelets worn by the wives of the king's servants'³⁴³. If all these ornaments were actually worn by the wives of the king's servants, the queen and rich ladies might have worn many other ornaments made of gold and silver. In this context, a reference to the temple girls' charms whose bodies were enhanced by jewellery is extremely interesting³⁴⁴. The Naihāṭi plate of Vallālasena refers to necklaces of pearls worn by the ladies of royal blood³⁴⁵. The Rāmacharita contains a vivid account of ornaments set with diamonds, lapis lazuli, emeralds, etc³⁴⁶. Charming necklaces with gems and pearls are also referred to³⁴⁷. The same text gives also an account of many articles of gold bearing artistic designs³⁴⁸. Even plates, dishes and pitchers were made of gold and silver. There are also references to Guvarṇakumbha or golden jar which was placed on the top of the temple of Pradyumneśvara³⁴⁹. In this connection, the observation of the Tabaqāt-i-Nāsiri which speaks

of golden and silver dishes in the palace of Lakshmanasena is extremely interesting³⁵⁰. Lastly, a reference may be made to images of gods and goddesses made of gold and silver³⁵¹. It would thus appear that gold and silver industry flourished in the villages of ancient Bengal, and there were certainly village goldsmiths and silversmiths as prevailing today.

It has been already stated that the flourish of prolific stone and metal industry in ancient Bengal is well attested to by archaeological finds recovered from many excavated sites of Bengal. Almost all excavated sites yielded concrete Archaeological records relating to precious and semi-precious stone objects, ordinary gical finds and engraved. Beads of precious and semi-precious stones have been as well unearthed from most of the sites. Gold and silver objects including various ornaments have been also recovered from many ancient sites³⁵².

As to the precious and semi-precious stone and metal industry, it may be, however, noted that Bengal does not possess raw materials for the purpose. Most of these raw stones and metals were perhaps brought from outside. Regarding precious and semi-precious stone industry, it may be presumed that its raw materials might have been brought from the foot of the Himalayas, and it is not also certain as to whether these specialised stone crafts flourished in ancient Bengal. Alternatively, all finished stone products might have been imported from other parts of India. Stone and Metal Sources The excavated sites have also yielded a sufficient number of gold and silver objects, mostly ornaments³⁵³. It may be, however, noted that Bengal has always been a traditional centre of gold and silver crafts. This is clearly borne out by all available records. Even today Bengal is the centre par-excellence for the manufacture of all sorts of gold and silver ornaments.

(viii) Ivory :

There were also many other specialised village crafts in ancient Bengal, of which mention may be made of ivory industry. It is generally believed that the Muslim rulers introduced this industry, and Murshidabad became the chief center of this craft. But that the ivory industry once flourished in ancient Bengal long before the Muslims in India is well attested to by archaeological and other records.

Ivory objects There are ample references to both ivory-workers and their products. Ivory products have been obtained from various excavated sites of Bengal since Chalcolithic times. The earliest record of ivory comes from Pāṇḍurājārdhibi (Burdwan district)³⁵⁴. Several sites of early and late historical periods like

Chandraketugarh (24 Parganās district), Rājbaḍidāṅgā, (Mursīdābād district), etc., have also yielded some ivory works³⁵⁵. The Dantakāra, i.e., ivory-carvers are also mentioned and described in many early literary texts like the Mahāvastu, the Arthasāstra, the Kāmasūtra, the Rāmāyaṇa, etc.³⁵⁶. In this connection, a specific reference may be made to the Bhāṭerā plate of Govindakeśava³⁵⁷. The Dantakāra mentioned therein was no doubt an ivory-worker. Even the palanquin's staff used to be made of ivory as referred to in the Edilpur plate of Keśavasena³⁵⁸. Besides, there are also references to various other articles made of ivory. In this connection, a particular mention may be made to some important centres of ivory carvings of Bengal. We are reminded of the present locality called Dāntora, i.e., ancient Dantapura on the bank of the river Suvarṇarekhā in the district of Midnapur^{358a}. It appears that the present Dāntora area was in ancient times a flourishing centre of ivory carvings. Another important centre today is indeed Mursīdābād which became a flourishing centre of ivory-craft from the medieval times onwards. That ivory-carving was a traditional craft of Mursīdābād district is attested to by the finding of ivory objects from the excavated site of Rājbaḍidāṅgā³⁵⁹. Again, that ivory-carvings, attained great excellence is also proved by the discovery of several specimens of ivory objects from different sites. It may be noted that even in ancient times, ivory objects used to be exported to foreign lands, more particularly in the first century A.D. as described in the Periplus^{359a}. That some villages of Bengal were once flourishing centres of ivory craft is beyond any dispute. Raw materials might have been brought from the neighbouring regions of Assam. But unfortunately, this highly flourishing craft has been gradually dying out because of the changing socio-economic life-patterns caused primarily by the lack of patronage so long extended to it and the paucity of the availability of raw materials. Yet, its value and richness of the possession of ivory objects are widely acclaimed in the Bengali society even today.

(ix) Shells :

Another popular village craft relates to making of various conch-shell or conch objects like bangles, rings, etc. Ornaments made of conch and of their wearing by women are referred to in the early literary texts. From very ancient times, Śaṅkha-bangles and Śaṅkha-rings have been very popular in Bengal. Even today the wearing of red Śaṅkha-bangle is a must for a Hindu married woman. Shell-bangle is in fact an insignia or symbol of marriage. It has been said that a woman desirous of a long life of her husband must put on conch-shell bangles. On

the death of the husband, the conch-bangle worn by the wife is broken and never
 Shell to be touched^{359b}. In the Brahmavaivarta-purāṇa it has been thus enjoined:
 bangles 'Patihīna ... na dhatte srajaṅ cha-chandanam chaiva śaṅkham sindūra-
 and ring bhūṣaṇam'.³⁶⁰ So also is the shell-ring. Besides the religious sanctity
 attached to them, these shell-objects are also supposed to bear magical import
 as a protector against all sorts of evil influences. It is very significant to note
 in this context that shell-objects have been found in good numbers from almost
 all the excavated sites of Bengal dating from C. 3rd century B.C. like Chandraketugarh,
 Rājibāḍidāṅgā, Bāngarh, etc.³⁶¹.

In this respect, a particular reference may be made to Śaṅkha (conch) and
 cowrie shells. The former is a sacred object as an attribute held by one hand of
 Viṣṇu. It is an essential perquisite in all religious matters, and its blowing is
 auspicious in all socio-religious rites and ceremonies. As to cowrie shells it may
 be noted that these were all throughout used as mediums of exchange. Even during
 the Gupta period when coins made of metal were in currency, cowrie-shells continued
 to be used as the most popular medium of exchange. This is clearly borne out by
 Conch the statement of Fa-hien who states that "cowrie is in use"³⁶². Inscriptions
 and and literary records bear ample testimony to the cowrie currency³⁶³.
 cowrie

All excavated sites of Bengal yielded also many cowrie shells testifying
 to their wide currency in ancient Bengal and its continuance till recent times. In
 the Dharmasūtras and other texts there are also references to Śaṅkhabalaya-kāriṇa
 or rather Śaṅkhakāras. Again, there are expressions like Śaṅkhavalayakāraṇa-
hattaraka, gajadantaśaṅkhamayam³⁶⁴, etc. It is likely that these expressions refer
 to both the Śaṅkhakāras and Dantakāras. It is from this Śaṅkhakāra that the name
 Shell- of the modern conch-shell object-maker, i.e., Śaṅkhāri has been derived.
 objects The Śaṅkhāri community of today is wholly engaged in conch-shell craft.
 makers The members of this community are widely distributed over different
 parts of Bengal. In the city of Dacca a large section of the Śaṅkhāris is concentrated
 in one of its particular area which has been named after them as Śaṅkhāripārā.
 An important centre of the Śaṅkhāris in West Bengal is at Rājibāghinī in the district
 of Bāṅkurā. The Śaṅkhāris who make and sell conch-shell products are also called
Śaṅkha-banik, i.e., trader in conch-shells.

The once flourishing conch-shell craft is also now facing decay caused
 by many socio-economic factors. New life-patterns and gradual urbanization have

changed the traditional value and attachment to conch-shell ornaments. Synthetic ornaments have replaced those made of conch-shells. Besides, supply of raw materials and high cost of shells which are to be mostly imported have also proved disastrous to this craft. It is also a dying craft of Bengal.

(x) Bamboo and Cane :

Among other indigenous village crafts of ancient Bengal a particular mention may be made of bamboo and cane crafts, of which a picturesque description has been given in the Charyyāgītis. The village houses were mostly made of perishable materials like bamboo, wood, cane and clay. In the Charyyāgītis, there is a significant reference to the fencing of the house with mats made of bamboo-strips.³⁶⁵ Baskets, etc. Besides, different sorts of baskets were also made of cane and strips of bamboo. These were all of great artistic excellence. This is no doubt an indication of the artistic skill and creative sense of the people of Bengal from bygone days. Today every attempt is being made to bring about a revival of this wonderful village craft.

(xi) Mask and scroll :

Besides, there are also many other village crafts which are being carried on through centuries in Bengal. Of such crafts a particular reference may be made to mask-making and scroll-painting. The former craft is as old as prehistoric times, and in Bengal even today it is a living craft. The wearing of masks and performances of all sorts of socio-religious rites accompanied by singing and dancing are said to possess magical potency associated primarily with fertility cult. Scroll-painting is also another traditional village craft of hoary antiquity. These paintings very closely reflect the Buddhist, Jaina and Hindu pantheons³⁶⁶. The scroll-painters of Bengal are known as Paṭuā, Chitrakāra, Paṭikār/Paṭidār, etc. They are found widely distributed over different parts of West Bengal.

(xii) Observation :

Most of the village-crafts discussed above are now dying out due to both external and internal factors. The progressive trends of civilization bearing seeds of Western life-patterns infiltrating into villages have made tremendous impact on the traditional village arts and crafts. This so-called civilizing forces brought about significant changes in social, economic and religious life and thought of the simple village people as well, and as such, changing attitudes and life-patterns

reacted sharply on most traditional arts and crafts resulting in minimising their demands and utility. The inevitable result has been its gradual decline, and most of the traditional arts and crafts are dying out. Every attempt is now, however, being made to revive or revitalise and in other words, to animate and nourish some of the crafts to prosper, for at least catering to the drawing room needs of the towns-folk. Here also the traditional vigour, natural life-patterns and spiritual contents have been lost altogether. In fact, most of the village crafts have been divorced wholly from their respective traditional contents and utility.

VII. Trade Centres and Communication

From the above discussions relating to ancient village crafts of Bengal, it becomes evident that the villages were mostly self-sufficient in respect of both agricultural and industrial requirements. Surplus products of the producers were naturally sold or exchanged. The peasants would require craft products and the craftsmen, agricultural produces. Naturally so, a common scheduled centre of a large village or a group of small villages became absolutely necessary for selling and purchasing all rural products. Such a centre turned into a village market.

Fortunately, both literary and epigraphic records very often speak of the village-market. The term used in the inscriptions for this kind of market is Hatta³⁶⁷. Generally, the term Hatta is supposed to denote a village-market, and it is in use even today in rural parts of Bengal. But its connotation has changed. Market Now-a-days, the term Hatta (colloquial hāt) denotes a weekly or byweekly market at a scheduled site where peoples from all neighbouring villages assemble for trading. For daily market, the usual term used today is ḡazār which meets either in the morning or evening. In ancient times as well, a large village used to hold a daily market in the morning. Very often, such a ḡazār met at a central place surrounded by a number of small villages.

In the inscriptions we frequently meet with such terms as Hatta, Hattikā, Hattapanakai, Hatta-vāra, Hattiyagriha, etc.³⁶⁸. The term Hattavāra probably denotes a big market and Hatta, an ordinary one. But today the latter term bears the meaning of the former which meets weekly or byweekly. It is very significant to note that Hatta in the Bhāṭerā Plate there is a distinct reference to 'Hattiyagriha' meaning market-shop³⁶⁹. Even today in the villages there are thatched huts as market-shops. In the Khālimpur Copper plate the term Hattikā occurs, and the Dāmōdarpur Copper

plate of the time of Kumāragupta refers to Hattapānakaiḥ which has been interpreted as meaning "along with market places and tanks"³⁷⁰.

The village-market was also a great source of income. There might have been both private and state controlled markets. In the case of the market owned by the state, taxes were perhaps levied on sale proceeds. This revenue was certainly collected by the state officials and deposited with the state treasury. There might have been also markets owned by private persons. Even today, in the villages markets are privately owned and managed, and all market-dues collected become the income of their owners. In the inscriptions, there are also several references to market-dues and market-places. The Khālimpur inscription records the grant of villages along with the market-places³⁷¹. The Irdā inscription similarly mentions the grant of a village along with its market-place (sa-hatta)³⁷². The Khālimpur inscription refers also to market-dues as well. The term used is Hattikā which has been explained by Kielhorn as market-dues³⁷³. The expression in the inscription refers to the grant of four villages along with their Hattikā³⁷⁴. This implies that the market was perhaps owned by the king, and while granting the villages a specific mention has been made of the market-dues which would be also vested with the donee. No significant reference is, however, to be found in the inscriptions regarding the details of privately owned markets.

From the meagre information obtained from the available sources, it may be presumed that there were regular trading centres in the villages as well. But it is not known for certain as to what extent the villages were intercommunicated. There are of course several references to public roads. The Chittagong plate of Dāmōdara mentions such a Rājapatha passing by the side of a village³⁷⁶. In this connection, a particular reference may be made to the discovery of remains of two ancient embanked roads in the neighbourhood of Dhanora³⁷⁷. There might not have been many regular roads connecting villages. It is, however, almost certain that there were pathways for land-communications. Besides intercommunications between the villages by land, there were also means of water-communications through various kinds of water-Communications by land and water transports. Both in the early literature and epigraphic records there are sufficient materials relating to the use of boats and ḍiṅgi for water transport. The plying of boats and ḍiṅgis are frequently referred to in the Charyyāpadas³⁷⁸. This is evident from the pada : Gāṅgā Jaunā mājhere

vahai nāi³⁷⁹. In the inscriptions as well the term 'ṇau' meaning boats occurs frequently³⁸⁰. There are also references to Nauvāta and Nauvātaka meaning perhaps navy³⁸¹.

It would thus appear that intercommunication between the villages was maintained both by land and water, and as such, people from distant villages could also meet together in small and large markets which have been always centres of great attraction for economic, political, social and religious communications of the village people. In fact, the village-markets were indeed the very nerve centres of the rural people of ancient Bengal.

VIII. Medium of Exchange : Currency

In this context, a brief reference may be made to the medium of exchange and the currency system prevalent in the ancient villages of Bengal. In other words, it is to be found out as to how the market-transactions were carried out in ancient Bengal. It is quite well-known that from hoary antiquity all exchanges in rural Bengal were carried out by barter system. Subsequently, along with barter cowries or shells were largely used as currency. The use of cowries is frequently referred to in both literary and epigraphic records³⁸². It is very significant to note in this connection that the Gupta rulers issued various types of gold, silver and copper coins. Yet, the cowries continued to be the common medium of exchange in the rural areas. This is attested to by the account of Fa-hien who visited India during the time of Chandragupta. It is known from the account of Fa-hien that the cowrie was largely used in rural Bengal in the Gupta period^{382a}. This observation of the Chinese pilgrim is corroborated by the discovery of cowries during excavations at a number of early and late historical sites of Bengal belonging to the Gupta and post-Gupta Cowrie currency periods. Excavations at different sites yielded numerous cowries of various sizes and even in hoards indicating wide currency of cowries in ancient times³⁸³. Cowries in fact are being largely used by the people of Bengal from early times as currency. From the Rāmacharita it is learnt that the army of the king Madanapāla was maintained by the payment in cowries³⁸⁴. According to Minhāj, when the Muhammadans came to Bengal, they found the people using cowrie shells in all transactions³⁸⁵. When the king desired to make any monetary gift, says the Muslim historian, "the lowest gift he used to confer was a lakh of kownies"³⁸⁶. From another Muslim source it is learnt that the trade in Bengal was carried on by the medium of cowrie which was the current

money of the country³⁸⁷. The Bengali Charyyā-padas also refer to the use of Kavadī (cowrie) and Vōdī (budī³⁸⁸) (kavadī na lei, vōdī na lei suchchhadē pār karēi). There is nothing surprising at the use of cowrie shells even in a commercially developed community. As late as 1750 A.D., duties or taxes were collected even in Calcutta in cowries, and many bazar-transactions were also carried on through cowries³⁸⁹.

Regarding the actual use of coins as the medium of exchange a reference is to be first made to the punch-marked coins. Like other parts of India, this kind of coin is indeed the oldest available specimen in Bengal as well. Such coins have been obtained in large numbers from both excavated and unexcavated sites³⁹⁰. These are mostly made of copper and silver bearing primarily various symbols or motifs³⁹¹. Their earliest dating is attributed to 7th - 6th century B.C. and latest 3rd century B.C. All punch-marked coins of ancient Bengal cannot be, however, attributed to such an early period. Some of these coins did actually belong to a very late period. These coins were not perhaps issued by any state authority, but by the guild organisations or corporations. These coins were current in Bengal even upto the early medieval periods along with regular coins.

With the establishment of the Maurya dynasty a regular coinage was perhaps introduced, though no coins bearing any positive indication of their issue being made by the Mauryan kings have been discovered yet. From this time, however, we come across several words in both literary and epigraphic records denoting different denominations of coins. Some of these terms are Gandaka, Kākanika, Purāna, Kapardaka, etc. The Mahāsthān Brāhmī inscription refers to a coin called Gandaka and probably also to Kākanika³⁹². The word Gandaka has been explained as a small piece of coin of the value of four cowries, and Kākanika is referred to in the Arthasāstra as a 'sub-multiple of the copper coin Kārshāpana³⁹³. Besides, epigraphic records belonging to the Gupta period mention two other kinds of coins, viz., Dināra and Rūpaka as media of exchange even in purchasing land. Silver and copper Rūpakas designated as Rūpya-rūpa and Tāmra-rūpa respectively are also mentioned in the Arthasāstra³⁹⁴. It is generally held that the term Dināra which is derived from the Latin Dinarius aureus denotes gold, and Rūpaka denotes silver coin of the Gupta monarchs. Concerning the rate of exchange between the two, we get valuable information from the Baigrām Copper plate inscription³⁹⁵.

The epigraphic records furnish also details of the purchase of land at the price of 6 Dināras for 3 Kulyavāpas and 8 Rūpakas for 2 Dronavāpas of land. The Rates of customary price in that locality was 2 Dināras for each Kulyavāpa. exchange Thus 1 Kulyavāpa was equivalent to 8 Dronavāpas in area. It is thus evident that the rate of exchange between the Dināra and the Rūpaka coins was 1 : 16³⁹⁶. The Copper plate grants of the Sena kings refer primarily to two coin-denominations, viz., Purāna and Kapardaka-purāna³⁹⁷. These are usually mentioned in connection with the income from particular plots of land donated by the kings. It seems that Purāna and Kapardaka-purāna were interchangeable terms, and the term Kapardaka was prefixed to Purāna³⁹⁸.

Again, in some land-grants the income derived from particular plots of land is described in figures only as 200 in the Edilpur plate of Keśavasena, 500 in the Śaktipur plate of Lakshmaṇasena, 500 in the Madanapāḍā plate of Viśvarūpasena, 100,60,140,50,25 and 50 /in the Sāhitya Parishat Copper plate of Viśvarūpasena, etc., without making any reference to any coin-denomination³⁹⁹. If there were two different kinds of coin circulating side by side, it is certain that one or the other would have been mentioned in connection with these figures. Secondly, it is well known that the Purāna was a silver coin weighing 32 Ratis or 58 grains⁴⁰⁰.

IX. Measurements

From very ancient times, the people of Bengal found out various methods of measuring both cultivable and non-cultivable lands. Both inscriptions and literary records furnish necessary information regarding diverse ways by which land used to be measured. Detailed information is, however, to be found in the inscriptions beginning from the Gupta period.

In the inscriptions various terms have been used while referring to land-measurements. It is, however, very difficult to determine the actual denotation and connotation of all these terms and their modern equivalents to the prevalent means of measurements. However, it is necessary to discuss these terms and find out their plausible explanations and equations.

In the inscriptions of the Gupta period two terms are frequently mentioned, viz., Kulyavāpa and Dronavāpa. The term Kulyavāpa is generally

supposed to denote an area of land which could have been sowed with one Kulyavāpa of seed, and Drōṇavāpa has been taken as an equivalent to 1/8th of a Kulyavāpa in area^{400a}. This equation is to a certain extent corroborated by the details obtained from the Pāhārpur Copper plate inscription of the Gupta year 159⁴⁰¹ (479 A.D.). In this inscription, it is recorded that the first plot of homestead Kulyavāpa land consisted of 1.1/2 drōṇavāpas, the second 4 drōṇavāpas, the third and fourth 4 drōṇavāpas and 2.1/2 drōṇavāpas (or 2 drōṇavāpas and 2 ādhavāpas) respectively corresponding to an area measuring 1.1/2 Kulyavāpa land⁴⁰². It will be evident that 1 Kulyavāpa is equal to 8 Drōṇavāpas and that 2 Ādhavāpas are equal to 1/2 Drōṇavāpa⁴⁰³. Accordingly, 1 Drōṇavāpa would be equal to 4 Ādhavāpas and 8 Drōṇavāpas to 1 Kulyavāpa⁴⁰⁴.

On the basis of these equivalents, Sircar contends that 1 Kulyavāpa of land is larger in area than one Bighā of modern times⁴⁰⁵. (1 Kulyavāpa = 128 - 160 bighās of land). This is also the opinion expressed by Bhattasali⁴⁰⁶. But other scholars like Guha have gone to the extent of pointing out that one Kulyavāpa is equivalent to 14 bighās in the Kāchchār district⁴⁰⁷. From these possible equivalents it appears that 1 Kulyavāpa of land is larger than 1 Bighā of land (twenty Kāthās; 1 Kāthā = 720 sq ft.)

Besides Kulyavāpa, there are other terms as well, such as, Pātaka and Bhū-pātaka which are frequently mentioned in the inscriptions of the Khadga, Chandra, Varman and Sena kings⁴⁰⁸. The earliest reference to Pātaka is most probably to be found in the Gunāighar Grant of Vainyagupta of the Gupta year 188 (A.D.507)⁴⁰⁹. It is recorded that an area measuring 11 Pātakas was granted. Altogether 5 plots of land of varying sizes were donated. These plots are⁴¹⁰:

- (1) First plot contained 7 Pātakas & 9 Drōṇavāpas
- (2) Second plot contained 28 Drōṇavāpas
- (3) Third plot contained 23 Drōṇavāpas
- (4) Fourth plot contained 30 Drōṇavāpas
- (5) Fifth plot contained 1.3/4 Pātakas

Accordingly, 8.3/4 Pātakas and 90 Drōṇavāpas are equal to 11 Pātakas of land;
11 Pātakas = 8.3/4 pātakas and 90 drōṇavāpas;

Therefore 2.1/4 or 9/4 pātakas = 90 drōṇavāpas;

$$1 \text{ pātaka} = \frac{90 \times 4}{9} = 40 \text{ drōṇavāpas}$$

It would thus appear that $2\frac{1}{4}$ Pātaka will be equivalent to 90 Drōnavāpas and 40 Drōnavāpas = one Pātaka. Therefore, 1 Pātaka of land would be 5 times larger than 1 Kulyavāpa⁴¹¹. Besides, the inscriptions belonging to the post-Gupta period refer to many other terms in connection with the land-measurements. These are Ādhaka, or Ādhavāpa, Unmāna or Udāna, Kāka or Kākinika, etc.⁴¹². In some later inscriptions, there are other terms like Bhū-khādi, Khādikā, Hala, Bhū-hala, Kedāra or Bhū-kedāra, Drōna⁴¹³ etc.

Most of these terms denoting land-measurements are not in use today, and their modern equivalents can hardly be ascertained. As to Unmāna it may be said that 12 Angulas or digits were perhaps equivalent to 1 cubit, and 32 cubits to 1 Unmāna. Regarding Hala and Kedāra, it may be noted that 1 Hala is equal to 12 Kedāras. In certain regions of East Bengal these two terms are used even today. Other terms and their equivalents may be stated as :

1 <u>Kulyavāpa</u>	= 8 <u>Drōnavāpas</u>
1 <u>Pātaka</u>	= 40 <u>Drōnavāpas</u>
5 <u>Kulyavāpas</u>	= 1 <u>Pātaka</u>
1 <u>Ādhaka</u>	= 16 to 20 seers
1 <u>Drōna</u>	= 64 to 80 seers
1 <u>Kulya</u>	= 512 to 640 seers or 12 maunds, 32 seers to 18 maunds
4 <u>Kākas/Kākinīs</u>	= 1 <u>Unmāna</u>
50 <u>Unmānas</u>	= 1 <u>Ādhi</u>
4 <u>Ādhis</u>	= 1 <u>Drōna</u>
4 <u>Kudavas</u>	= 1 <u>Prastha</u>
4 <u>Prasthas</u>	= 1 <u>Ādha</u> (<u>ādhaka</u> or <u>ādhavāpa</u>)
4 <u>Ādhas</u>	= 1 <u>Drōna</u>

Some of these terms denoting units of land-measures are also to be found mentioned in certain literary works. The Amarakōsha refers to Drōna, Marika, Adaka⁴¹⁴ etc. The term Kākinī is referred to in one of the Āryas of the Triśatikāya of Śrīdhara⁴¹⁵. In the Śuvaṅkarī, there are also references to Ādhi, Drōna, etc. According to the Śuvaṅkarī formula, 4 Kākas or Kākinī would be equivalent to 1 Unmāna and 50 Unmānas to 1 Ādhi and 4 Ādhis to 1 Drōna⁴¹⁶. In the Āryas of Līlāvati there is also a reference to another term, viz., Kudava⁴¹⁷. The equivalents of all these terms may be stated as :

4 <u>Kuḍavas</u>	= 1 <u>Prastha</u>
4 <u>Prasthas</u>	= 1 <u>Ādha/Ādhaka/Ādhavāpa</u>
4 <u>Ādhas</u>	= 1 <u>Drōṇa</u>

It is very significant to note that the term Kuḍava does not occur in the inscriptions⁴¹⁸.

Besides all these units of land-measurements, there was another very common method of measuring land. This is the Nala-unit, i.e., the land used to be measured by Nalas or reeds varying in length from one region to another. The measurement of land by the Nalas was no doubt a very common practice in ancient Bengal. In the inscriptions, there are frequent references to this kind of measurement. Both in the Gupta and Sena inscriptions the most common expression is : ashtaka-navaka-nalena nalabhyām or ashtaka-navaka nalēna, i.e., the land was measured by 8 or 9 Nalas⁴¹⁹. In the Baigrām Copper plate, it is stated that 3 Kī ulyavāpas and 2 Drōṇavāpas of land were measured by Ashtaka-navaka-nalabhyām.⁴²⁰ As to the import of Ashtaka-navaka-nala, a particular reference may be made to the Faridpur and Baigrām Copper plates wherein the land-surveyor has been referred to as : Dharmasīla-sīvachandra - hastena and Darvvi-karmma-hastena⁴²¹. The expression Hasta is very significant. It is not known for certain whether Ashtaka or Navakanala denotes 8 or 9 Hasta-measurement. If we, however, accept that it refers to Hasta-measures, it may be assumed that 1 Hasta is equivalent to 19 inches, and in that case, Ashtaka-navaka-nalas would correspond to an area of 12.8 ft or 14.3 ft.⁴²²

Apart from these Ashtaka and Navakanalas, the Pāhārpur plate inscription contains a reference to Shastaka-nadir-apavinchchya⁴²³. It implies that Shastaka-nala, i.e., a nala of sixth digit was also used for land measurements. It has been already pointed out that in many inscriptions the length of the Nala used to be measured by a person's hand⁴²⁴. It would thus appear that the Nalas of different digits were used for measuring lands in different parts of Bengal⁴²⁵. From the Sena inscriptions it becomes evident that there were at least four kinds of Nalas in use for measuring lands. As for instance, the Samatatiya-nala was the standard of measurement not only in Samatata region, but also in the Khādi-Vishaya of the Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti⁴²⁶. Again, Vṛishabha-śāṅkara was perhaps used for measuring land in Uttara-Rāḍha of the Vardhamāna-bhukti and Vyāghrataṭi in Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti⁴²⁷. Another kind of Nala-

measurement was used in Varendrī. In the Tarpaṇḍighi plate of Lakshmaṇasena, the expression is : tatratya-deśa vyavahāra-nalēna, i.e., the land was measured by the nala standard in use in the country⁴²⁸. Besides, a Nala of 56 cubits was in use at Vetaḍḍachaturaka in Paśchimakhātika of Vardhamāna-bhukti⁴²⁹. Moreover, a Nala measuring 22 Hastas was also in use in the north-eastern part of the Dacca district as evident from the Bhowāl Copper plate of Lakshmaṇasena⁴³⁰.

It would be thus clear that various kinds of land-measurements were in use in different parts of ancient Bengal. As most of the inscriptions contain information relating to grants, purchases and sales of lands, land-measurements were necessary to denote the areas donated or sold. This further proves that the people of ancient Bengal were thoroughly acquainted with the land-survey, and as far as possible, accurate measurements of land were faithfully made and recorded.

X. Village Administration

Like all tribal settlements, the villages of ancient Bengal were also self-administered units. Unfortunately, sufficient records regarding the village administration in ancient Bengal are not available till the expansion of the imperial authority over the villages. No authentic information regarding the pre-Mauryan village administration of Bengal can be gathered. It is perhaps during the time of the Mauryas that the imperial authority was extended over the villages, and some of them might have been brought under the direct administrative control of the Magadhan authority. The extension of the imperial authority over the villages became more and more ~~growing~~ with the beginning of the rule of the Imperial Guptas, and this pattern continued till the Muslim conquest.

A large number of epigraphic records from the Gupta period onwards bearing elaborate details regarding the purchase, sale and gift of land made by the king and villagers throw considerable light on administrative patterns of the ancient villages of Bengal. While recording purchases or gifts of lands, all sorts of official formalities were strictly adhered to, and a large number of officers who were entrusted with diverse functions have been introduced. The expansion of the royal authority becomes further evident with the rise and growth of feudalism or Sāmanta-nripatis. The beginnings of a form of feudal structure in ancient Bengal can be most fruitfully traced from the Gupta period onwards⁴³¹.

Both the Mauryas and the Guptas introduced a sound administrative machinery. The kingdom was divided into several integral administrative units like the Bhuktis, Vishayas, Mandalas or Vithis, Khandalas, Chaturakas and lastly Grāmas or Pātakas.⁴³¹ It appears that all these administrative units were created with the sole purpose of controlling various kinds of land-transaction and the collection of taxes and maintenance of law and order throughout the kingdom. Even the government officials were posted in the villages for this purpose. In spite of this elaborate and effective administrative machinery, the villages in ancient Bengal continued to enjoy considerable autonomy in respect of all matters affecting them. This becomes evident even from the inscriptional records from the Gupta period onwards. The general village administrative pattern as recorded in the inscriptions is based on the primitive or traditional village administrative system.

It is quite well-known that like all other parts of India, the villages of ancient Bengal were also so many little republics in which all the inhabitants of a village took active part in all affairs concerning them. In inscriptions there are frequent references to Pañchakula, Ashtakula and also Ashtakulādhikarāṇa.⁴³² The Pañchakula appears to be analogous with the tribal Pañchāyet. It consisted of five persons, perhaps selected from amongst the village inhabitants who were responsible for the village administration. In Nilakantha's commentary on the Sabhāparvan of the Mahābhārata the five forming the Pañcha have been named as : Samāhartā, Sannidāta, Gonaka, Lekhaka and Sākshī.⁴³³ The term Pañchāyet Pañchakula occurs also in several inscriptions.⁴³⁴ Goshal suggests that the body of Pañchakula was concerned with financial matters of various kinds including those connected with land.⁴³⁵ It appears, however, that Pañchakula was the body par-excellence of the villagers looking after not only its financial aspects, but also all other matters relating to the village. This body was no doubt given a recognition even by the imperial authority, and it might have been remodelled to suit the imperial purpose. But the bedrock of the Pañchakula was indeed the archaic Panchāyet system. Even the Maurya and Gupta imperial authorities did not directly interfere with the workings of the village Pañchakula. Instead, its active co-operation was always sought for. This becomes evident from all available epigraphic records.

Besides the Pañchakula, there are also references to Ashtakulādhikarāṇa or Ashtakula as referred to in a number of inscriptions.⁴³⁶ Scholars

differ as to the composition of the Ashtakulādhikarāṇa. There is, however, little doubt that the Ashtakula was almost similar to the Pañchakula organisation, the difference being that the former consisted of eight members. It has been suggested that the term Kula denotes a group which is the owner of an area of land that could be cultivated by 6 bullocks and 2 lāṅgalas⁴³⁷. In ^{that} case, Ashtakula might have been composed of 8 such Kula representatives. It is not, however, perfectly known whether this kind of interpretation conforms to the real nature and character of the body. On the other hand, from Dhanaidaha Copper plate inscription of Kumāragupta it is learnt that the Ashtakulādhikarāṇa might have been composed of members consisting of the Brāhmaṇas, Kuṭumbas, Mahattaras, Gosthakas⁴³⁸, etc. Accordingly, it may be contended that the Ashtakula was perhaps a larger body than the Pañchakula, the former being endowed with the authority over a large vilalge or several villages. But unfortunately, no details of the composition and working of the Ashtakulādhikarāṇa are available from the records. The fact remains that these traditional bodies continued inspite of all sorts of direct interference in the village affairs by the central authority. There is, however, little doubt that the members of both the bodies represented the village people and were entrusted to look after all affairs concerning the villages.

Besides these traditional bodies administering the villages, the imperial authority also introduced a system of gradation of villages for the purpose of direct administration. A detailed account of the formation of the graded groups of villages consisting of 10 villages, 100, 200, 800 villages, etc. are to be found in the Manusmṛhitā and Arthaśāstra of Kauṭilya⁴³⁹. It implies that even from Graded grouping of villages Mauryan times all efforts were made to bring the villages under the direct control of the state authority because of the very fact that the heads of such graded groups of villages were directly responsible to the state authority. Even in epigraphic records, there are several references to such graded grouping of villages as for instance, Daśagrāma and Daśagrāmikādi or headman of ten villages is frequently referred to in the inscriptions⁴⁴⁰. This graded grouping of villages formed parts and parcels of the imperial administrative structure. Originally, each village was a unit by itself and was headed by Grāmika or Grāmapati. In the inscriptions frequent references to Grāmika have been also made⁴⁴¹. Not only that, there are also references to personal names of some Grāmikās, such as, Nābhaka, the Grāmika of the village Chandaḡrāma. Yashtidatta, Śrīdatta, Dhanasvāmin, Suvarṇayaśa, Mahidatta, Rājyadatta, Hina-datta and other village headmen⁴⁴².

Details regarding the actual position of the Grāmika are, however, insufficient. Even it is not known for certain whether he was an elected or an appointed officer in charge of the village. It is, however, from the Smṛiti-texts that an account of the actual position and functions of the village headman can be obtained. According to the Manusmṛhitā, the king appointed a headman over each village as well as heads of ten, twenty, hundred and thousand villages⁴⁴³. In the inscriptions, the Grāmika is more particularly mentioned in connection with purchases and gifts of land and the maintenance of village temples, tanks, etc⁴⁴⁴. He was perhaps responsible also for all other affairs relating to the village. It is not definitely known also whether the Grāmika was actually the headman of the Pañchakula. Probably, he was so, and that with the help of the Pañchakula advisory body, the Grāmapati or Grāmika used to look after the village affairs. Besides, in the inscriptions there are frequent references to other persons along with the Grāmika⁴⁴⁵. They are the Brāhmaṇa, Mahattara, Kutumba, Pustapāla and others. Moreover, the word Akshudra-prakṛiti occurs in the Dāmōdarpur Copper plate of Budhagupta (482 A.D.⁴⁴⁶). But the meaning of Grāmika of Akshudraprakṛiti is not also very clear. It is further learnt from the same inscription that it was vested with the authority of looking after all purchases of lands, etc. Not only that, even many other persons of the village, such as, the traders or businessmen, cultivators and other actively participated in all matters relating to industry, trade and commerce. It would thus appear that a complete harmony prevailed in the village, and all affairs relating to the village were commonly dealt with, and in fact, nobody was neglected. However, it appears to be certain that the Grāmika was the headman of the village and his position was also duly recognised by the imperial state authority. From the early Vedic times, the institution of Grāmika thus continued uninterrupted in the village, and even with the rise and growth of the imperial authority as well it retained its traditional position and bearings.

In the imperial administrative structure, next to the Grāmika was perhaps Daśagrāmika or the officer in charge of ten villages. In this connection, a particular reference may be made to Gōpa as referred to in the Arthaśāstra of Kauṭilya⁴⁴⁷. The Gōpa was perhaps a state official placed in charge of a unit of villages. It is learnt that this officer was entrusted with the power of

setting up village boundaries, recording the number of plots of land cultivated or uncultivated, gardens, fences (vata), forests, temples, roads, cremation grounds, feeding houses (sattra), places of pilgrimage, pasture grounds, etc.⁴⁴⁸. He was also in charge of registering all gifts, sales, charities and tax remissions, etc. Dasagrāmika and Gopa Not only that, he was also the census officer recording the member of cultivators, cowherds, merchants, labourers, slaves and even animals. It is really surprising that even proper records were made regarding the members of each house including their āya (income) vyāya (expenditure), ajiva (occupation) and even their nature and charita (character)⁴⁴⁹. These functions of the Gōpa as described in the Arthasāstra are not, however, to be found enumerated in the inscriptions of Bengal. Instead, with the extension of the imperial authority some other officers were appointed in each village. One of these important state officials was of course Pustapāla who is frequently mentioned in the inscriptions⁴⁵⁰.

The Pustapāla was undoubtedly a record-keeper of the village who used to keep records of all matters relating to the village. In several inscriptions, the Pustapālas are also mentioned by names, such as, Durgādatta, Arkkadāsa, Vishṇudatta Vijayanandin, Sthānunandin, Naranandin, Gōpadatta, Bhaṭanandin, Jammabhūti, Vinayasena, Patradāsa, Rishidatta, Jayanandi and Vibhudatta⁴⁵¹. The Pustapālas or record-keepers were often consulted by the Adhikarana⁴⁵². For instance, the Pustapālas, Durgādatta and Arkkadāsa, were consulted by the district authority of Pañchanagarī in 448 A.D. as recorded in the Bāigrām inscription⁴⁵³. The names of record-keepers are also to be found in the Nandapur Copper plate inscription⁴⁵⁴. The primary duty of the Pustapāla was to enquire into all matters relating to purchases, sales, gifts and donations of land and to furnish detailed and correct reports on all matters. In all inscriptions referring Pustapāla to purchases, sales and gifts of land, the Pustapāla figures prominently. As the Pustapāla was the record-keeper, all matters are to be referred to him. In the Dāmōdarpur Copper plate inscription of Budhagupta (482 A.D.) it is stated that the Pustapāla Patradāsa granted an appeal made by the Grāmika Nābhaka⁴⁵⁵. This is also clear from the Bāigrām Copper plate of the Gupta year 128 (448 A.D) which records that two family heads Bhoyila and Bhāshkara applied to the Pustapāla for purchasing fallow lands, and the latter named Durgādatta and Arkkadāsa after making necessary enquiries granted the said prayer⁴⁵⁶. From many other inscriptions it is learnt that the land could be donated only after the clearance given by the Pustapāla. It is known from the Dāmōdarpur

Copper plate of Kumāragupta (448 A.D.) that according to the decision of the Pustapāla, the land measuring 5 prōṇas with the right of using canals for watering the field , lying to the west of the village of Airāvata-Gōrājya, was given to the petitioner⁴⁵⁷. Not only that, even the donated land used to be inspected by the village elders, royal officials and house-holders⁴⁵⁸.

It is very interesting to note in this connection that the Pustapāla used to be helped in his work by a board of recordkeepers^{458a}. In the Pāhārpur Copper plate inscription it is stated that the board of the record-keepers was composed of Dhṛtivisthū, Virōchana, Rāmadāsa, Haridāsa, Śaśinandin, Suprabha, Manudatta and that it was presided over by the chief record-keeper named Divā-karanandin⁴⁵⁹. Thus it appears that there were several assistants of the Pustapāla, and they actually formed the board. Besides these, there were other persons Pustapāla to assist the Pustapāla. One such officer was in charge of looking and his board after the demarcation of land. In the Baigrām Copper plate inscription of 448 A.D., an officer named Darvikarma who was in charge of demarcating lands is mentioned⁴⁶⁰. There was also a surveyor entrusted with the work of surveying lands. In the Faridpur Copper plate inscriptions of the time of Gopachandra and Dharmāditya, it has been recorded that the land was actually measured by Dharmasīla and Śivachandra who were certainly the land-surveyors⁴⁶¹. They all appear to have been the assistants of the Pustapāla.

Besides, there are frequent references to Mahattaras in the inscriptions⁴⁶². The term Mahattara perhaps refers to the headman of the village or the leading man of the locality⁴⁶³. In that case, the Mahattara may be equated with the Grāmika. According to Pargiter, the Mahattaras were men of position in the village, i.e., leading men. He even suggests that the word Mātabbar or Mātabar, a common title for the headman of a village in East Bengal, though generally derived from the Arabic Mutabar (trustworthy or reputable), is more probably a corruption of Mātarbar, i.e., Mahattara-vara, "the chief of the leading Mahattara men"⁴⁶⁴. Ghosal, however, regards Mahattaras not as "private individuals", but as officials and administrative agents⁴⁶⁵. Majumdar suggests that the Mahattaras may be the representatives of the people⁴⁶⁶. It has been also presumed that Mahattaras represented the landed gentry⁴⁶⁷.

The actual position and functions of the Mahattara is not, however, quite clear. It appears that the Mahattaras were government officials, and their

posts were filled up by the state authority. This would be evident from the details of his functions given in a number of inscriptions. In the Mallasārul Copper plate inscription of Vijayasena it is stated that the Mahattara Hinadatta looked after the village Andhakaraka⁴⁶⁸. It is further learnt that the Mahattara-
 Position Suvarṇayasa looked after the village Nirvṛtavāṭaka, Mahattaras,
 and Yashtidatta and Śrīdatta, after Vaṭaballaka, Mahattara-Dhanasvāmin,
 functions after the donated lands in the village of Kapisthavāṭaka, Mahattara-
 of the Mahattara Bhaṭṭavāmanasvāmin, after the lands donated to gods or Brāhmaṇas
Mahattara in the village of Koḍḍavira, Mahattara-Jivasvāmī, after the land of the village
 Śālmaliṇvāṭaka and Mahidatta and Rājyadatta inspected all gifts made to gods
 or Brāhmaṇas in the village of Gōdhagrāma, etc.⁴⁶⁹. Thus in inscriptions, there
 are names of a number of Mahattaras looking after matters relating to lands
 and other village affairs. It appears that like the Pustapāla, the Mahattara was
 also perhaps another state official. But it is not known whether he was superior
 or inferior in position to the Pustapāla.

Besides the Mahattara, there occurs also a reference to another officer, namely, Mahāmahattaka which perhaps literally means the great headman⁴⁷⁰. As the name implies, Mahāmahattaka might have been a superior officer to that of Mahattara. This becomes evident from the Chittagong Copper plate
Mahā- of Dāmōdara which states that the order of the king for granting
mahattaka 5 Drōṇas of land was actually conveyed through the Mahāmahattaka⁴⁷¹. It, therefore, appears that he was perhaps a superior state officer who was to communicate the royal order to the Mahattara for implementation.

Moreover, in the inscriptions, the Kutumbinas are also frequently referred to⁴⁷². The exact meaning of the term Kutumbin is not also clear. According to Basak, Kutumbina undoubtedly refer to ordinary householders or family men, i.e., men being Kutumbas or relatives⁴⁷³. Bhandarkar thinks that Kutumbins were cultivators⁴⁷⁴. But Ghosal interprets Kutumbina as the heads of the household⁴⁷⁵. Ghosal also regards the Mahattaras, the Kutumbins and even the Kutumbins Prakritis not as "private individuals", but as officials and administrative agents⁴⁷⁶. But the evidence of the Khālimpur Copper plate does not support this contention. For any person concerned with administration is not necessarily an official, as for example, there are also non-official members of the municipalities and district boards and assessors and jurors as at present⁴⁷⁷. The Kutumbins, therefore, might have been the representatives of the people or relatives or

kinsmen. However, it appears from the inscriptions that the Kutumbins possessed considerable power regarding the sale and purchase of lands in the village. The present Bengali word Kutum meaning relatives is perhaps a derivation from the ancient term Kutumbin. In that case, the Kutumbins might have been the relatives of the purchaser and seller of any land and their presence during the transaction was required.

There were also many other junior or senior officers in the village. It may be noted in this connection that all these official positions were created with the extension of the imperial authority over the villages. Before that, the village was undoubtedly a self-governed unit with the Pañchakula and its headman Grāmika who was responsible for all affairs affecting the life and activities of the villagers. The situation, however, changed considerably with the observation the Mauryas coming into power and subsequently with other imperial dynasties like the Guptas, Pālas and Senas when the royal authority was exercised through a number of officials appointed in the villages. This picture becomes abundantly clear when we go through the details of the working of the village officials. It may be, therefore, contended that with the wide extent of the imperial authority and the establishment of feudal structure, the village of ancient Bengal gradually lost its autonomous character, and instead of being a self-governed unit, it was transformed into the lowest unit of the administrative organisation established by the imperial authority. This would be evident from other details relating to the land measurements and collection of revenues made from villages by the state.

XI. Village Revenue

The village in ancient Bengal was the fountain of revenues of the state. The main economic foundation of ancient Bengal was primarily agrarian in character. Therefore, the land was the principal source of revenue. In this sphere as well the inscriptions furnish sufficient information. Revenues were generally collected from agricultural lands. These were collected by the heads of the village units like Grāmapati and Daśagrāmika or head of ten villages⁴⁷⁸.

In the land-grant records of the Gupta rulers, the terms like Bhāga, Bhōga, Kara, Hiranya, Uparikara, etc., are to be found frequently mentioned⁴⁷⁹.

The exact nature of these kinds of revenue is not distinctly known. The term bhāga denotes land-revenue paid in kind. There occurs also a reference to an officer in charge of the grain-share called Shashthādhikṛita⁴⁸⁰. The term occurs also in the Arthaśāstra and the Manusmṛiti. It is quite possible that he collected the sixth part of produce as the share of the king⁴⁸¹. The term bhōga perhaps denotes periodical supplies of fruits, firewood, flowers and the like, which the villagers had to supply in kind⁴⁸². There is also a reference to an officer called Bhōgapati who was perhaps a collector of the bhōga^{482a}. The term kara perhaps denotes a kind of general property-tax levied periodically. The Arthaśāstra mentions three types of kara : (i) regular tax, (ii) emergency tax and (iii) profit tax. Perhaps these three kinds of kara were levied in Bengal as well. Hiranya was probably a tax to be paid in gold levied upon certain special kinds of crops distinguished from the tax in kind (bhāga) which was charged upon ordinary crops⁴⁸³. Uparikara was a tax levied on temporary tenants⁴⁸⁴. Perhaps, it was an additional tax. Besides, the villagers paid taxes for protection against thieves and robbers, and this kind of tax was perhaps collected by an officer called Chaurōdharaṇika⁴⁸⁵. Custom-dues and toll-taxes were also collected from villages by the officer called Śaulkika⁴⁸⁶. Fines for criminal offences, ferry dues, etc., were other heads of revenues collected from the villages. Probably, the officers designated Daśāparādhika and Tarika were responsible for collecting taxes from fines for criminal offences and ferry-dues respectively⁴⁸⁷. Tax was also collected from market, i.e., Hatta or Hattika. Perhaps, this tax was collected by Hattapati as referred to in the Rāmgūñj inscription of Śivaraghosha⁴⁸⁸. Tax was also imposed on markets⁴⁸⁹. Pindaka was another kind of tax⁴⁹⁰. Pindakara is mentioned in the Arthaśāstra as well⁴⁹¹. Pindaka is the same as Pindakara. The commentator Bhaṭṭasvāmī is of opinion that the tax imposed on the whole village was known as Pindakara⁴⁹². Kielhorn identified the term Pindaka with Bhāgaḥbhōgakara. But this term appears to stand for Hiranya (payment in cash) mentioned in other inscriptions⁴⁹³.

From the above details obtained from inscriptions it would appear that various kinds of tax were actually levied and extracted from the villagers, and for which again, many officers were employed. This picture of various taxes and levies is, however, largely available from the records issued during the period when the imperial power exercised its absolute authority over the villages. It has been already pointed out that all these levies were actually realised by the state authority from the time of the Mauryas. Before that, there were of

course some kinds of revenue to be paid either in cash or kind to the king. But all other levies as described above were subsequently imposed to augment the resources of the state treasury, a detailed account of which is to be found in the Arthasāstra and the Smṛiti works. More levies were imposed during the time of the Guptas, the Pālas and the Senas when the royal authority could bring the villages under their direct administrative control.

XII. A. Village and People

From the above survey of the village and rural life of ancient Bengal it would appear that each village was a self-contained and self-sufficient unit. As at present, the village in ancient Bengal was primarily agricultural. It does not, however, mean that a village was bereft of any industry and craft. On the other hand, both agriculture and industry developed equally. Along with this development there was no lacking in trade and commerce. But the village economy in Bengal has remained essentially agricultural through centuries. There were small and large villages, and the settlement of the agriculturists, and craftsmen was largely conditioned by the size and population of the village as well as by its economic potentiality.

Originally, each village was the habitat of the aboriginal and ancient peoples who were engaged in both food-gathering and food-producing activities. Along with this economy developed village industries which were primarily concerned with agricultural and food-gathering operations. With the gradual process of development, the villages made also advancements in diverse fields of activities which became more and more accentuated by the settlement of the more progressive and advanced people in villages. This happened with the infiltration of the advanced people from Upper India, more particularly with the coming of the Aryans and Aryanization that followed. As a result, all sorts of people, advanced or less advanced and primitive indigenes or aboriginals, lived in the villages under distinct socio-economic codes of life. A perusal of the literary and archaeological sources reveal that various sections of the people beginning from the Brāhmaṇas occupying the topmost position of the social ladder upto the Antyajās and the indigenes/aboriginals lived in the villages. From the study made in the preceding pages in regard to agricultural products

and crafts a fair picture emerges about the different sections of peoples living in the village. The Brāhmaṇas, the land-owning Mahattaras, Kuṭumbins, the Kshetrakāras, Bārujibis, landless labour, craftsmen like weavers, the Karmakāra, the Kumbhakāra, the Kaṇsakāra, the Mālākāra, the Chitrakāra, the Tailakāra, the Mōdaka, the Tāmbulika, the Sauṇḍika, the Dhīvara or Jālika, the Village people Gōpa, the Nāpita, the Rajaka, the Ābhira and the Naṭa rendering all social services thronged the villages. There were many other peoples in the villages like the Bāuri, the Charmakāra, the Ghaṭṭajīvi or Pāṭni, the Dolāvāhi, or Pāṭni, the Vyādha, the Hāḍi, the Dōm, the Jōlā, the Bhagatita, the Vedyā, the Māmsacheda, the Chaṇḍāla, the Kōl, the Bhilla, the Śavara, the Pulinda, the Meda, the Paṇḍrika, etc., rendering all sorts of menial services to the other classes of peoples. In some big and prosperous villages lived also the Śreshṭhīs as in Southern Rāḍha and Bhuriśreshṭhī (Bhursut) which was a village par-excellence of the Brāhmaṇas. Finally, were the Antyajās and the Ādivāsīs who were not allowed to live inside the village, but always outside its periphery.

All these diverse peoples conglomerated only in a large village. There were also villages with only some or a few of all these peoples. These villages may be called multitudinous^s and are larger in sizes. But there were also villages peopled by a single community. Such a village may be called unitary and is smaller in size. Generally, a unitary village was peopled by one particular community of the craftsmen or Antyajās or underdogs of the Brahmanical society. References to such villages are abundantly found in literary works, such as, Chaṇḍālagrāma. There were also some villages peopled by a single section of the several upper or middle caste groups. But a village was generally peopled by more than one community for meeting its needs.

These peoples again belonged to diverse ethnic and cultural groups. It has been discussed in the following chapters as to how all these peoples belonging to multi-racial and multi-cultural groups penetrated into Bengal from different parts of India and made their settlements all over Bengal and also as to how they contributed to the ethnic and cultural composition of the Bengali people. It has been also discussed that most of the village peoples had a primitive tribal base or origins and some of them in course of time succeeded in heightening their socio-economic position. This happened only after the Aryanization of the villages.

An analysis of the different classes of people of the village would reveal also that the class or socio-economic differentiations have been made largely on the basis of vocation which was again considered as the principal criterion for the social ranking and status. The Brāhmaṇas undoubtedly occupied the topmost position in the village. They were not, however, the actual producer of wealth. Those who produced wealth and made the village prosperous were not given any higher social status. There were of course land-owning classes who enjoyed a little higher position. The artisans and the landless labourers have not been also given any higher status and so also, the traders and the merchants. Then there were the primitive peoples and the Antyajās who were all untouchables.

This kind of class differentiations in the ancient villages of Bengal was, however, made after the Aryanization (discussed in the following Chapters) of the villages of Bengal. With the establishment of the Brahmanical hold, the socio-economic stratifications became more and more rigid. This would be evident from a perusal of the deterioration of the position held by certain sections of the people of a village. Classic examples may be cited in respect of the merchants and the craftsmen. It may be noted that before the 7th century A.D., the position of the merchants/traders and craftsmen appears to have been not at all low. A review of the epigraphic records points out that they were great helpers and integral parts of the administrative machinery. The craftsmen like Dhīmān, Viṭapāla, Mahīpāla, Śāśideva, Karnabhaddia, Tathāgatasar and the merchants like Buddhāmītra, Lokadatta, Raṇaka and other artisans like the Tantuvāya, the Karmakāra, the Kumbhakāra, the Kāṁsakāra, the Śāṅkhakāra, the Takshaṇa, the Sūtradhara, the Svarṇakāra, the Chitradhara and the merchant class like the Taulika, the Mōdaka, the Tāmbuli, the Gandhika, the Suvarṇavaṇik, the Tailakāra, the Dhīvara, etc., enjoyed high social position and played important roles in the governmental affairs. This was so because of the very fact that the artisans and merchants were considered as the real producers and distributors of wealth. The Śūdras and the Antyajās were bereft of any social prestige whatsoever though they were also the producers of wealth. They had been relegated to a very low position. In fact, all sorts of manual labour was looked down upon by the Brāhmaṇas sitting at the top.

From the 8th century A.D., the situation as delineated above changed considerably. Industry and commerce declined and agriculture became the primary

economic source of the village. With the decline of industry and commerce, the position of the artisans and the merchants also deteriorated because they had little part to play in the production and distribution of wealth. If the position of the merchants and craftsmen could have been retained in tact then in the Bṛihaddharma-purāṇa and Brahmavaivarta-purāṇa, they would not have been recognised as fallen or downtrodden.

It would appear from a perusal of the literary texts and epigraphic records that the Brahmins were all powerful, and they enjoyed a privileged position in all spheres of the village life. They introduced separate rules for different caste groups, but they themselves were outside the jurisdiction of rules and regulations designed for other caste orders. There were again differences in respect of norms of guiding the relationship between different castes. Since the Brahmins were beyond the purview of the social norms, they naturally had their own taboos or prohibitions in respect of their own life-patterns. As for instance, they were prohibited from taking meals from the lower caste peoples and the Antyajas. In general, no food was to be taken by a Brāhmaṇa from a Śūdra. Violation of this rule can be, however, mitigated by the performance of purificatory rites. But at the same time, it has been enjoined that during distress and danger, even the Brāhmaṇa could take cooked food, Pāyasa and even water from the low caste peoples, for which, however, he had to repent only. The Brahmins formulated norms and rules for regulating marriages. Each Brahmanical caste has been all throughout an endogamous social unit, but most curiously, relaxations have been made for the Brahmins. As for instance, a Brahmin could marry a woman of lower caste order, but at the same time, it has been laid down that the said married woman is not to be on a par with a pure Brahmin wife. Jīmūtavāhana lays down that even if a Brahmin enters into sex relation with a woman of a lower order, he can not be accused of moral turpitude. The sin thus committed can be simply done away with by repenting. It appears from Jīmūtavāhana that it is more sinful to marry a woman of a lower order than to have any sex relation with her. Even Vyābhichāras committed by the Brāhmaṇas and other peoples received sanctions under different garbs. That this actually happened becomes evident from Prabodha-chandradaya-nāṭaka wherein a Brahmin is described to have uttered : "My mother is not of good order, I have married a Sat-Kshatriya woman ; in this respect, I am superior to my father". This becomes further clear from all sorts of sex-licenses practised by the Brahmins and others, more particularly in the cities and towns. Though the Brahmins were not the

actual producers and distributors of wealth, they enjoyed all sorts of privileges, social and economic. A review of the textual references reveals that the Brahmins themselves were responsible for introducing all social laxities, and in fact, the whole social atmosphere of the village of ancient Bengal was polluted by the Brahmins. This was so more particularly because of the very fact that the Brahmins from Upper India came to Bengal with very few womenfolk, and as such, they had no other alternative but to take their wives from the local people and even to satisfy their sexual urge with all other classes of women who were otherwise considered as low and untouchables in the society.

Next to the Brahmins, were the people belonging to the Madhyama caste group, who enjoyed a little better position than the Antyajās or underdogs of the ancient villages of Bengal. The ancient villages of Bengal were primarily peopled by these Antyajās comprising all the ancient indigenes and the tribal aborigines. A long list of these Adhamas and Antyajās can be prepared from the available sources. Many of the Antyajās were again untouchables. It would be quite relevant to know a little about the general life-patterns of these Antyaja people of ancient Bengal.

There were many villages in ancient Bengal wholly peopled by the Antyajās. This becomes clear from a study of the names of the villages, many of which actually bear the name of the community to which the dwellers belonged/ belong even today. There are again many villages, the names of which are either of Austric or Dravidian in origins. These two points clearly submit that there were villages par-excellence of the Antyajās and tribal peoples as well.

In general, the dwellers in the villages belonged mostly to the different sections or classes of the people. After the Aryanization of the villages, the services of the Antyajās were essentially required for doing all sorts of unclean and manual works. They were not, however, allowed to stay inside the village along with others. On the other hand, the Antyajās lived outside the village periphery in their thatched huts. They were untouchables to the Brahmins and even walking over their shadows were considered to be a sin. Their general life-patterns have been also vividly described in some literary texts. These common people were at the mercy of government officials as well as of the social leaders. They had no leader of their own. They were quite helpless in all social affairs of the village.

A glowing account of the condition of these people has been given in the Saduktikarnāmrta wherein the poet says : "The children are ill of hunger, body lean and thin like a dead body". They had nothing in possession. They had to simply beg even for a needle for knitting their wornout clothes. They lived in abject poverty. And the Antyajās wore torn-out clothes and with their eyes in the cavity out of hunger they have been described as crying for food and their house-wives with tears praying for rice. In another place of the said work, the poet describes an Antyaja's house as : "The posts are moving, the mud-wall falling down and the straws of the roof are flying away and the house is being thronged by the fox in search of earth-worms. The Prākṛita-paiṅgala similarly has drawn a gloomy picture of the common people of the 9th and 10th century Bengali villages as : "I am a helpless woman and my beggar husband always takes poison. What will happen to me". These are indeed the common words of the Antyaja people. Similarly, in the Charyyāpadas as well the same pathetic picture of these downtrodden people has been depicted. It is stated : "My house on a Tilā (high place/mound/small hill-top) is bereft of any neighbour, no rice in pot, always hungry, but my family is growing like that of the fox and I have no food⁴⁹⁴". Since this was the general condition of the people, the Sādhakas of the Charyyāpadas refer to the void by giving an account of the sufferings and miseries of the people and argue that the only way to escape from all these is the attainment of Nirvāna (Salvation). The poets of the Charyyāpadas scorn at the Brahmin-controlled society ridiculing the Brahmin as Nedā-bāmun (bald-headed brahmin). They also express their non-adherence to all enjoyments. It is, however, to be noted that the Siddhāchāryas included both the Brahmins and the people of the lower order. Most of the Brahmin Siddhāchāryas were Antyajās : perhaps originally persons belonging to the lower order of the society.
life

During the Aryanization some of the peoples belonging to the lower order were perhaps elevated to Brahmanhood. Kukkurīpāda and Luipāda appear to have been elevated to this high position. There is no trace of any Aryan element in their names nor any indication to the effect that they were Brahmins before. Accordingly, it may be said that they came from lower orders of the society. If they were not so, it becomes very difficult to explain as to how they should represent so vividly the domestic life-patterns of the common people of the village. On the other hand, this can explain better their attitude towards the Brahmins and also their protest against the Brahmanical iron curtain.

The villages of ancient Bengal were no doubt mostly self-contained and self-sufficient. Many of the villages were also prosperous and the life was quite easy-going. The village life-patterns, however, differed from one section of people to another. The well-to-do class led a life of pleasure. It was indeed a life in milk and honey including pursuing sensuous life. On the other hand, hunger, poverty, exploitation, and all sorts of sufferings and miseries pervaded the village life of ancient Bengal. The common people were always at the mercy of the richer and more prosperous sections of the villagers. The Antyajās and others who were deprived of their living had to pass a life of miseries and sufferings. This grim picture of the people of ancient Bengal has been continuing from very ancient times till today.

That different sections of people lived in the villages of ancient Bengal becomes evident also from an examination of details of food-articles, dress and ornaments, sports and festivities of the people of ancient Bengal. An account of the agronomic products, village industries, general economic condition in the villages, etc., has been already given. Here only a few salient points may be briefly delineated.

While dealing with food-articles of the people, a particular reference may be made to the Prākṛta-paiṅgala wherein details of food-articles have been described itemwise⁴⁹⁵. Food articles as described in various records consisted of rice, ghee (clarified butter) prepared from cow's milk, fish and leaves of jute. Fish and meat which are the most common and popular food-articles were/are not, however, eaten by the Brāhmaṇas outside Bengal. Both fish and meat were/are available in plenty in Bengal, and the Bengali Brahmins had broken their taboo on fish and meat eating. For giving a Sastric sanction Bhavadeva-Bhaṭṭa urged that "there is no crime in eating fish and meat" excepting on certain days⁴⁹⁶. The Bṛihaddharma-purāṇa (II.5. 44-46) recommends for the Brāhmaṇas only those fishes which are white and bear scales. The Madana-pāḍā Copper plate inscription of Viśvarūpasena and Barrackpur Copper plate of Vijayasena refer to eating of fruits like mango, jack-fruit, betel-nut, coconut, etc. All these fruits, plants are all mentioned in those inscriptions⁴⁹⁷. Hiuen-Tsang in his account has also referred to the cultivation of jack-fruit trees in Varendra and other places⁴⁹⁸. As to the cultivation of other plants and products, a detailed discussion has been already made in the preceding pages. Most significantly, no reference to Dāl or pulse is found in the Charyyāpadas, Prākṛta-paiṅgala,

Naishādacharita and Saduktikarnāmrta. It appears that in ancient Bengal, people were not accustomed to consume Dāl as a primary food - item as it is now. Dāl was perhaps a later introduction from Upper India. Rice was of course the principal food-article of both low and high people. Next comes fish and meat which are frequently referred to. Deer-meat was most favourite for the primitive aborigines like the Śavaras and the Palindas, the Nishādas, etc. Besides, drinking appears to have been quite common, though disapproved in the Bṛhaddharma-purāṇa (II.6.98). The Charyyāpadas present a lively account of the wine shop and the fermentation of wine with fibres of roots of plants. Chewing of betel and betel-leaves along with camphor is also referred to in one of the songs of the Charyyāpadas. As to the custom of eating, a glowing account has been given in the Prākṛita-paiṅgala which represents a wife serving her husband with worm rice on plaintain leaf, ghee, milk, fish-curry, Nālitāśāk. The Naishādacharita has presented an account of the marriage feast as well. A rich banquet consisted of several vegetables, fish curries, meat, sweet cakes, drinks, etc. This was followed by chewing of betel-leaves⁴⁹⁹. It has been already pointed out that the ordinary people or the Antyajās could hardly manage to have all these food-articles. They were satisfied with simple boiled rice, vegetables, fish and a little sweet, if obtained. It appears that there has been no change in food-articles and food-habits since bygone days.

Regarding dress and ornaments of the village people, a picture can be drawn from both the literary accounts and archaeological records including inscriptions, terracotta plaques, sculptures and paintings. It would be evident that the dress of the higher classes was different from the dress of the common people. The higher classes of people used to wear short and long Dhoti and also trousers, shorts and Luṅgi, and the lower garment was always kept below the navel with the help of a girdle. More prosperous people used to wear dress of various colours bearing different designs. The texture of their clothings was also finer. The upper garment of the higher classes consisted of scarfs as well. They used to keep long hair falling on their shoulders. Sometimes, hair was arranged in top-knots. Even the male folk used to wear all sorts of ornaments like earrings, necklaces, armlets, bangles, bracelets anklets, girdles, etc. Sometimes, they were even accustomed to use crowns, diadems and caps. The females of the higher class wore Śāḍī (woman's cloth) keeping the upper part mostly uncovered. Even there are indications from the terracotta plaque representations at Pāhārpur regarding wearing of Śāḍī in the present day Bengali fashion. Sometimes, they also used to cover the upper part of the body with a dress like blouse, Kucha-bandha and other types of garment for covering their breast. They used to bear long hair falling on the neck and some-

times arranged in knots on the top or bun at the back. They wore all sorts of ornaments, crown, diadem Kundalas, earrings, necklaces of pearls and gold, armlets, bracelets, anklets, ornamented girdles, etc. Some of these ornaments were also inlaid with precious stones.

But the dress of the common people was, however, different. The males generally wore a short and narrow Dhoti. They were also used to wear trousers, shorts and Luṅgis. Tunies were also used. Simple ornaments like earrings, bangles, armlets, necklace, etc., were worn. Like the people of the high classes, they were also used to have long hair falling on their shoulders and sometimes arranged in knots. The Antyajās and the primitives were even bereft of these essential garments and ornaments. The Śavaras used to wear girdles of leaves and short Dhotis. Their jackets and Dhotis were mostly worn out. Even the females of the common people wore simple Śādīs, shorts or trousers with the upper portion being left uncovered. The Antyaja women decorated themselves with leaves and flowers. Various ornaments worn by them like earrings, necklace, etc. were all made of flowers, fruits, etc.

Both inscriptions and literary texts refer also to the use of various cosmetics, collyrium, etc., by the women. From the Saduktikarnāmṛta it is learnt that the village women used to put collyrium on the forehead. Similarly, in the Āryasaptasatī there are references to the application of collyrium on the forehead and eyes and lac on feet⁵⁰⁰. Most interestingly, there is a reference to the use of vermillion inside the partings of the hair of the married woman as indicated in the Manahali Copper plate inscription of Madanapāla⁵⁰¹. Other cosmetics included sandal wood powder, lac, etc. The womenfolk were even used to redden their lips with vermillion. It would appear that in respect of dress/garments as well there has been very little change amongst the village people. The continuity of Bengali tradition till today becomes evident also from a study of the village sports, amusements and festivities.

From both literary texts and archaeological records consisting mostly of the terracotta plaques discovered from Pāhāḍpur and Maynāmatī it is possible to draw a picture of games and music of the village people of ancient Bengal. There existed differences in respect of sports or games played by the higher and the lower sections of the villagers. It appears from the study of the Pavanadūta

and the Charyyāgīti that dice and chess games were perhaps most popular with Games, the high class peoples. Dice-playing was undoubtedly the most ancient music and game in India, but it is not known exactly when the game of chess dance was introduced into Bengal. The Charyyāpadas give a vivid account of the chess-playing⁵⁰². But the games of the lower people mainly consisted of running, fighting, wrestling and all other kinds of physical exercises. In the Pavanadūta, there are of course references to water-games and gardening. These were perhaps mostly confined to the women belonging to the high class.

Besides games and sports, villagers also used to engage themselves in all sorts of musical and theatrical performances. The Rāmacharita (III, 29) refers to different kinds of Muraja or tabor. It is stated that the city of Rāmāvatī was resonant with the music of tabor of many varieties. This was specially practised in Varendrī⁵⁰³. It appears that this playing on the tabor was primarily performed by a special class of people whose occupation was to play on different musical instruments. There are also references to Vīṇā or lyre with thirty-two strings in the Bauddhagān-ō-dōhā. The commentary on the Rāmacharita also refers to Muruja, i.e., flute. The Gītāgovinda has given an account of Kṛṣṇa's flute⁵⁰⁴. References to several other musical instruments like Padhaha (Gongs), Mādala (drums), Dundubhi (a kind of Kettledrum) and Vīṇā (lyre) are to be found also in the Charyyāpadas⁵⁰⁵. The Āryasaptasati also refers to Vīṇā⁵⁰⁶. In accompaniment with all these musical instruments, singing and dancing used to be performed by village people. There are again frequent references to both music and dancing in literature, inscriptions and in the representations on the terracotta plaques discovered from Pāhāḍpur and Maynāmatī. The Bhuvaneśvara inscription of Bhaṭṭabhadradeva refers to the meeting hall of music implying thereby that there used to be a separate hall meant for singing and dancing⁵⁰⁷. The Rāmacharita gives also a beautiful account "of the pleasing notes of different musical instruments, which were sonorous, deep and sweet which produced full effect through the acquisition of the harmony of the vocal music and which excelled the performances of the celestial musician". In the next Śloka, a reference has been also made to dancing passionately⁵⁰⁸. Though this account refers more particularly to singing and dancing at the palace of Rāmāvatī, there seems to be little doubt that those musicians and dancers were perhaps mostly the Naṭa and Naṭis who lived primarily in the villages excelling in musical and dancing performances. Further, the representations on the terracotta plaques from Pāhāḍpur depict dancing in different postures in accompaniment with musical instruments⁵⁰⁹.

These representations deal with the singers and dancers of the village people of different sections. Again, the Charyyāpadas gives a vivid account of the singing and dancing of the people belonging to the lower classes, more particularly of the Dōms, the Śavaras, etc.⁵¹⁰. In the Charyyāpadas, there is a fascinating account of a Dombī dancing on a lotus bearing 64 petals⁵¹¹. The songs of the Charyyāpada also refer to the performance of Buddhanātaka in accompaniment with songs and dances⁵¹². Similarly, the Āryasaptasati speaks of the dancing of womenfolk⁵¹³. All these singing, dancing and theatrical performances were perhaps done by the professional village peoples who were engaged in all these amusements, these both in the villages and towns.

From a study of the village life of ancient Bengal, it would be evident that in a large village there were several classes of people, the high, middle and the commoners. But the life of the common people, both men and women, was quite distinct from those of the higher classes. Both men and women were engaged in their daily activities from dawn to dusk. A beautiful description of the village women has been given in the Saduktikarnāmrta of the poet Lakshīdhara. This account refers more particularly to the Kulastrīs of the ancient villages of Bengal. The poet says : "Her covered head is bent down with shame of its own accord, her talk is regulated, soft and sweet, as if by these, this lady is loudly speaking of her family prestige"⁵¹⁴. Śaraṇa similarly gives a vivid account of the busy life of the village men and women. It is said that the peasants have left the homes at dawn for agricultural works and their women coming back to home after completing their morning works before the return of their husbands⁵¹⁵. This refers to the common people. The Deopārā inscription also refers to the simple life of the common people and also as to how the wives of the rich people in the villages used to be trained by the wives of the town people or the city-dwellers in respect of wearing ornaments and other behaviour patterns. It is stated in the inscription that through the grace of the king, the Brāhmaṇas versed in the Vedas have become the possessors of so much wealth that their wives have to be trained by the wives of the townspeople to recognise and distinguish pearls, pieces of emerald, silver coins and gold from their similarity with seeds of cotton, leaves of Śāka, bottle gourd flowers, developed seeds of pomegranate and the blooming flowers of the creepers of pumpkin-gourd (Beninkasaceriaprā)⁵¹⁶. It thus appears that even the wives of the rich Brahmin living in the village had no knowledge about the precious and semi-precious stones which are in particular the rich treasures of the townsmen.

They were acquainted more intimately with seeds and fruits. The richer people of the village could even afford to purchase precious stones, but failed to differentiate or distinguish or recognise them. That is why the wives of the city-bred people were engaged to train the rich women of the village to make differentiation or distinction between the above mentioned precious stones and seeds and fruits. This was done by comparing the precious stones with the floral specimens like leaves and fruits with which the village people were more acquainted and which were their usual ornaments. These rich peoples exploited also other sections, particularly peasants. From Manu and Kauṭilya, it is learnt that the peasant women had to work under the order of the village headman who lived on the share of the agricultural produces of the villagers. Yet, these women had to do unpaid works - filling granaries, taking out things from the house, cleaning and decorating houses, working in the field, etc. Even raw materials used to be taken free from them⁵¹⁷. Here are the germs of feudalism and the motivation to exploit the poor people, and that even the women were not excluded.

The picture of the Antyajās is, however, entirely different. They mostly lived outside the village and engaged themselves in all sorts of unclean and manual work. The Charyyāpadas have given beautiful accounts of the Śavaras, the Dōmbas and the Dōmbīs in different songs⁵¹⁸. It is stated that in the country and of the house of the Śavara, cotton-flowers have blossomed and the Śavaris rejoiced because Kaṅguchina fruits have ripened. The Śavari girl wearing peacock's feather and Guṇjari garland and Kuṇḍalas is also described as roaming in the forest⁵¹⁹. Similarly, a picture of the Dōmbas and the Dōmbīs has been also drawn by the poets of the Charyyāpadas. Abject poverty of these people is the characteristic feature of the village life of ancient Bengal. In spite of their poverty, they, however, led a happy life of merriment engaged in music and dancing.

The Village people of ancient Bengal led a simple and happy life no doubt. Some of them became of course wealthy, and they separated themselves from the bulk of the village folk. Since the villages in ancient Bengal were purely agricultural, all their activities and life-patterns centered round agriculture. They had perhaps little tendency to lead a life of ease and comfort including their abhorrence to sensuous laxity. They had their own ideals and adhered strictly to their respective socio-religious customs, rites and practices. At the same time, the village people were averse to the townfolk. They did not like

the life-patterns of the city-bred people. A vivid account of the dislike of the village folk for the ways of life of the townsfolk has been given in the Āryasaptasati. It is stated : "Oh Sakhi ! walk with straight steps, give up, all customs of the town"⁵²⁰. It is perhaps because of this that Vātsyāyana in his Kāmasūtra has urged the city-bred Nagaraka to introduce the city culture amongst the village people⁵²¹. In fact, the village life was in contrast to the city life. This will be evident from a resume on city-life in ancient Bengal.

B. CITY : PEOPLE AND LIFE

Though from very early times the settlements of the ancient people of Bengal in general centered round the villages or rural areas, and the origins and development of the Bengali culture have been all throughout basically village-oriented yet like other parts of India and of the world ancient Bengal was not devoid of any cities or towns. Since the main concern of the present dissertation relates to the ancient people and culture of Bengal, which are primarily rural in nature and character, here only a generalized treatment of the city-life has been made to focus on certain basic differences in city and village life patterns.

It is generally held that with the spread of human settlements and growth of population, industries and crafts, commerce, diverse religious approaches, etc., cities, market-places, ports, harbours, etc., sprang up along the river valleys or trade routes or by the sea-sides of Bengal for meeting the growing needs of a developing society. A lively and growing society with active creative faculties in all spheres of life would create cities to serve its higher needs. These needs of a developing society are political, administrative, religious, commercial, cities etc. Some of these independently or jointly and more particularly localization and specialization of industries gave rise to cities and their growth, and as a result, urbanization began. With the passage of time, these cities became more and more complex and variegated along with the growing needs of the people. The process of urbanization and growth of cities in ancient Bengal followed the same trends and patterns as can be witnessed in many other countries. These processes are primarily the growth of population, consolidation and expansion of political apparatus social and economic necessities, industrialization and commercialization and religious behaviour patterns. Accordingly, arose business centre like Tāmralipti, military centres like Koṭivarsha, Bāṅgaḍ, Vikramapura, etc., administrative centres like Rāmāvatī, Lakshmaṇāvatī, Vijaypurī, etc., and religious

centres like Karṇasuvarṇa, Sōmapura, Puṇḍravardhana, etc., in different parts of Bengal. A list of ancient cities of Bengal has been prepared and their number is not less than 141 as referred to in literary texts and epigraphic records (Map. 8)

From very early times, several terms have been used in the literary and epigraphic records to denote a city or town, such as, Nagara, Pura, Purī, Pur, Nagarī, Pattani, Sthāniya, etc. Of these terms, Nagara and Pura denote city or town in general, though the latter originally meant only a fort. But later on, the two terms became synonymous. The term Sthāniya, more particularly, refers to an administrative center and Pattana, to a port. Most interestingly, the names of the cities in ancient Bengal are generally to be found with suffixes Nagara and Pura. Thus there are cities named as Puṇḍravardhananagara (present Mahāsthān, Bogrā dist. Bāṅglādeś), Śūranagara (identity uncertain, West Bengal), Vardhamānanagara (present Burdwan in West Bengal), Skandanagara (unidentified; Rāmāvatīnagara probably in North Bengal), etc. Similarly, there are cities also ending with the word Pura as Vardhamānapura, Gauḍapura (Gauḍa in North Bengal), Dantapura (modern Dānton, Midnapur, West Bengal), Sīṃhapura (Sihapura in Rāḍha, West Bengal), Pāhāḍpur (Rājsāhi, Bāṅglādeś), etc. Again, the same city has been also sometimes mentioned with the suffixes of either Pura or Nagara. As for instance, a reference may be made to Puṇḍravardhananagara and Puṇḍravardhanapura. The names of some cities again end with the word Grāma, such as, Suvarṇagrāma, Saptagrāma (Hugli dist. West Bengal), Falgugrāma (Faridpur dist. Bāṅglādeś), etc. Cities were also named after the ruling monarchs. These were primarily capital cities and administrative centres like Rāmāvatī (Rāmāvatīnagara named after the Pala king Rāmāpāla), Vijayanagara (named after the Sena king Vijayasena), Śūranagara (named after the Śūra ruling family), Lakshmaṇāvatī (Maldah, West Bengal, named after Lakshmaṇasena), etc. Again, some cities are named after a country/region/territorial unit like Puṇḍravardhananagara, Rāḍhāpurī (named after the territorial unit), etc. Further, there were cities named after the predominant tribe living therein, such as Puṇḍravardhana (city of the Puṇḍra tribe), Gauḍapura (city of the Gauḍa tribe), etc. Some ports and market-towns are again found named after metals as Tāmralipti (Copper; present Tamluk), Suvarṇagrāma (gold; present Suvarṇagrāma, a village, opposite of Munsiguñj in the district of Dacca, present Bāṅglādeś), Karṇasuvarṇa (gold; Rāṅgāmāti, in the district of Mursīdābād, West Bengal), etc. Further, many cities are also named after rivers, tanks, etc., such as Trivenī (present Trivenī), Pushkarāṇa (Pōkharṇā), etc. Several other cities are again found named after flowers creepers,

moon and also demon. An analysis of the names of these cities would reveal also their respective nature and character. Again, there were capital cities bearing the names of the kingdoms. This is clear from Hiuen Tsang's account which refers to four principal capital cities and kingdoms bearing identical names Puṇḍravardhana (Mahāsthān, North Bengal), Samatāṭa (South and East Bengal), Karṇasuvarṇa (West Bengal) and Tāmralipti (South and West Bengal⁵²²). Thus the cities of ancient Bengal were named variously.

Many cities sprang up in different parts of Bengal in the period from 3rd century B.C. to 12th century A.D. Accounts of these cities are to be found in both literary and epigraphic records. Archaeological excavations have also brought to light ruins of a few old cities. In this context, particular references may be made to the unearthing of the ancient city and monastery relics from Pāhāḍpur (Rājsāhi dist), Maināmatī (Comilla, Bāṅglādeś), Mahāsthān and Puṇḍravardhana (Bogra dist., Bāṅglādeś), Karṇasuvarṇa and Raktamṛttikāmahāvihāra⁵²³, etc. These centres served political, economic and religious purposes. Bāṅgaḍ (Dinājpur, West Bengal) was a fort and a capital city⁵²⁴. It is learnt that all cities were not uniform in size, in population and in their respective nature and character. This would be clear from the accounts of the four cities of Bengal given by the Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsang⁵²⁵. Some cities were large and others, small. In general, the cities were surrounded either by a wall, ditch or trench. The boundaries of a city was well-marked by wall, ditch, trench, river, roads, etc. In ancient times, a city contained palace in the centre, big houses, ponds/tanks, gardens, temples, etc. Roads in the cities in general ran parallel from North to South and East to West. On both sides of the roads were residential houses, shops, etc. In the suburbs of most of the cities were the monasteries, temples, etc., wherein lived the monks, priests, etc., accounts of which have been given by the pilgrim Hiuen Tsang⁵²⁶. All these religious establishments were largely maintained by the city people.

Most of the big cities were crowded with palatial buildings as in the case of Rāmāvatī described in the Rāmācharita⁵²⁷. Similarly, Puṇḍravardhana has been described as the 'crest jewel of Varendrī'. Here, it would be interesting to give an account of the prosperous condition of the cities of ancient Bengal as can be gleaned from the accounts of Rāmāvatī and Puṇḍravardhana given by Sandhyākaranandī in the Rāmācharita. Rāmāvatī was a beautiful and prosperous

city with rows of palaces. It is stated that the sky was illuminated with a network of rays diffused from the ornaments set with diamonds, pearls, emeralds, lapis lazuli, rubies, sapphires, etc. The city was decorated with very fine and costly articles made of gold bearing artistic designs. The city looked charming on account of variegated garments of fine texture and also mask, black aloe, sandal, saffron and camphor. The whole atmosphere was vibrated with the pleasing notes of various musical instruments which were sonorous, deep and sweet and which produced full effect through the acquisition of harmony with the vocal music and which excelled the performances of Tumbara, the celestial musician⁵²⁸. Similar accounts of Puṇḍravardhana and Vijayapurī are also to be found. Some of the cities originated and developed centering round the religious and pilgrimage centres. These were also the capital cities. Other cities were primarily commercial such as, Tāmralipti, Bhurīśreshṭhikā, etc.

Peoples belonging to all sections or classes engaged in diverse vocations lived in the cities. In the capital or administrative or military centres, the king, administrators and other officials, etc., lived primarily. The religious or pilgrimage centres were also loci of educational institutions. As such, in these cities lived the monks, worshippers, pilgrims, teachers, students, etc. The businessmen, traders and craftsmen dwelt primarily in trade and industrial centres, which were under the control of the Śresthīs, Sārthavāhas, Kulikas and other guild chiefs. Besides, in all these cities lived different craftsmen like the Karmakāra, the Kāṁsakāra, the Śāṁkhakāra, the Mālākāra, the Sūtradhara, the Sauṇḍika, the Tantuvāya, the Svarṇakāra, the Suvarṇavanik, the Gandhavanik, the Aṭṭalikāra, etc. Again, for the services of the city peoples lived the Rajakas, the Nāpitas, the Gopas, etc. Besides, for rendering manual labour and doing all unclean jobs were the Antyajās like the Doms, the Chaṇḍālas, the Dōlāvāhis, the Charmakāras, Māṁsachhedakas, etc. Since the last group of peoples belonged to the lowest order of the society and were untouchables, they were not allowed to live inside the city area, but in its peripheries only. It is quite evident that for the services to be rendered to the city people, even the craftsmen and the Antyajās lived in and near a city for earning their livelihood.

From the available accounts of the ancient cities of Bengal, it appears that the cities in general were rich and prosperous. All wealth actually flowed into the cities. The cities were also the distributors of money. The concentration of wealth and provisions of all amenities of life gave the people of the towns

or cities the freedom of living. In contrast to the Bengali village life, the life of a city-bred man was entirely different. The life of a Nagaraka in ancient Bengal was not perhaps different from the one presented by Vātsyāyana. Accordingly, while presenting a picture of a city life of ancient Bengal, a particular reference is to be made to Vātsyāyana's ideal of city life. Vātsyāyana has also made a particular reference to the ladies of the royal courts of Gauda-Vaṅga who were most shamelessly engaged in all sorts of erotic affairs with the palace Brahmins, officers and even servants. He says that in the cities the rich people used to engage even the maid servants for their pleasures. The city-bred people had also Vararamā and Devadāsīs who were used to be sold as movable property⁵²⁹. Right of enjoyment with them becomes also clear from Jīmūtavāhana's prescriptions⁵³⁰. Jīmūtavāhana has actually referred to the practice of keeping female City-bred slaves who were "women kept for enjoyment"⁵³¹. Besides, there are records referring to licenses and erotic life-patterns of the city people as described in Dhōyī's Pavanadūta and Sandhyākaranandī's Rāmacharita and also in inscriptions. In both literary and epigraphic records, praiseworthy words have been expressed in favour of the courtesans, court-dancers and court-ladies. The Edilpur Copper plate of Keśavasena refers to the ladies of the city as gazing upon the king at the time of passing through the city⁵³². The king also used to maintain harem. This is clear from the Belāva Copper plate⁵³³. It is said that Sāmalavarman had his own "seraglio which was full of the daughters of many kings". This shows that even after the 8th century A.D., the erotic life-pattern of the city people continued unabated. In this connection, an interesting reference may also be made to the Rājatarāṅginī which gives an account of the Devadāsī of a temple of Puṇḍravardhana⁵³⁴. This Devadāsī was the great dancer Kamalā who excelled in dancing, singing and playing on musical instruments. The institution of Devadāsī figures also prominently in the later period. It was more particularly so with regard to the temples in the cities or in their neighbourhood. The Devadāsīs though offered to the deities, were in fact Vararamā or Devavaravanitā. They became the close associates of the rich people to satisfy their desires. It was perhaps because of this that Dhōyī, Sandhyākaranandī and Bhavadevabhāṭṭa have spoken highly of their beauty, dress and experience in erotic affairs. Dhōyī refers to these women in a temple erected by the Sena king Lakshmaṇasena in Suhma⁵³⁵. The Rāmacharita (III.37) refers to Deva-varavanitā of Rāmāvatī. Similar references to the Devadāsīs are also to be found in the Deopārā inscription of Vijayasena and Bhuvaneśvara inscription of

Bhaṭṭabhavadeva⁵³⁶. The Deopārā inscription refers to "100 beautiful females, Devadāsīs the charms of whose bodies were enhanced [by wearing] of jewellery⁵³⁷". In fact, Bhavadevabhaṭṭa records that though dedicated to the Viṣṇu temple, these Devadāsīs have again animated "Kāmadevatā and that they were the prison-houses of the passionate and refuge of all beauties and meeting hall of music, dalliance and beauty"⁵³⁸. In this context, a particular reference may be made to Savarōtsava on the Daśamī day during the Durgā-pūjā when even the city-women dressed in leaves and covering their bodies with clay danced in erotic postures singing all sorts of erotic songs, and the people believed that if this is not done, the goddess Durgā will not be pleased. So also was with the Holi-utsav for pleasing Kāmadeva. This kind of sexual behaviour patterns are said to be pleasing to Durgā in the Bṛhaddharma-purāṇa. It appears that erotic lifepattern is fully illustrated during these festivals, and all these are being done in the name of the deities to justify their own wild and primitive life.

Erotic activities were quite common in the royal courts which gave incentives to other sections of the people in the city. Even the higher sections of the people were not punished for any sexual crime. Here, a reference may be made to a story in the Sek-Śubhadaya cited by Sen as to how a person of royal family committing a sexual crime escaped and women concerned was, however, dishonoured. In fact, characterlessness, living in pomp and grandeur, listening to eulogy, spending time in association with the court ladies, engagement in erotic activities, etc., were the patterns of the court-life, and their glowing accounts are to be found in all contemporaneous poems, inscriptions and also in representations of paintings, sculptures, etc.

It is not known for certain as to when the city court life in ancient Bengal became polluted/vitiated by licentious behaviour patterns. Perhaps, the development of Tantric cults and degradation of Buddhism and Brahmanism were largely responsible for sexual laxity and licentious life. The degradation of the city-life in this particular field of decency and sexual laxity affected its healthy development. In fact, both literary texts and epigraphic records of the later period are fully replete with references to such a prevailing condition in the city and the same prolonged in diverse forms.

All cities were not, however, alike in their respective nature and character. There were of course very few large cities like Rāmāvatī, Puṇḍravardhana and Tāmralipta, and in later periods some other large administrative centres grew up. Most of the cities were, however, small and their number was more numerous in comparison. Some of those small cities again originated and developed centering round religious establishments. A few of the small cities were again no better than prosperous villages. That some villages actually developed also into cities is proved by their very names ending in Grāma as already indicated. The small cities were not certainly so wealthy and prosperous as the large cities. Unfortunately, the contemporary texts or inscriptions hardly furnish any relevant information regarding the life-patterns of the people of the small cities.

The ancient cities of Bengal started, however, decaying with the decline of foreign trade which was the main channel of the flow of gold into the cities. This decline of foreign trade began more particularly from the 7th century A.D. The Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsang in the 7th century A.D. saw four principal cities, Puṇḍravardhana, Samatāṭa, Karṇasuvarṇa and Tāmralipti. Excepting the last one, three other cities were primarily administrative centres. From the 8th to the 9th century A.D., several large cities sprang up and their description indicates that they were mostly administrative and military centres, such as, Rāmāvatī, Lakshmaṇāvatī, Vijayapura, Vikramapura, Suvarṇanagara, etc. There were of course some other cities with religious, educational and other cultural bearings like Triveṇī, Sōmapura, Karṇasuvarṇa, Paṭṭikera, etc. Even archaeological excavations, as already pointed out, have brought to light remains of some cities which were primarily administrative centres and secondarily religious as Mahāsthān, Bāngarh, Rāmāvatī, Puṇḍravardhana, Karṇasuvarṇa, Paṭṭikera, etc. It would appear that in the earlier period the cities were primarily commercial, and subsequently, other cities grew up and developed centering round administrative and military establishments. The early medieval period, however, witnessed increasing growth of several commercial and business cities. In reality, all the primary cities of Bengal grew up around industry, trade and administrative centres.

The life-patterns of the city-people as briefly delineated above relate more particularly to the rich and prosperous cities, and their depiction primarily refers to the court and rich man's life. The city-bred persons' ways of life again centered round wealth and prosperity. It was indeed an easy life, a life of ease and comfort and also of amusements. A city-bred man had enough time and

opportunity to lead a sensuous life-pattern. This is in marked contrast to the village life-pattern. There were of course a few rich people even in the villages. But most of the village people living on food-producing activities and manual labour were poor. The poverty of the village people has been most glaringly described in some of the works wherein they have been portrayed as moving about with a decaying body wearing tottered clothes, eyes in the cavity due to hunger, begging for food, etc. In such a case, the common man and woman of the village had no other alternative but to lead a simple life. Both men and women were engaged in different works from dawn to dusk for earning their simple livelihood. The village woman has been actually called a simpleton by

Village life and city life Vātsyāyana, and she has been spoken of as very light and fickle⁵³⁹.
A beautiful description of the village woman has been given in the

Saduktikarnāmrta : "...the covered head is bent down with shame of his own accord ; her gait is slow and eyes are fixed on her feet, her talk is regulated, soft and sweet as if by these, this lady is loudly speaking of her family prestige". Similarly, Śaraṇa has also spoken highly of the busy life of the village women : "...peasants have gone to the fields for ploughing leaving their homes at dawn and their women are hastily coming home after finishing their business in the mart before the return of their husbands"⁵⁴⁰. Not only that, even the poor people of the village were exploited by the well-to-do villagers and government officials or the village headman who lived mainly on the share of the produces given by them. It has been already pointed out as to how the peasant women used to be engaged for doing all sorts of unpaid works, both in the fields and houses. As to the untouchables and the Antyajās, their life was most deplorable indeed.

The village people because of their poverty and lack of amenities had to lead a simple life with a greater sense of morality, higher ideals and religious fervour. That is why, the village people disliked the ways of life of the city-people. The Saduktikarnāmrta has made a specific reference to this fact that the village people did not like the ways of life of the rich people of the city. Even many writers have also asked the village people to give up the idea of imitating the city life-patterns. In fact, Govardhanācharya (Āryasaptarśati) has asked the village people to give up the ways of life of the city people. He says : "Oh Sakhi ! walk with straight steps and give up all customs of the town".⁵⁴¹

The villages of Bengal have mostly remained unchanged throughout centuries. This is not, however, true in regard to cities which have undergone

transformations or changes or have been wiped out altogether leaving only their remains underneath. It has been already pointed out that in ancient times, cities of Bengal were primarily commercial centres, many of which decayed due to natural causes like shifting of rivers, lack of water communication and provision for opportunities of obtaining articles of trade. In some of these business centres, administrative and military headquarters were also established serving both the purposes of regulating trade and running of general administration. Even on the decline of the commercial importance of a city, the administrative establishment continued for some time. The capital cities, however, changed very often with the successive ruling dynasties or kings. Not only that, even a particular king established more than one administrative centres or metropolises in his kingdom. Human agencies like invasion, natural calamities and other activities of natural agencies sometimes brought about the end or disappearance of a capital city. The religious cities growing around sectarian religious establishments passed through changes or decayed due to the decline of the popularity of the concerned religious beliefs and practices. An analysis of the causes leading to the decay or disappearance and transformation or changes of the cities of ancient Bengal would show that both natural and human agencies were operative separately or jointly in bringing about the decline or ruination of a city.

The cities have disappeared or passed through changes, but the villages have remained more or less stationary through ages, excepting of course that some villages grew and developed into cities. These were indeed mostly small cities which were no better than prosperous villages. Even a modern Bengali village today reminds one of the nature and character of the ancient villages. The Saduktikarnāmrta has given a wonderful description of the village with rich paddy-plants due to heavy monsoons, men-folk engaged in all sorts of agricultural operations, cows returning home at dusk, women busy in their domestic works and dressing themselves after their hard work and the younger ones sleeping. "In the Hemanta season, paddy-plants are harvested and kept in heaps in the courtyard; cows, bulls, goats are fully satisfied with food after returning and the whole village becomes charmed with the sound of Ikshujantra". The picture of a village as given in the Saduktikarnāmrta is not at all different from that of a modern village of Bengal.

Not only that, simplicity of life has been the characteristic trait of the village life throughout centuries. Their ways of living, food-articles, dress, manners and customs and even religious behaviour patterns have undergone little changes. The simplicity of the village women becomes evident even from Deopārā inscription⁵⁴². On the other hand, the ways of life of the people of the cities certainly changed considerably from age to age. This has been primarily due to contact with other alien cultures, some of which were perhaps superior in material cultural assemblages. Large scale cultural acculturations had also taken place in the cities, but the villages have remained through centuries little affected by such cultural contacts and changes because of their isolation. Further, the city people were more elastic and accommodative in regard to other alien cultural traits. The village people have been, however, all throughout more conservative in their approaches to different spheres of life. Isolation, conservativeness, self-contained economic self-sufficiency, etc., are the primary factors for the unchanging nature of the life-patterns of the people of the villages of Bengal.

The cities were/are no doubt rich and prosperous in respect of concentration and distribution of wealth. But the cities of ancient Bengal like their modern counterparts have been always dependent on the villages. The city did not produce anything for subsistence and raw materials for industrial products. For all these the cities were/are to depend entirely on the villages. As a result, it cannot be said that there was no contact between the village and the city. On the other hand, there were regular land and water communication links between the villages and the cities. As at present, the cities had to depend on the village people not only for supplying food articles, but also for manual labour. Accordingly, there were lively contact between the city-dwellers and the villagers. As a result of this kind of contact, the ways of life of the city people infiltrated into the villages. Here, a particular reference may be made to Vātsyāyana who has strongly upheld the city-life as an ideal one. That is why he prescribes that those who are living in the villages are to imitate and introduce city life-patterns in the villages. This he has done by drawing a vivid picture of the life-pattern of a Nāgaraka. A Nāgaraka is advised to give a taste of city-life amenities to the village by starting clubs, social gatherings, giving company to the people, assisting them and rendering them all help and co-operation⁵⁴³. What Vātsyāyana has said appears to have been in operation all throughout

centuries. A specific instance as to how the city people did actually initiated the village people to the city's ways of life may be cited from the contents of the Deopārā inscriptions as already referred to. It is stated that the wives of the rich Brahmins of the village were taught to distinguish between floral seeds and precious stones⁵⁴⁴. Not only so, even the village people working in the cities for cash-earning after coming back to their respective villages very often inducted the village people to the city-ways of life. All these produced contact between the cities and the villages, and as a result, the village life became vitiated or polluted as happening today. The vices of the city-life penetrated into the village life. Accordingly, even the village life became greatly affected and contaminated by the vices of the city-life. It can not be, however, said that all villages became polluted in such a fashion. There had been/are villages which are/were of course free from city-vices and contaminating traits of the city life. This has been so because of their self-sufficient economy and isolation. It is in this respect that the villages and the village life-pattern of Bengal based on agriculture and crafts, unchanging land system, class differentiations, etc., have remained mostly unchanged throughout centuries. But it was only during the last few centuries that lively cultural contact between the villages and cities caused by easy communications, influx of the village people into cities, spread of education, yearning for cash-earning, business transactions, etc., has produced tremendous changes in the traditional village life-patterns of Bengal.

It is in the villages that all ancient peoples of Bengal including the aborigines/indigenes made their settlements and dwellings. The aborigines and the indigenes were perhaps the oldest settlers in the village settlements. Accordingly, all these peoples have been treated in the following chapters.

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CHAPTER THREE

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73. Ibid, p. 327.
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Tulā dhuni dhuni asure asu
 asu dhuni dhuni niravara sesu
 Tufā dhuni dhuni sune āhāriv
 Suna lala āpanā chatarui.

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 251. ibid.
 252. JBORS, IV, p. 437; Ray, VI, p. 10; Sen, CV, p. 196.
 253. Śūśruta, Nīlīsāra, 45, 138-140, Ed. Majumdar sastri, AIDA, (McCrindle) p. 122, f.n. 3.
 254. ibid.
 255. Ed. Majumdar, Basak & others, RC, III, V. 17b, p. 91.
 256. Ed. Majumdar Sastri, MAIDP p. 122; Ed. Majumdar, HB, Vol. I, p. 650.
 257. ibid.
 258. Śrīdharadāsa, SKM, 3/5/28.
 259. ibid, 2/84/3; 2/136/5.
 260. ibid, 2/136/5.
 261. Yule, BSM, Vol. II, p. 115.
 262. Buarte, Barbosa, Hakluyt Society, London, Vol. II, 112, 146.
 263. Watt, DEPI, Vol. VI, Pt. II, p. 58 ff.
 264. Ray, SPP, 1347, (BS) p. 185; VI, p. 171.
 265. EI, Vol. XXII, pp. 155-158.
 266. Majumdar, IB, pp. 5-14; EI, Vol. XII, p. 136.
 267. Majumdar, IB, p. 14; Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, p. 239.
 268. ibid, pp. 158-162.
 269. Ray, SPP, 1347, (BS) p. 188.

270. Ed. Majumdar, HB, Vol. I, p. 66
271. Ibid.
272. Maṅgalkāvya, Ray, VI, (1359 BS), p. 185 ; Bandyopadhyaya KKC, p. 360 ; Ed. Majumdar, VDI (Madhya Yug) Vol. II, pp. 219, 222-23, 226, 155.
273. Ray, VI, p. 196
274. Ancl, No. 14, p. 36 ; Dasgupta, EPD, p. 19.
275. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, p. 337.
276. El, Vol. XII, p. 65 ff ; XIX, p. 115 ff ; Bhattacharya, KSV, (in Bengali) p. 41.
277. Maitra, SONEI, pp. 267-85.
278. El, Vol. XXIV, p. 329 ff.
279. Majumdar, IB, p. 53.
280. Dasgupta, EPD, pp. 11-34 ; Das, Rājāddidāṅgā, pp. 41, 42 ; Qadir, GTP, pp. 30-33 ; Dikshit, MAI, No. 55 ; PA, No. I p. 47, Goswami, EB, p. 32.
281. Dasgupta, EPD, pp. 11, 45 ; Bridget and Allchin, BIC, p. 198.
282. Bridget & Allchin, op.cit., p. 198 ; Dasgupta, EPD, pp. 17-28, 30-45.
283. Das, Rājāddidāṅgā, pp. 41-42 ; Bridget & Allchin, BIC, p. 293.
284. Bridget & Allchin, BIC, p. 293 ; IAAR, from 1964 onwards.
285. IAAR from 1964 onwards.
286. Das, Rājāddidāṅgā, pp. 50-73 ; MAI, No. 55 ; PA No. I, p. 47.
287. Saraswati, ESB, pp. 108-110 ; Majumdar, HAB, p. 645 ; Qadir, GTP, pp. 29-30 ; PA No. I, p. 47 ; MAI, No. 55.
288. Majumdar, HAB, pp. 342, 349, 643-652 ; Saraswati, ESB, pp. 97, 101, 103, 110-11 ; Dikshit, EP (MAI No. 55), IAAR, 1954-55, pp. 19-20, 23, 1955-56, pp. 61-62, 1956-57, pp. 29-30, 73-74, 1957-58, pp. 51 ff ; 72 ; 1958-59, pp. 55-56, 76-78, 1959-60, pp. 50 ff, 77-78 ; Das, Rājāddidāṅgā, pp. 50-73.
290. RVM, Canto IV. 36 (Vaṅgān-utkhāya tarasa-neta nausāadhanodyatān/nichakhāna jayastambhan gaṅgā-srōtantareshu sah).
291. El, Vol. XIV, p. 110 ff ; Sircar, SI, p. 385 ; Ray, VI, p. 183 ; IA, 1917, pp. 126-27 ; Sen, SHAIB, p. 246.
292. El, Vol. XII, p. 65 ff ; XIX, p. 115.
293. Maity and Mukherjee, CBI, p. 373 (Nauvāṭa) ; Majumdar, IB, pp. 48, 54.
294. El, Vol. IV, p. 248 ff.
295. Majumdar, IB, pp. 48-54.
296. Maity and Mukherjee, CBI, pp. 373, 381 (for Nauvāṭa) ; Maitreya, GLM, p. 14, IHQ, Vol. VI, p. 648 ; El, Vol. II, p. 351 ; Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, p. 98 (for Nauvāṭaka) (Khālimpur CP of Dharmapāla).
297. Majumdar, etal, RC, II, V. 10, p. 46.
298. Ibid, RC, II, V. 10, p. 46.
299. Ibid, I, V. 4, p. 4.
300. Dasgupta, BOCG, pp. 101, 121, 124 (naukā) , (vāhai nai, nai means boat ; Āge nāb na bhita disai ; nāb means boat ; bheīā means raft ; nābe means boat). [Āissi jāsi dōmbi Kāhari nābē] Dasgupta, op.cit., p. 119.
301. De, CGP, pp. 118-119.
302. Maity and Mukherjee, CBI, pp. 100 (Khālimpur CP of Dharmapāla), 168, 182 (Bhāgalpur CP of Nārāyaṇapāla), p. 202 (Bāngada CP of Mahāpāla), p. 215 (Manahali CP Grant of Madanapāla) (for Tarika, Tarika-an officer in charge of ferry boats. He looks after the boats, realises fares and maintains an account).
303. Ibid, p. 182 ; Sen, SHAIB, p. 541.
304. Maity and Mukherjee CBI, p. 373 ff.
305. Ibid, pp. 167, 174 ; IA, Vol. XV, pp. 304-310.
306. Ibid, pp. 67, 70.
307. Ibid, p. 67.
308. Ibid, pp. 76, 78.

309. Ibid, pp. 67-77.
310. Ibid, pp. 80, 83.
311. Das, Rājāśāṣṭāgā, pp. 56-58.
312. PASB, 1880, p. 141 ; El, Vol. VXIX, p. 277 ; Ray, VI, p. 184.
313. Dasgupta, BOCG, p. 117, Charyyā, 50 (Chārivāse gaḍḍāre diyā chañchālī).
314. Maitly and Mukherjee, CBI, p. 67 ff.
315. Saraswati, ESB, p. 23 ff ; (Ed) Majumdar, HB, Vol. I, pp. 450-451.
316. Ibid, pp. 37-38.
317. Maitly and Mukherjee, CBI, p. 112.
318. Majumdar, IB, pp. 52, 55 ; 47, 49 ; Maitly and Mukherjee, CBI, pp. 252, 246 (Deopārā Ins. of Vijayasena) ; IB, pp. 72, 77 ; CBI, pp. 260-264 (Nāthātī Ins. of Vallālasena).
319. Majumdar, IB, pp. 47, 49, 52, 55. (Deopārā Ins. of Vijayasena).
320. Majumdar, etal, RC, III, VV, 33-34 pp. 103-104.
321. Majumdar, IB, pp. 47, 52.
322. Sankalla, PAPJAP, p. 238 ; Sinha, SW (CI, 1961, WB & Sikkim), p. 4 ; Dasgupta, EPD, pp. 8, 12, 23, 80, 64 (Plate XLIV), 86.
323. Sinha, SW, (CI, 1961, WB & Sikkim) pp. 4, 9 ; Majumdar, HAB, pp. 625-36.
- 323a. Dasgupta, EPD, pp. 11-34.
324. Dasgupta, EPD, pp. 11-34 ; Bridget & Allchin, BIC, pp. 198, 99, 330-38.
325. Ibid.
326. Das, ADFM, pp. 36-38, 46-48 ; MASI, No. 55 ; PA, No. 1, p. 47 ; Qadir, GTP, p. 33.
327. Ed. Majumdar, HB, Vol. I, p. 656.
328. Majumdar, IB, pp. 123, 128.
329. Ibid.
330. Ed. Majumdar, HB, Vol. I, p. 656.
331. El, Vol. XV, pp. 301-315.
332. Pañchānen Tarkaratna, AP, Adhyāya 245, Ślokaś 21-27, pp. 475-76 ; (Khaḍgalakṣhaṇam... tikṣhāśchhedasahā Vāḡāśtikṣhṇāh Syuśchāḡadeśājāh ... śreshṭhām Khaḍam prakīritam) Majumdar, HAB, p. 349.
333. Majumdar, etal, RC, I, V, 19, p. 15 ; IV, V, 43A, p. 148.
334. Ibid, I, V, 48, p. 36 ; IV, V, 43A, p. 148.
335. Ibid, I, V, 21, p. 18.
336. Ibid, II, V, 15B, pp. 49-50.
337. Majumdar, HB, Vol. I, p. 656 ; Majumdar, HAB, p. 349.
338. Majumdar, CAI, p. 308.
339. Schoff, PES, p. 47.
340. Majumdar, etal, RC, III, VV, 33-34, p. 104.
341. Ibid, III, V, 23A & B, pp. 95-96.
342. Ibid, III, VV, 39-40A, pp. 106-107.
343. Majumdar, IB, p. 42 ff, p. 52.
344. Ibid, p. 42 ff, 55.
345. Ibid, p. 68 ff.
346. Majumdar, etal, RC, III, VV, 33-34, p. 104.
347. Ibid.
348. Ibid.
349. Majumdar, IB, pp. 54-55, 49.
350. Raverty, TIN, Vol. I, p. 557 ; Elliot & Dowson, HH, Vol. II, p. 309 ff.
351. Banerji, EISMS, p. 140 ; Majumdar, HB, Vol. I, pp. 449-474 ; HAB, p. 626 ; Saraswati, ESB, pp. 29-32.
352. Majumdar, HAB, pp. 461-462.
353. Dasgupta, EPD, p. 33 ; MASI, No. 53 ; Ahmed, Mahāsthān, pp. 34-35.
354. IAAR, 1961-62, p. 43 ; Ed. Roy Burman, IWITIA, (CI, 1961), pp. 6, 79.
355. IAAR, 1957-58, p. 51 ; 1958-59, p. 56 ; 1959-60 Pl. LIV - 12, 13 ; Ed. Roy Burman, IWITIA, (CI, 1961), pp. 1, 6, 26, 43.

356. Mahāvastu, SBE, III, 113, Sl. 6-11; Motichand, Prince of Wales Museum Bulletin, No. 6, 1957-59 p. 8; Shamasastri, AS, Roy Burman, IWITTA (Cl, 1961), pp. 6, 26, 43; KMS, 1.3.16
357. El, XIX, pp. 277, 286
358. Majumdar, IB, p. 127 ff.
- 358a. Roy Burman, IWITTA (Cl, 1961), p. 84
359. IAAR, 1964
- 359a. Schoff, PES, p. 45-61 ff.
- 359b. Majumdar, HAB, p. 359; IHQ, XXII, pp. 144-45.
360. BVP.
361. Majumdar, HB, Vol. I, p. 656; Das, Rājāśāhī, p. 42
362. Legge, FRBK, p. 43
363. De, CGP, p. 174, Charyyā, 26
364. Pañchānan Tarkaratna, BDP, Uttara-Khaṇḍa, XIII adhyāya, pp. 339, 345-46
365. Dasgupta, BOCG, p. 117, Charryā, 50
366. Mitra, TCWB, (Census 1951) p. 308
367. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, p. 48 (Dāmodarpur CP Ins. of the time of Kumāragupta I, 448 A.D.); Majumdar, HAB, p. 344
368. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, pp. 100-101, for haṭṭika (Khālīmpur CP of Dharmapāla); 48, 49, for haṭṭapana-kaiḥ (Dāmodarpur CP of Kumāra Gupta I); El, XIX, p. 282 ff; Haṭṭiyagriha (i.e., shops) (Bhātera plate p. 282 ff, haṭṭa-vara (i.e., big market) (Bhātera plate); El, IX, p. 277ff, XXII, p. 150 ff; IA, LVM, p. 161 ff haṭṭa (i.e., market). According to Prof. Sircar, the term Haṭṭapanakaiḥ means 'with the right of using the canals excavated for watering the field'. It may also mean 'along with market-places and tanks'...
369. El, XIX, p. 282 ff.
370. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, pp. 100-101; 48 ff.
371. Ibid, p. 108 ff.
372. El, XXII, pp. 155-158
373. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, pp. 100-101.
374. Ibid, El, Vol. IV, p. 254
375. Ibid, p. 108
376. ARASI, 1922-23, p. 109; Majumdar, IB, p. 161. (Chittagong CP of Dāmodaradeva).
377. Ibid.
378. Dasgupta, BOCG, p. 101 (Naukā i.e., boat); p. 119 (nāve, i.e., boat).
379. De, CGP, p. 60
380. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, p. 98 (Khālīmpur CP of Dharmapāla); pp. 373, 381 (Kamauli CP of Vaidyadeva); pp. 167, 174 (Bhāgalpur CP of Nārāyaṇapāla for nauvāṭa).
381. Ibid, pp. 373, 381 for nauvāṭa (Kamauli CP of Vaidyadeva); 98 for nauvāṭaka (Khālīmpur CP of Dharmapāla); 167, 174 for nauvāṭa (i.e., multitudes of fleet, Bhāgalpur CP of Nārāyaṇapāla).
382. Majumdar, IB, p. 51 (big cowries emanated); Charyyāpadas, (BGD, 29); Majumdar, HB, Vol. I, p. 669; Raverty, IIN, p. 554; Renaudot, AAIC, p. 17 ff.
- 382a. Legge, FRBK, p. 43
383. Das, Rājāśāhī, p. 42; Ahmed, Mahāsthān, pp. 34-35.
384. Majumdar and et al, RC, Chap. IV, verse 36 p. 143; Majumdar, HB, Vol. I, pp. 668-669; Niyogi, EHNI, p. 279.
385. Raverty, IIN, p. 556; Hamilton, DOH, Vol. II, p. 556
386. Ibid.
387. Renaudot, AAIC, p. 17 ff; Elliot & Dowson, HHI, Vol. I, p. 5 ff.
388. De, CGP, p. 174; Charyyā, 14
389. Wheeler, ERBI, p. 223
390. ARASI, 1922-23, p. 109 (in the neighbourhood of Berāchāmpā, 24-Parganas); 1930-34, p. 255 (near Manda, Rājāśāhī); 1922-23, p. 74 (riverbed at Tamluk); ARDM, 1935-36, p. 5 (at Wari Bator, Dacca); Chaudhuri, CECAM, Benerji, PM, pp. 14-15; Goswami, EB, pp. 30-32; JASBNS, Vol. XXVIII, p. 127; Sircar, SSAAMI, p. 5; Ahmed, Mahāsthān, pp. 34-35; Qadir, GTP, pp. 20-21; ARASI, 1928-29, pp. 87-97; 1926-27, pp. 140-49.

391. Ibid.
392. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, pp. 39-40.
393. Shamasastri, AS, BK II, Chap. XII, pp. 88, 95.
394. Ibid., pp. 86-87.
395. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, pp. 50-53.
396. Ibid., Sircar, SI, p. 343 n. 5 ; Sen, SHAIB, p. 521. (In the Balgrām plate there is a reference to rūpakas, 8 rūpakas being equivalent to a 1/2 dināra which means that dināra was worth 16 rūpakas in value).
397. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, p. 263 (for Kapardakapurāṇa, Naihātī CP of Vallātasena) ; 274-75 (for purāṇa- Govindapur CP of Lakshmanasena) ; 281, 286 (Mādhānagar CP of Lakshmanasena) ; p.293 (Sundarvan CP of Lakshmanasena) ; pp.298, 300 (Tarpaṇḍighi CP of Lakshmanasena for Kapardakapurāṇa p.306 ; for Kapardakapurāṇa Ānuliā CP of Lakshmanasena).
398. Ibid., Majumdar, HB, Vol. I, p. 668 ff.
399. Majumdar, IB, pp. 125, 130 (Edilpur CP of Keśavasena) ; EI, XXI, p. 211 ff (Śaktipur CP of Lakshmanasena) ; Majumdar, IB, pp. 137, 138 (Mānāpādā plate of Viśvarūpasena) ; p. 1401. (Sāhitya Parishat CP of Viśvarūpasena).
400. Majumdar, HB, Vol. I, p. 668, Bhandarkar, IN, p. 139.
- 400a. Niyogi, EHNI, pp. 89-96 ; Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, pp. 44-58, Majumdar, HB, Vol. I, pp.651-52.
401. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, pp. 53-58.
402. Ibid., pp. 55, 57.
403. Ibid., p. 58.
404. Ibid.
405. Ibid., p. 44.
406. Ray, VI, (1st Pt.), p. 242 ; Niyogi, EHNI, p. 107.
407. Ibid.
408. Majumdar, IB, p. 68 ff, 14 ff ; EI, XXI, p. 211 ff.
409. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, pp. 65-70 (Gunaighar CP of Vainyagupta).
410. Ibid.
411. Ibid., pp. 65-70.
412. Majumdar, IB, pp. 106, 170-172, 178-179 ; Shamasastri, AS, p. 95 (Kākaṇi).
413. Ibid., pp. 112, 115, 166 ; EI, XIX, p. 285 ; Bhāratavarsha, 1349-1350 (BS), Pt. I, pp.263f, 384.
414. Ray, VI, p. 230.
415. Ibid., pp. 230-31.
416. Ibid.
417. Ibid.
418. Ibid.
419. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, pp. 49-53.
420. Ibid., pp. 49-53.
421. Ibid., pp. 80, 51.
422. Pargiter, IA, 1910, p. 215.
423. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, p. 83.
424. Ibid., pp. 51, 84.
425. Majumdar, HB, Vol. I, p.652.
426. Majumdar, IB, p. 63.
427. Ibid., pp. 74, 78, 87.
428. Ibid., pp. 100, 102, 84 ; Sen, SHAIB, p. 568.
429. Ibid., p. 96 (Govindapur CP of Lakshmanasena).
430. EI, XXVI, p. 13.
431. Sharma, IF, pp. 214, 225.
432. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, p. 59 for Ashtakulādhikaraṇa (Dāmodarpur CP of Budhagupta, 482 A.D.) ; 42 (Dhanāidaha CP of Kumāragupta).
433. MBH, Sāhāparvan, Chap. V.
434. Sen, SHAIB, p. 505 ; Sharma, IF, pp. 163-64.

435. Ghosal, CHRS, pp. 238, 255, 257-58; Sen, SHAIB, p. 505.
436. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, pp. 42, 43, 59.
437. Ray, VI, p. 421; Niyogi, EHNI, pp. 82-85.
438. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, pp. 42-43.
439. Shamasastri, AS, Bk. II, Chap. I, p. 45.
440. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, p. 100 Ibid. (for Daśagrāmika, Daśagrāmkadī-Khālīmpur CP of Dharmapāla).
441. Ibid., p. 59 (Mahattara-ashtakulādhikaragrāmika-kuṭumbina-Dāmodarpur CP of the time of Budhagupta, 482 A.D.); Mahattara, i.e., village headman).
442. Ibid., pp. 58-61 (Dāmodarpur CP of Budhagupta), 88-95 (Mallasarū CP of Vijayasena).
443. Vidyabhusan Syamakanta, MS, VII, 115-130 pp. 178-180.
444. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, p. 59, for Grāmika (Dāmodarpur CP of Budhagupta).
445. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, p. 59 (Mahattara-kuṭumbina Brāhmaṇa-ashtakulādhikaragrāmika-pustapāla, etc.).
446. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, p. 59.
447. Shamasastri, AS, Bk. II, Chap. I, p. 46; XXX V, p. 161.
448. Ibid.
449. Ibid.
450. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, p. 59 (Dāmodarpur CP Ins. of the time of Budhagupta, 482 A.D.), p. 50 (Baigrām CP Ins. of Gupta yr. 128 (448 A.D.); p. 62 (Dāmodarpur CP Ins. of Budhagupta, 476-495 A.D.); p. 47 (Dāmodarpur CP of Kumāragupta, 448 A.D.).
451. Ibid., pp. 50, 52 (Baigrām CP Ins. of Gupta yr. 128, 448 A.D.); p. 62 (Dāmodarpur CP Ins. of Budha Gupta, 476-495 A.D.), p. 72 (Dāmodarpur CP Ins. of Gupta yr. 543 A.D.), p. 59 (Dāmodarpur CP Ins. of Budhagupta of 482 A.D.); Sen, SHAIB, p. 503.
452. Ibid., p. 50 (Baigrām CP of Gupta yr. 128, 448 A.D.) Sen, SHAIB, p. 503.
453. Ibid.
454. Sen, SHAIB, p. 503.
455. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, pp. 58-61.
456. Ibid., pp. 50-53.
457. Ibid., p. 49.
458. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, pp. 59-60 (Dāmodarpur CP Ins. of Budhagupta, 482 A.D.).
- 458a. Ibid., p. 56 (Pāhārpur CP Ins. of 479 A.D.)
459. Ibid.
460. Ibid., p. 53.
461. Ibid., pp. 79-87.
462. Ibid., p. 119 (Monghyr CP. of Devapāla).
463. Majumdar, HB, Vol. I, p. 268.
464. IA, XXXIX, p. 213.
465. Ed. Majumdar, HB, Vol. I, p. 272.
466. Ibid.
467. Ibid.
469. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, pp. 88, 91 (Mallasarū CP of Vijayasena; Mahattara, i.e., village headman).
470. Majumdar, IB, pp. 161-62; 138-39; 126 (Chittagong CP of Dāmodaradeva, Madanapādā CP of Viśvarūpasena, Edilpur CP of Keśavasena).
471. Ibid., p. 162 (Chittagong CP of Dāmodaradeva).
472. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, p. 59 (Dāmodarpur CP of Budhagupta); p. 42 (Dhanaidaha CP of Kumāragupta); p. 202 (Bāngadā CP Ins. of Mahipāla); p. 215 (Manahali CP of Madanapādadeva).
473. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, p. 131.
474. IA, 1919, p. 80.
475. Majumdar, HB, Vol. I, p. 269.
476. Ibid.
477. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, pp. 96, 100, 106, 107.
478. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, p. 100 (for Daśagrāmika, Khālīmpur CP of Dharmapāla); Sharma, ib. pp. 7, 89.

479. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, pp. 184, 202, 203, 215-16 (Bhāga & Bhoga) 101, 184, 202-03, 215-16, 225, 239, 263 (Kara & Hiranya).
480. El, IV, p. 243 ff.
481. Shamasastri, AS, Bk. II, Chap. XV, p. 101; Ray, VI, p. 243; Shyamakanta, MS, Chap. VII, p. 131.
482. Majumdar, HAB, p. 330.
- 482a. Ibid, p. 314.
483. Majumdar, HAB, p. 330; Shamasastri, AS, Bk. II, Chap. VI, pp. 58-61, Chap. XV, p. 101; Bk. V, Chap. II, pp. 273-74.
484. Ibid.
485. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, pp. 167, 183 (Bhāgalpur CP of Nārāyaṇapāladeva), 202 (Bāngad CP Ins. of Mahipāla), 215 (Manahali CP of Madanapāladeva), 224 Rāmpal CP of Śrīchandra), 363 (Rāmgāñj CP of Isvaraghoshā), 100 (Khālimpur CP of Dharmapāla); Sen, SHAIB, p. 570, CBI, p. 180 (In ancient Bengal, citizens had to pay a separate tax known as Chaurōddharana; the revenue on this head was spent on maintaining sentries for the prevention of theft and dacoity. Chaurōddharanika was perhaps the head of the department entrusted with the charge of collecting this tax).
486. Niyogi, EHNI, pp. 193-194; Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, p. 100 (Khālimpur CP of Dharmapāla), 118, 129 (Monghyr CP of Devapāla), 167, 181 (Bhāgalpur CP of Nārāyaṇapāladeva), 202 (Bāngad CP Ins. of Mahipāla); 215 (Manahali CP of Madanapāladeva), 224 (Rāmpal CP of Śrīchandra); 363 (Rāmgāñj CP of Isvaraghoshā).
487. Majumdar, HAB, p. 315; Maity & Mukherjee, CBI (for Tarika), pp. 100, 168, 182, 202, 215.
488. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, p. 363; Ray, VI, p. 244.
489. Ibid, p. 101.
490. Ibid, pp. 96-100, El, IV, pp. 243, 245 ff.; Niyogi, EHNI, p. 186.
491. Shamasastri, AS, (8th edn) Bk. II, Chap. XV, p. 101.
492. Ibid, Ghosal, CHHRS, p. 37.
493. El, IV, p. 254, note. 7; Gopal, ELNI, pp. 38 ff.
494. Majumdar, A, Charyyāpada, pp. 33-39.
495. Ed. Ghosh, Chandramohan, Prākṛta-Paiṅgala, p. 403.
496. Vidyaratna Girish Chandra, Prāyaścitta-Prakaraṇa, pp. 67-68.
497. Majumdar, IB, pp. 130, 66.
498. Watters, OYCTI, Vol. II, pp. 184, 185.
499. Majumdar, HAB, p. 459.
500. Kasinath Durgaprasad, Āryasaptasati, p. 57; Banerjee, SKM, p. 154 Śloka, 577.
501. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, pp. 214, 219; PD, VV. 40, 42, 43, 44; Majumdar, HAB, p. 462.
502. Dasgupta, VBP, 1355 (BS), p. 266; Ray, VI, p. 57.
503. Ed. Majumdar and et al, RC, Chap. III, V. 29, p. 101.
504. Mukhopadhyay, GGI, pp. 10, 34.
505. Basu, Charyyāpada, pp. 98, 99.
506. Kasinath Durgaprasad, Āryasaptasati, p. 186.
507. Majumdar, IB, p. 41.
508. Ed. Majumdar & et al, RC, Chap. III, VV., 35-37, pp. 104-105.
509. Dikshit, EP, Pl. No. XXXIV, XXXIX, XLIII, & LI.
510. Basu, Charyyāpada, p. 88.
511. Ibid, p. 49.
512. Ibid, p. 88.
513. Kasinath Durgaprasad, Āryasaptasati, pp. 83, 141.
514. Sharma, SKM, p. 138; Hussain, Everyday Life in the Pāla Empire, p. 171.
515. B.C.Law Vol. Pt. II, p. 259.
516. Majumdar, IB, p. 54.
517. Shyamakanta, MS, Chap. V, 150, p. 148; Shamasastri AS, Bk. II, Chap. XXIII, pp. 128-29.
518. Dasgupta, VBP, 1355 (BS), pp. 255-57.
519. Basu, Charyyāpada, pp. 230-51.
520. Kasinath Durgaprasad, Āryasaptasati, p. 87.
521. Chakradar, SLAI, pp. 103-104.

522. Wetters, OYCTI, Vol. II, pp. 184-193.
523. MAI, No. 55 ; Khan, F.A, Maināmatī, 1955 ; Ahmed Nazimuddin, Mahāsthān, Das, Rājādidāṅgā.
524. Goswami, EB.
525. Wetters, OYCTI, Vol. II, pp. 184-94.
526. Ibid.
527. Ed. Majumdar and etal, RC, Chap. III, p. 103.
528. Ibid, pp. 108, 204.
529. KMS, V. 6 41 ; VI, 8, 9.
530. Colebrooke, Jimutavāhana's Dāyabhāga, VII, pp. 105, 108, 109.
531. Ibid, Dāyabhāga, p. 159.
532. B.C.Law Volume, Pt. II, p. 256 ; Majumdar, IB, p. 23.
533. Majumdar, IB, p. 23.
534. Stein, RJTN, IV, 332, IV, 422.
535. PD, V. 28 ; Majumdar, HAB, p. 465.
536. Majumdar, IB, pp. 49, 55, 35, 40.
537. Majumdar, IB, p. 55.
538. Majumdar, IB, pp. 35, 40-41.
539. Chakladar, SLAI, p. 104.
540. Banerjee, SKM, p. 545, Śloka 2005 ; Ray, VI, Pt. I, p. 407.
541. Govardhanacharya, Āryasaptastī, V. 140 p. 87.
542. Majumdar, IB, p. 54.
543. KMS, IV, Chakladar, SLAI, pp. 103-104.
544. Majumdar, IB, p. 54.

CHAPTER - THREE

SETTLEMENTS : VILLAGE AND CITY

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A. VILLAGE

Since bygone days, India has always been a veritable land of villages. Throughout the courses of the Indian history, the village has been always the lowest and smallest socio-economic-cum-political unit. Originally, the village or Grāma was a Svajāta or kin-group, more particularly on move led by its leader called Grāmanī. In course of time, new modes of production made the kin-group settled in a particular field and thereby formed the nucleus of a village. Such a village settlement was indeed a self-sufficient and self-contained unit. Today the Indian village demonstrates no doubt a grim picture of poverty and helplessness. Though a village is now rarely a self-contained or self-sufficient unit yet through ages it has been the very nucleus and nerve centre providing the very base of the Indian culture.

Sufficient data regarding the village establishment in ancient Bengal are not available. Whatever materials are available from both literary and archaeological sources have been coalesced to present a complete picture of the village and its life-patterns in ancient Bengal. Some valuable information about villages is furnished by the later epigraphic and literary records, from which it may be presumed that the village settlement in Bengal came into existence with the introduction of food-producing economy. The jungles were cleared, burnt and prepared for shifting cultivation before the introduction of cultivation by plough. Even the shifting cultivation required a kind of settlement to look after plants and their yields. But these settlements arising out of the introduction of shifting cultivation were all temporary habitats. Even such a conglomeration of habitats forming a primary village used to be always on move as required by the shifting cultivation patterns.

I. Growth of Village

With the introduction of plough-cultivation the settlement pattern changed considerably. The same plot of land could thence be cultivated persistently producing yields years after years. The inevitable result of this plough-cultivation was the permanent settlement made by the cultivators. Such a settlement was in early times very small, and it was no better than the habitat of a small kin-group. Gradually, with the expansion of the kin-group the village became larger and larger. It reached its climax when such a Svajāta settlement began to accommodate other peoples including even non-agriculturists, such as, the artisans whose products were essential requisites for the village economy. From very early times, such settlements or a cluster of settlements grew up primarily along the river valleys. Reasons are quite obvious. The land along the river valleys has been always fertile for agricultural production, and the rivers supplied not only perennial water, but also some other basic necessities of subsistence.

The village in ancient Bengal, as in the rest of the country, has been always a compact area composed of various types of land, such as, Vāstu (high and hard land, i.e., habitat), Kshetra (low land or arable land), Ushara (barren tract), Go-charanabhūmi (natural meadow land) and wood-land or forest areas etc., as described in the early Indian texts and inscriptions¹. Manu has given a description of a village by saying that it is on the back of a tortoise, i.e., on a high land, and on its four sides is the Gocharanabhūmi covering 400 cubits and beyond it are agricultural fields². Similarly, in the Pāla and Sena inscriptions, the most commonly recorded expression is Trīṇapūti-go-charaparyantah³.

With the growth of population, there, however, arose a great demand for both dwelling sites and agricultural fields. Both literary and epigraphic records furnish information regarding the establishment of villages by clearing forests and bringing waste lands under cultivation. It becomes also evident that dwelling plots and agricultural fields were no doubt separate, but these were mostly contiguous and as such, the compactness of the village settlement was always maintained⁴. In this context, it may be pointed out that at the initial stage of the establishment of the village-settlement there were not many dwelling sites and agricultural fields. But with the growth of population the primary

settlement expanded, and the physical compactness of the village and the solidarity of the people became essential for the purpose of its protection or defence against all odds. In the beginning, the establishment of such a village-settlement along with subsisting agricultural fields had indeed a primitive tribal base.

II. Village Types

It is learnt from the Arthasāstra that a village should consist of one hundred to five hundred families.⁵ The Jātakas, however, refer to villages containing thrity to one thousand families⁶. In the Vinayapitaka we are told that a village consisted of one or two or three or four Kutis⁷. All these were perhaps no better than hamlets. In the Brihatkathā-kōsha (11th century A.D.) there are various terms denoting a village-settlement, such as, Grāma, i.e., a small unit with a fence, Kheta, i.e., surrounded by rivers and hills, Kharvata, i.e., lying on the outskirts of the hills, Matamba, i.e., a collection of 500 villages, Pattana, i.e., with diamond mines or a town like village, Drona-mukha, i.e., lying on the sea-coast and Sanniveśa, i.e., lying on the hills. All these categories of village are not, however, to be found described in the available records of ancient Bengal.

Besides the above types of village, there are also references in early literatures to another kind of village-unit called Ghōsha⁹. In the Pāli-texts there occurs the expression Gonishādi-nivishṭa-Grāma^{9a}. This may refer to a pastoral settlement. Actually, in the Amarakōsha the term Ghōsha is defined as a small village of the cowherds (Ābhīras)¹⁰. Excavations at Utnur and Kupgal revealed such neolithic pastoral settlements¹¹. For ancient Bengal, the primary concern is, however, with the agricultural village, the very base of habitation with some smaller hamlets. Even in ancient times, there were large and small villages. A large village used to contain several quarters or parts. This is indicated by frequent references to Pātaka (pādā) which may mean either a small village or a quarter of it¹². According to Hemachandra, Pātaka refers perhaps to one half of the village. In the inscriptions, there are also references to Chaturaka meaning perhaps a unit of four villages. It is very significant to note here that the modern Bengali word Pādā might have been a derivation from Pātaka¹³. But Pādā in Bengal today denotes a part or a quarter of a village.

III. Size and Boundary

As to the size of a village in ancient Bengal there are some specific references in inscriptions. According to Kauṭilya, the size of a village varies from one Kroś to two Kroś containing 100 to 500 houses¹⁴. The territorial size of a particular village can be easily determined from the measurements of land given in epigraphic records. It has been stated in the Dāmōdarpur Copper plate inscription of Buddha Gupta (482 A.D.) that the land measuring 8 x 9 reeds adjacent to the village Vāyigrāma formed a village.¹⁵ In the same manner, the Govindapur Copper plate of Lakshmaṇasena (12th century A.D.) refers to the village Viddāraśāsana containing land measuring 60 bhū-dronas and 17 unmānas according to the standard Nala consisting of 56 cubits¹⁶. Again, the village named Dāpaniyā-pāṭaka comprised 100 bhūkhādis and 91 khādikas of land as recorded in the Mādhānagar Copper plate of Lakshmaṇasena¹⁷. The Tarpandighi Copper plate of Lakshmaṇasena tells us that the village Velahishṭi consisted of 120 ādhāvāpas and 5 unmānas of land according to the particular Nala standard prevalent in the locality¹⁸. In the Naiḥāṭi Copper plate of Vallālasena there is a vivid account of the area of the village of Vallāhittā as consisting of 7 bhūpāṭakas, 9 dronas, 1 ādhaka, 34 unmānas, 3 kākas, etc., measured according to Śrīvr̥ṣhabhaśaṅkaranala.¹⁹

Not only from the measurements of land as recorded in the inscriptions, the size of a village can be also determined from the number of plots of land belonging to it. It is learnt from the Guṇāighar inscription of Vainya Gupta that the village named Kānteudaka contained five plots of land. This inscription also refers to the area of each plot of land as can be gleaned from its measurements²⁰. The first plot of land measured 7 pāṭakas and 9 dronavāpas, the second 28 dronavāpas, the third, 23 dronavāpas, the fourth, 30 dronavāpas; the fifth, 1½ pāṭakas of land forming 11 pāṭakas of uncultivated lands in five plots belonging to the village Kānteudaka falling within the jurisdiction of northern territorial division²¹. From these measurements of different plots of land, it appears that the total area would be about 11 pāṭakas, each pāṭaka being composed of 40 dronavāpas of land (first plot - 7 pāṭakas and 9 dronavāpas; second plot - 28 dronavāpas; third plot - 23 dronavāpas; fourth plot - 30 dronavāpas and fifth plot - 1½ pāṭakas²² = 11 pāṭakas). According to the Sundarvan Copper plate

grant of Lakshmaṇasena the land used to be measured by unmānas, kākinīs, khādikā, bhūdrōṇa, etc.²³. A plot of land might have been measured by 3 bhūdrōṇa: 1 khādikā, 23 unmānas and 2.1/2 kākinīs according to the standard of 32 cubits = 1 unmāna and 1 cubit = 12 āṅgulas²⁴. Even there are references to a particular plot of land well-marked by boundaries and measurements as in the Dāmōdarpu Copper plate inscription of Buddha Gupta (482 A.D.²⁵).

In the Guṇāighar inscription, the specific boundary-marks of different plots of land have been also given. The first plot has been described as : "...to the east existed the boundary of the village of Guṇēkāgrahāra and the land in possession of the carpenter Viṣṇu; to the west, the land belonged to Śurī, Nāśī, etc., to the north, was the tank temporarily in possession of Doshi and to the south, the land belonged to the jurisdiction of the village Miduvilāṭa"²⁶. In this way, the boundaries of different plots of land have been also clearly recorded²⁷. Moreover, the Guṇāighar Copper plate inscription of Vainva Gupta Boundary (Gupta year 188 or 507 A.D) furnishes also information regarding the boundary-marks of low water-logged, waste and rent-free lands of the village Kānteudaka²⁸. The boundaries of the low land also have been noted as : "...to the east was the channel between the two ports at Cuḍāmaṇi and Nagaraśrī; to the channel opened to boats and connected to the lake; to the west, the end of the land attached to the temple of Pradyumnēśvara and to the north, the navigable channel"²⁹. The boundary marks of the water-logged, waste and rent-free lands belonging to the monastery have been also recorded as : "...to the east, the boundary-limit of the land attached to the temple of Pradyumnēśvara; to the south, the end of the field belonging to the monastery of the Buddhist monk Āchārya Jītasena; to the west, the dried rivulet Hacāta and to the north, the tank of Daṇḍa"³⁰.

Again, each village in ancient Bengal had well-defined boundary-marks. This is clear from numerous references in the Copper plate grants. It is learnt that every village had well-marked boundaries fixed by trees, rivers or rivulets, lakes, marshy lands, tanks, ocean, embankments, temples, orchards, houses, cattle-tracks, public roads, boundary walls, ditches, lanes and adjacent village peripheries or plots of land belonging to another village. In the boundaries of the inscriptions, peripheries of the adjacent villages have been described as forming boundaries. In all cases, the boundaries of the four quarters of a village have been clearly stated. While describing boundaries, the name

of the village and the peripheries of the adjacent villages have been also clearly indicated.

Rivers also very often formed firm boundary-lines of many villages. This will be evident from a large number of inscriptions like the Khālimpur Copper plate of Dharmapāla, Naihāṭi Copper plate of Vallālasena, Govindapur Copper plate of Lakshmaṇasena, Madanapāḍā Copper plate of Viśvarūpasena and Sāhitya Parishat Copper plate of Viśvarūpasena, etc³¹. In the Khālimpur Copper plate of Dharmapāla, it is mentioned that the village Krauñchaśvabhra in Mahanta-prakāśa-vishaya attached to Vyāghryataṭi-maṇḍala of Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti was bounded on the west by a perched rivulet (Krauñchaśvabhra nāma grāmoasya cha sīma paśchimena gaṅginikā³²). The village Mādhasālmalīgrāma in this record was also bounded on the north by a perched rivulet³³ (Uttareṇa gaṅginikā sīmā). Again, the same record refers to the village Pālitaka as bounded on the east by the river Kaṇṭhiā and on the north by the perched rivulet (Pūrveṇa Kaṇṭhiā srōtaḥ-uttareṇa Gaṅginikā³⁴). In the Naihāṭi Copper plate of Vallālasena there is a reference to the river Siṅgatiā flowing to the north of the village to Khāṇḍayillā and also to the same river flowing to the north of Nāḍichā and to the west of the village Ambayillā (Khāṇḍayillā śāsanōttara sthita Siṅgatiā nadyu-ttarata Nāḍichā Śāsanottarastha Siṅgatiānadi Paśchimattarataḥ Ambayillā śāsana paśchimasthita Siṅgatiā³⁵...). From the Govindapur Copper plate of Lakshmaṇasena, it is known that the village Viddārasāsa in Vetaḍḍachaturaka of Paśchimakhāṭika in Vardhamāna-bhukti was bounded on the east by the sacred river Jāñhabī (Ganges) (Pūrvve Jāñhabī (sra) vantiardhasīmā³⁶). The Barrackpur grant of Vijayasena refers to a village called Ghāsasambhogabhāṭṭabādā (in Khāḍi-vishaya) was partly bounded on north, west and south by the stream of Rivers as marshy land of Tikshahaṇḍa. (Khāḍi-vishaya Ghāsasambhogabhāṭṭabādā-grāmē Tikshahaṇḍa-jal-ārdha-sīmā-dakshina-paśchim-ōttarataḥ³⁷). boundary marks

Again, from the Sāhitya-Parishat Copper plate of Viśvarūpasena, it is known that village Deulhastī in Lāuhaṇḍā-Chaturaka in Vikramapura has been indicated by a river Rājahitā which ran from east to west (Deulhasthām nadi-pūrvva-paśchimē Rājahitā-sa eva³⁸). In the same record, while defining the boundaries of the village Rāmasiddhipāṭaka in the Nāvya region of Vaṅga in Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti, it is stated that its northern boundary was formed by a river, the name of which has not been given³⁹. It is also known from this record that the north and south of Vaṅgālvadā was indicated by the river.

(Vaṅgālvadā-bhūh sīmā paśchime nadi sīmā uttare tathā nadi sīmā⁴⁰). It is thus evident that the rivers have been frequently mentioned as forming firm boundary-marks of the villages.

Not only the rivers, there are even specific refernces to the sea as forming the boundary-mark of a village. It has been stated in the Sāhitya-Parishat Copper plate of Viśvarūpasena that the village Vinayatilaka was bounded by the sea to the east (Vinayatilakagrāmē pūrvē samudrasīmā). It is quite apparent that this Samudra evidently refers to the Bay of Bengal. This village thus appears to have actually stood on the sea coast⁴⁰. Again, tanks also sometimes served as village boundary-marks. This becomes evident from the Sāhitya-Parishat Copper plate wherein it is stated that on the south-east of the village Rāmasiddhi-
 Sea and tanks as bounary marks pātaka lay the Varāhakunda, i.e., the tank of Varāha⁴¹. In the Tarpandighi Copper plate of Lakshmaṇasena it is stated that the southern boundary of the village Velahishti was formed by a tank named Nichadahāra (belonging to Nichada-āhāra) and on its west was Nandiharipā-kundī (tank belonging to Nandiharipā⁴²). In the Bhuvaneśvara inscription of Bhaṭṭa-Bhavadeva, a tank is referred to as lying on the waterless outskirts of a village, probably Siddhala in Rādha⁴³. Similarly in the Guṇāighar Copper plate of Vainyagupta a tank formed the boundary-limit of the plot of land in the village Kāntaudaka^{43a}.

Even embankments have been referred to as bounary-marks. In the Naihāṭi Copper plate of Vallālasena it is stated that the village Vinayatilaka was bounded on the south by an embankment⁴⁴. In the same way, the Madanapāḍā Copper plate of Viśvarūpasena refers to the embankment of the village Aṭhapaga
 Embank- as forming the boundary of a village named Piñjōkāshti. Another embank-
 ments ment of the village Vīrakāṭṭi as forming the boundary is also mentioned in this record⁴⁵. From the same record, it is also known that the village Pālītaka was bounded on south by Kāṇā sand-band (Pālītaka sīmā dakshinena kāṇā-dronikā⁴⁶). Again, it is learnt that the village Krauñcaśvabhra was bounded on north-east by a dike constructed by the prince Devaṭa and on its east, by another dike Viṭaka as described in the Khālimpur Copper plate of Dharmapāla (Pūrvvotta-rena rāja-putra Devaṭa-kritāṇi pūrvena viṭakāṇi khātaka khānikā (m) gatvā pravishṭā⁴⁷).

Not only that, even lakes and marshy lands are often referred to as village boundary-marks. In this connection, a reference may be made to the Madanapāḍā Copper plate and Khālimpur Copper plate inscriptions⁴⁸. While describing the boundaries of Mādhāsālmāṭṭrāma, a reference has been made to a lake as forming its western boundary⁴⁹. In the Mādhāinagar inscription the expression is : "Dāpaniya-pātaka Kāntāpura vṛttau rāvanasarasi"⁵⁰. Thus the boundary was indicated by a lake named Rāvaṇa. Regarding the marshy land it is recorded that the village Gopippalī was bounded on the south by a marshy land (Jolakah ⁵¹).

Sometimes, ditches and canals have been also mentioned for denoting boundary-marks. As for instance, in the Khālimpur Copper plate, the village Gopippalī in Sthālīkaṭṭa-Vishaya within the Maṇḍala of Āmrashaṇḍikā is described to have been bounded on the west by a ditch named Besānika⁵². In the Tarpaṇḍighi Copper plate it is stated that to the north of the village Velahishṭi there was a ditch named Mollāna-Khāḍi ⁵³. (Khāḍi is at present the name of a Parganā in Diamond Harbour Sub-division). From the Sundarvan Copper plate of Lakshmaṇasena it is known that the southern boundary of the village Maṇḍalagrāma in Kāntallapura-chaturaka of Khāḍi-maṇḍala in Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti was formed by a canal named Chitāḍi (Chitāḍikhāta ⁵⁴). Even now there is a canal called Chitāḍi-khāl in this region.

Not only that, even public roads, boundary-walls and lanes have been mentioned as boundary-marks of a village. In the Chittagong Copper plate inscription of Dāmōdara, it is stated that the village Kāmanapiṇḍiyā was bounded on the east by a public road (Kāmanapiṇḍiyā-grāmē pūrvvē rājapathasīmā ⁵⁵). From the Khālimpur Copper plate it is learnt that the village Gopippalī was bounded on the north by a narrow land demarcating the boundary of Udragrāmamaṇḍala ⁵⁶. Sometimes, Gocharaṇabhūmi and cattle-tracks have been also mentioned as boundary-marks (Uttareṇoudrogrāma-maṇḍalasīmā vyavasthita gomārgo ⁵⁷). In the Naihāṭi Copper plate there is a reference to the cattle-path (Gopatha) on the south and north of Āūhāgaḍḍiyā village⁵⁸. In the Chittagong Copper plate, the village Keṭaṇgapāla was bounded on the west by the cattle-track. (Paśchimē gopathasīmā ⁵⁹). Not only that, even the bullock-cart road is also mentioned as a boundary-mark. Houses also sometimes formed village boundary-lines. A significant reference may be made to Chittagong Copper plate wherein it is

stated that in Dāmbārdāma to the south of the village Kāmanapiṇḍiyā there was a house named Lavanotsavaśrama (Dakshinē Lavanōtsavaśramasamvādhavātī⁶⁰). Roads, walls, etc. It may be presumed that this house was named after salt produced in that area. In certain inscriptions, walls and sand-banks have been referred to for delineating the boundary of a village as described in the Khālimpur Copper plate, Madanapāḍā Copper plate and Naihāṭi Copper plate inscriptions. Even the cremation ground has been mentioned as indicating the boundary of a village⁶¹. In the Khālimpur Copper plate a cremation ground at the extremity of the village Jenandāyikā (Etadgāma sampārōnaparakarmakrdvīpah) is mentioned⁶².

In many other inscriptions, orchards of pomegranates, mango and other tree gorges have been specifically noted as village boundary marks. In the Khālimpur Copper plate of Dharmapāla there is a reference to date palm and also to mango and other trees on the south of the village Kālikāśvabhra (Paśchimē dālimbakshē-Orchards trasīmā⁶³). In Mallasārul Copper plate we have the expression: Āmrāgartikā-sīmā (Paśchimasyām diśi ardhenā āmrāgartikāsīmā⁶⁴). The Govindapur Copper plate of Lakshmaṇasena refers to an orchard of pomegranates on the west of the village Viddārasāsana (Paśchimē dālimbakshētrasīmā⁶⁵).

Lastly, temples are also mentioned as boundary-marks. In the Govindapur Copper plate there is a reference to Mandapa of Leṅghadeva on the south of the village Viddārasāsana (Dakshinē Leṅghadevamandapasīmā)⁶⁶. Again, in the Khālimpur Copper plate of Dharmapāla it is stated that the northern boundary of Temples Krauñchaśvabhra was formed by a temple of Sarasvatī or Goddess of Learning (Uttareṇa Kādamvarīdevakulikā)⁶⁷. Even the monastery is mentioned as the demarcating line of a village or of a plot of land. As for instance, the royal monastery or Vihāra (Rāja-vihāra Kshettrañcha) formed the southern boundary of the first plot of land in the village Kānteudaka as described in the Guṇāighar Copper plate inscription of Vainya Gupta⁶⁸. The Tarpandīghi Copper plate of Lakshmaṇasena refers also to a Buddhist monastery as forming the boundary mark (Pūrvvē Buddha-vihāridevatānikaradevām)⁶⁹.

It is thus evident that in ancient Bengal the area of each village was clearly demarcated by various sorts of boundary-marks as noted above. In this respect, the boundary-marks of a present day Bengali village hardly differ from those prevailing in the past.

IV. Constituent Parts

Both literary and epigraphic records furnish information regarding the constituent parts and characteristics of a village. It is known that each village comprised homestead land, arable land, high and low land, agricultural land, Gocharaṇa-bhūmi (cattle tract) and betel-leaf, betelnut, coconut, jack-fruit and mango plantations, orchards, etc. Besides, each village or a cluster of villages had tanks, ditches, lakes, marshy lands, temples, monasteries, markets, etc. As for instance, the title deed of a village named Ajikulā as recorded in the Sāhitya Parishat Copper plate of Viśvarūpasena presents a clear picture of the constituent parts of a village of ancient Bengal⁷⁰. It is known from this record that the villages like Ajikulā, Deulhastī, Ghāgharakāṭṭi, Pātilādivikā, etc., contained homestead lands along with betelnut-groves, coconut trees, forests and branches, pits and barren tracts, land and water, waste and arable lands (sa-vāstu ... sajalasthalāsajhāta-vitapā sagartaisharā sakhilanālā saguvākanārikelā ... varaja guvāka...⁷¹). Some villages again were very near the sea (Vinayatilaka grāme pūrvvē samudrasīmā⁷²). The rivers also flowed through and surrounded the villages. The villages were also studded with tanks, temples and embankments (devakulapushkarīṇyā⁷³).

There are indeed ample evidences of various categories of land in almost all inscriptions belonging to the Gupta, Pāla and Sena periods. The homestead (vāstu) land was meant for the purpose of dwelling and gardening. The Baigrām Copper plate inscription (448 A.D) refers to the donation of one Dronavāpa of homestead land in Śrigohālī for the purpose of dwelling and gardening (Śrigohālyāḥ sthala-vāstunī dronavāpaṁ⁷⁴). Besides, there are also references to tanks, lakes, embankments, temples, etc., as constituting integral parts of a village. It is known from the same record that three Kulyavāpas of fallow land in Trivṛta was granted to Bhoyila (Trivṛtāyām khilakshetra⁷⁵). A specific mention of arable land and homestead land has been made in the Sāhitya-Parishat Copper plate of Viśvarūpasena⁷⁶. It refers to the homestead land on the south-west of Varāhakunḍa⁷⁷. This tank might have been a sacred one because of its association with Varāha (boar ; Boar incarnation of Vishṇu). Sometimes, embankments were raised for the protection of a village against inundation. In fact, there is a specific reference to such an embankment on the north-east of the village Krauñchaśvabhra which was constructed by the prince Devaṭa⁷⁸.

Again, in each village there were Brahmanical temples, Buddhist and Jaina Vihāras as well. In the Baigrām Copper plate inscription there is a reference to the temple of Lord Viṣṇu (Govindasvāmina⁷⁹). The Khālimpur Copper plate records that there was a temple of the Goddess of learning or Sarasvatī (Kādamvarī-devakulikā) in the village Krauñchaśvabhra⁸⁰. The Govindapur Copper plate of Lakshmaṇasena refers to the Maṇḍapa of Leṅgadeva in the village of Viddāraśāsana Religious centres (Leṅgadevamāṇḍapī⁸¹). Besides, other references to temples are also to be found in a large number of inscriptions. For instance, lofty houses of gods, i.e., high temples are referred to in the Deopārā inscription of Vijayasena⁸². One of the temples named Pradyumneśvara, the abode of the playful union of the beloved of Lakshmi, is also mentioned in this inscription⁸³. A vivid description of this temple has been also given as : 'A lofty edifice of Pradyumneśvara, the wings, the plinth and the main structure occupied several quarters. On the top of the temple a golden jar was placed (tadā-Ghata ...suvarṇa-kumbhasya⁸⁴). A temple of Viṣṇu is also referred to in the Bhuvaneśvara inscription of Bhaṭṭa-Bhavadeva⁸⁵. This inscription refers to the installation of a stone image of Nārāyaṇa along with Ananta and Nṛisimha (Nārāyaṇāntanṛisimha) in a temple and also of the engagement of one hundred damsels in the service of the god⁸⁶. There were a tank and a beautiful garden in front of this temple⁸⁷. A similar reference to a temple is also to be found in the Tarpaṇḍighi Copper plate of Lakshmaṇasena (Devagopāthādyasārabhuvahī⁸⁸). Besides, there are also references to the Buddhist and Jaina temples and Vihāras. The Tarpaṇḍighi Copper plate of Lakshmaṇasena refers to a Buddhist monastery⁸⁹. A significant mention in this context is to be found in the Pāhārpur Copper plate inscription wherein it is stated that a Brahmin Nāthaśarman and his wife Rāmī living in the village Vaṭagōhālī purchased or acquired the land by gift for the worship and maintenance of the Jaina Vihāra of Vaṭagohālī-grāma⁹⁰. There are some other inscriptions which record the granting of land to the Buddhist monastery⁹¹. Even the name of the Āchārya of the Buddhist monastery has been mentioned in the inscriptions. Thus we know that Jitasena was the Āchārya of a Buddhist monastery⁹².

In reality, just like the modern villages of Bengal their ancient counterparts also centered round the place of worship. Even today each village has its own Sthāna or the site of religious worship wherein the villagers assemble together for the performance of their socio-religious rites and ceremonies. The same was the practice in ancient times as well. Without making any discrimination whatsoever, the followers of different religious sects participated together in all socio-religious

observances at those places of worship. Even the kings never pursued any policy of religious intolerance. On the other hand, the king was to patronise, irrespective of his own personal religious beliefs, all prevailing religious rites and practices. This becomes evident from references to Brahmanical temples, Buddhist monasteries and Jaina Vihāras flourishing side by side in the same village. In this context, it is very significant to note the information supplied by the Dhullā Copper plate of Śrīchandra which relates that a Buddhist king like Śrīchandra could take active part in Brahmanical observances like Adbhuta-śānti during the Hōmachatushtaya or the Four Homas⁹³. It implies that the villagers of ancient Bengal had always lived in perfect religious harmony.

Moreover, for the regular worship and maintenance of temples, the villagers used to set a part of their income from market-places and palm-groves. Such an evidence is to be found in the Khālimpur Copper plate of Dharmapāla which states that the village contained market-places and palm-groves for the worship and maintenance of the venerable supreme lord Bhagavān-nara-nārāyaṇa⁹⁴. Even a temple used to have its own tank. Such a reference is to be found in the Bhuvaneśvara inscription of Bhaṭṭa-Bhavadeva⁹⁵. We are told that the tank in front of the Viṣṇu temple was a unique emporium of the world for earning merit, and its water was shady and as transparent as emerald displaying in its midst the wonderful temple of Viṣṇu, which on account of false imagery caused the anxiety of the brood of serpents⁹⁶.

Villages in arid zones used to have reservoirs of water or tanks. From the Bhuvaneśvara inscription of Bhaṭṭabhavadeva a vivid description of such a reservoir in a village situated in an arid region in Rāḍha is found (Rāḍhāyāma-jalāsujāṅgalapathagrāmōpakāṇḍa-sthalīśīmāshu⁹⁷). It has been stated that such a reservoir of water (or tank) 'gladdens the soul and mind of the company of tourists sunk in fatigue and whose beds of lotuses have become devoid of bees as they are fascinated by the reflections on its surface of the lotus-faces of beautiful damsels engaged in bath'⁹⁸.

Besides a few villages contained also large and lofty buildings. It is learnt from the Edilpur Copper plate of Keśavasena that the villages were crowded with lofty buildings and joyful on account of the sweet and melodious sound made by the geese restlessly sporting about on the river banks. These villages had smooth fields growing excellent paddy⁹⁹. Not only reservoirs, the villages also contained lakes. The Mādhānagar Copper plate of Lakshmanasena

refers to a lake named Rāvana in Dāpaniyā-pāṭaka in the direction of Kāntāpura¹⁰⁰.

Thus with tanks, lakes, reservoirs, temples, gardens, embankments, etc., each village in ancient Bengal was a composite unit. This picture of rural settlements reveals that villages of ancient Bengal had all the physical and natural requisites necessary for subsistence and also for leading a self-contained life-pattern.

V. Agronomy & Agronomic Produces

Since Neolithic times, agronomic products of all kinds have been the mainstay of the people of Bengal. It has been generally upheld that food-producing economy was introduced in different parts of the world by the people belonging to the Neolithic stage of Culture¹⁰¹. Like other parts of India, the Neolithic people of Bengal might have been also actively associated with the production of food-articles. Wanderings and settlements of the Neolithic people in different parts of Bengal and its neighbourhood are clearly borne out by the discovery of polished stone tools made and used by them. In many parts of West Bengal, more particularly in the districts of Burdwan, Bāñkurā, Bīrbhūm and Midnapur, the supposed antecedents of neoliths, i.e., microlithic tools have been also discovered in large numbers from various sites¹⁰². But unfortunately, no stratified digging has been made at any place for ascertaining their chronological and cultural sequences excepting Microlithic stage at one site in the district of Burdwan. This is the famous site of Bīrbhānpur that yielded substantial records relating to chronology and hydrographical condition prevailing there at that time¹⁰³. Microliths from Bīrbhānpur have been assigned to pre-pottery stage. But a late dating has been attributed to it, i.e., not later than the 4th millenium B.C.¹⁰⁴. There is, however, no indication or evidence as to whether these peoples were actually associated in any way with the food-producing economy.

The succeeding Neolithic cultural stage in Bengal is simply attested to by the finding of Neolithic tools and implements from various parts of Bengal. But unfortunately, not a single Neolithic settlement site has yet been detected Neolithic stage or excavated for widening our knowledge about the economic activities of these people. Most of the Neolithic tools and implements so far obtained are stray-finds, but their wide distribution in Bengal, more particularly in the valleys of the Ajay, Dāmōdar, Kāñsāi, Rūpnārāyaṇa, Suvarṇarekhā and Būrhāvālaṅg, all originating from the Chhotanāgpur high lands, certainly project an indication of the movement of the Neolithic people in Bengal¹⁰⁵. Even the

lower Gangetic valley yielded also neolithic tools. But these tools might have been washed out of the high lands or carried by the rivers falling into the Ganges. A few excavated historical sites also yielded Neolithic tools. At Bāngarh (Dinājpur) neoliths were found below Śūnga level and at Tamluk, neoliths with ill-fired pottery belonged to the second century B.C.¹⁰⁶. These neoliths of historical periods were perhaps ritual objects. In spite of widespread distribution of neoliths, nothing positive is known about the agronomy of those people. It may be, however, suggested that they might have carried out a very primitive type of agronomic operations for producing some food grains.

It is, however, in the next stage of culture, i.e., Chalcolithic, when the use of metal (copper or bronze) was introduced for the first time that we have positive evidence of food grains. Fortunately, the excavation at Pāṇḍurājārdhibi in the district of Burdwan yielded significant results in respect of Chalcolithic cultural complex including its agricultural produces. Digging in 1962 revealed certain Chalcolithic records relating to the oldest inhabitants of this site who appear to ^{stage} have been simple agricultural people living in mud houses and making hand-made pottery^{106a}. A few of these sherds were found to bear impressions of paddy husk. From a scientific analysis of this paddy-husk impressions it has been found out that this is a variety of cultivated paddy, namely, *Oryza sativa*¹⁰⁷. As to the exact dating of the period producing pottery with husk impressions, it may be noted that charcoal sample from the cemetery level of Period II was subjected to radio-carbon analysis which attributes B.C. 1012 $\pm$ 121 as its date¹⁰⁸. It implies that the Period I at the site is to be assigned to a still earlier period. In other words, it may be suggested that the earliest evidence of the cultivation of rice goes back to the second millennium B.C. The discovery of carbonised rice from Mahisdal (Bīrbhūm) is also very important in this respect. Carbon - 14 analysis of samples from the site attributes datings to it as 1380 $\pm$ 855 B.C.¹⁰⁹. There is no other early authentic evidence of the presence of rice in Bengal. Regarding the production of food articles all other records belong to the early historical periods only.

It may be suggested at the very outset that agricultural operations were first carried out by the semi-nomadic Neolithic people who perhaps practised a very primitive type of shifting cultivation. With the advancement of agricultural techniques and the growth of population, there was, however, a tremendous demand for more and more agricultural fields. The water-logged areas, waste lands and forests were all accordingly exploited for cultivation of food-grains. This would

be evident from a large number of inscriptions belonging to a period ranging from C. 5th to 7th century A.D. It is learnt from all these epigraphic records that even waste-lands and water-logged areas were either purchased or donated, invariably for cultivation. The Guṇāighar grant of Vainya Gupta records that five plots of land were donated to a Buddhist monastery as Śunya-pratikara-hajjika-khila-bhūmi (water-logged and waste-land paying no taxes¹¹⁰). There are also clear references to deforestation. The Tippera Copper plate furnishes details regarding the settlement of a community of Brāhmaṇas in a forest area which was the resort of deer, buffaloes, boars, tigers, serpents, etc.¹¹¹. But this task of clearance could have been most effectively done with the help of iron implements alone. We are not, however, sure as to when iron was first introduced into Bengal. There is, however, little doubt that in the post-Christian period iron tools were largely used for agricultural operations and deforestation. This is amply borne out by archaeological records unearthed so far from various sites. In fact, it may be said that by about 3rd and 4th century A.D. wide areas of ancient Bengal were brought under cultivation by plough.

Agri-
cultural
land

Agriculture has been always the mainstay of the people of Bengal because of her many river valleys and consequently of immense fertility of soil. Bengal has been from the dawn of history a potential field for bumper agricultural productions, and has been producing all sorts of food-crops by cultivation and plantation. This is amply borne out by both literary and epigraphic records as obtained from Bengal. A glowing record of all sorts of agricultural operations and productions has been left by the Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsang in the 7th Century A.D. He has stated that the country-side of Bengal was regularly and assiduously cultivated and produced grains, flowers and fruits in abundance.¹¹² In the Rāmcharita as well there is a vivid account of various kinds of agricultural produces.¹¹³ Not only that, even the epigraphic records bear ample testimony to all sorts of agronomic products. Here, it would be profitable to refer to some agricultural produces as can be gleaned from both literary and epigraphic sources at our disposal.

i) Dhānya and Yava ;

Of all agricultural produces, the cultivation of paddy or dhānya (Oryza-sativa) is the most important one. There are numerous references in ancient records regarding different agricultural operations relating to sowing of seeds, germination of seeds and nursing of plants, reaping, threshing, etc. As to sowing of seeds various methods

have been referred to, such as, broadcasting, drilling and transplanting. All these agricultural operations appear to have been similar to the prevailing ones. Kālidāsa in his Raghuvaṃśa while describing Raghu's conquest of the Vaṅga country states that the conquerer uprooted and replanted (utkhātapratirōpita) the kings like rice-plants^{113a}. The Rāmacharita contains a beautiful account of a threshing floor where the reaped crops were spread out and threshed by means of bullocks moving round and round over them (Sostu khalō yadnugame vigupena gavā kṛtapravandhānām vahulōkrte hitaphalaḥ sañchāro lokadhānyatō dr̥ṣṭaḥ^{113b}). From the verse : Khalah dhānyamarddanasthānām Khāmāreti ... in the Rāmacharita it appears that the present Bengali word Khāmār, i.e., treading place of paddy, occurs in the text for the first time^{113c}. In this connection it may be noted that the earliest reference to paddy in Bengal is to be found in the Mahāsthāngarh inscription^{113d}. (C. 3rd century B.C.). Many other later inscriptions and the early texts also refer to paddy and paddy-plants.

There are also references to varieties of paddy grown. Kautilya in his Arthaśāstra refers to different kinds of paddy as śāli, vrihi, kodraya^{113e}, etc. Again, varieties of rice are also mentioned. Hemachandra in the Abhidhānachintāmaṇi refers to seventeen kinds of Dhānya which was perhaps used to denote grains in general^{113f}. The Rāmacharita mentions various kinds of paddy-plants grown in Varendrī (Vahunāni vahuvidhanām dhānyarājānām dhānyaśreshtānām ...etc.) that looked lovely and beautiful^{113g}. The Saduktikarṇāmṛita (2/84/3) contains a beautiful account of the wonderful growth of paddy-plants as a result of abundant water-supply. It is stated : Vr̥hiḥ stamvakāriḥ prabhūta payasaḥ^{113h}. The same work (2/136/5) also refers to the accumulation of bundles of śālidhānya-plants in the courtyard, brought from the field (Śālichchheda-samṛddha¹¹³ⁱ). There is also a specific reference to śālidhānya in the Raghuvaṃśa of Kālidāsa. It has been stated that the peasant sitting under the shadow of sugarcane plants used to guard the fields producing śālidhānya^{113j}. But we are not sure as to whether this reference particularly relates to the fields of Bengal. In the Charyyāpadas there are references to another kind of paddy called Kāgani. From the Charyyāpada No.50, it is learnt that by making fences with strips of bamboos the Śavaras protected the fields producing kāgani, i.e., paddy¹¹⁴.

Inscriptions of the Sena period speak of smooth agricultural fields growing excellent paddy. In the Anuliā Copper plate inscription of Lakshmaṇasena there

is a reference to the abundant growth of Śālidhānya in the fields of the donated village (ratisāyī-śālivāsudhānārāma¹¹⁵ ...). The Edilpur Copper plate of Keśavasena refers also to agricultural fields and growth of excellent paddy-plants¹¹⁶. Even sincere prayer and ardent appeals of the heart of the Bengalees for paddy (dhānya) are clearly stated in the Maṅgalācharan-ślokas like Dhyānābhyāsa-samīraṇō as recorded in the Ānuliā, Tarpaṇḍighi, Govindapur and Śaktipur Copper plates inscriptions of Lakshmaṇasena¹¹⁷. In the Ānuliā and Tarpaṇḍighi inscriptions there is a specific mention of the full-bloom Śālidhānya in the month of Hemanta, i.e., Autumn (Hemantah sphuṭameva, kshetraudha-puṇyāvalī śāliśādhya¹¹⁸ ...). Not only that, there are also references to the granary of paddy, i.e., dhānya and its earliest reference, as already observed is to be found Yava in the Mahāsthāngarh inscription of the 3rd century B.C. which refers to a granary of paddy at Puṇḍranagara¹¹⁹. Another important agricultural product is Yava (barley) mentioned in the early literary texts. But the cultivation of Yava in ancient Bengal has been hardly referred to. It is, however, the Saduktikarṇāmrīta (2/136/5) which contains a positive reference to Yava : nīlōtpala snigdha śyāma yava¹²⁰. Besides barley, Godhuma or wheat was another agronomic product. But unfortunately, cultivation of wheat does not appear to have been very common in ancient Bengal.

In this context of the discussion on paddy and granary, a particular reference may be made to a very significant archaeological discovery made at a site named Rājibāḍidāṅgā in the district of Murśidābād. A big granary containing solid deposition of burnt grains of rice and wheat was unearthed. It appears that the granary caught fire and was completely burnt¹²¹. Scientific analysis of recovered burnt grains revealed that the deposition contained both wheat and rice (Oryza sativa). Three major varieties of rice (superfine, fine and coarse) could be identified¹²². It has been pointed out that wheat of this deposition belonged to the North Indian variety. Accordingly, it may be affirmed that wheat-cultivation in this region was perhaps introduced from upper India¹²³. This granary at Rājibāḍidāṅgā has been attributed to Culture Period II at the site, and radio-carbon analysis of burnt grains attributed to it a precise dating as 1200± 80, i.e., 8th and 9th century A.D.¹²⁴ This is the first authentic datable record of the cultivation of rice and wheat. It may be noted further that hardly any reference to the production of wheat can be found in the early epigraphic and literary records of Bengal.

(ii) Sugarcane .

Next important food-crop cultivated in ancient Bengal was of course sugarcane (Ikshu/paundra or saccharum officinarum). The classical writers like Aelian and others

made a particular reference to the cultivation of sugarcane, and they described it as a kind of honey extracted from reeds grown amongst the Prasioi¹²⁵. Lucan has specifically stated that the people near the Ganges were in the habit of quaffing sweet juices from tender reeds¹²⁶. It is therefore, quite evident that in the lower valley of the Ganges sugarcane was largely cultivated. In this connection, a particular reference may be made to varieties of sugarcane as described by Śūsṛuta, one of which is called Paundraka¹²⁷. This kind of sugarcane has been perhaps named after the Paundra country wherein it largely grew. That the Paundra country or North Bengal used to produce sugarcane is also attested to by the Rāmācharita which refers to sugarcane-plants in Varendrī. It is stated : Tatra jāta ikshuviśeṣaḥ Paundrakanāmnā¹²⁸... The Saduktikarnāmrta (2/84/3, 2/136/5) contains also references to abundant growth of sugarcane-plants in the fields, and even to sounds created by the Ikshuyantra for making molasses (dhvanadikshuyantramukhaḥ āgrāmya guḍāmōdinah)¹²⁹.

It is very interesting to note in this connection that the modern vernacular names of sugarcane like paundia, paunda, pundi, etc., cultivated in different parts of Bengal even today appear to have been derived from the ancient name Paundraka¹³⁰. Words like Ishu or Śar plausibly formed the term Ikshu commonly used in Bengal for sugarcane. Ikshu's name is Paudā or Pudā which bears affinity with the term Paundra, the most ancient name for sugarcane, and the people who cultivated and produced this plant were indeed the Paundras or Pundras¹³¹. Even today sugarcane (ākḥ in dialectical Bengali) is largely produced in different parts of Bengal.

(iii) Coconut and Betelnut :

Next to sugarcane, a particular reference is to be made to Nārikela (coconut or cocosmucifera) and Guvāka (betelnut or supāri or areca catechu) plantations. These two kinds of plants were largely grown by the side of the rivers like the Ganges, Padmā, Brahmaputra and Karatōyā and in the creek of the Sundarban area of the Nāvya region of Vaṅga or in the swampy lands of lower Bengal. There are frequent references to coconut and betel-nut plantations in both literary and epigraphic records. Nārikela and Guvāka are very commonly referred to in the epigraphic records of Bengal from C. 8th to 13th century A.D.¹³². In most of the inscriptions the expression occurs : Saguvākanārikela, i.e., the village being granted along with these plantations. In the inscriptions like the Barrackpur Copper plate of Vijayasena, Rāmpal Copper plate of Śrīchandra, Ānuliā Copper plate, Govindapur grant of Lakshmaṇasena, Sāhitya Parishat grant of Viśvarūpasena, Madanapāḍā Copper plate grant of Viśvarūpasena and Belavā Copper plate of Bhojavarman, etc., there are references to both Nārikela

and Guvāka in connection with the gift of land and garden¹³³. In the Āshrafpur grant of Devakhaḍga, it has been stated that the donee would enjoy the granted land by the cultivation of betelnut and coconut, i.e., Guvāka (supāri or areca catechu) and Nārikela (cocosmucifera)¹³⁴. In the Edilpur inscription of Keśavasena, it is stated that Guvāka and Nārikela were the chief products of a village named Talapāḍāpāṭaka in the Vikramapurabhāga of Vaṅga¹³⁵.

There are also frequent references to Guvāka and Nārikela (Saguvāka-nārikela) in the literary texts¹³⁶. In this context, it is significant to note that the Rāmacharita has specifically stated that Varendrī possessed the most suitable soil for coconut plantation¹³⁷. The region around Varendrī produced abundant crops and the beauty of this land with crops and water was enhanced by the groves of Sudhā or the milk hedge plants and Aśana, areca-nut and coconut trees. (nārikelāvāsinyēsheti jagati and guvākānām yāni udyānāni upavanāni¹³⁸). But North Bengal or Varendrī is not at present a potential area for the production of these plants. On the other hand, lower Bengal or more particularly the coastal areas now produce coconut and betel-nuts in abundance.

(iv) Betel leaves (pān):

Besides betel-nut plantation, betel-vines (Varajas), i.e., betel-leaves (pān) were also cultivated in different parts of Bengal¹³⁹. Even today betel-leaf (pān) production and selling are done by a particular community called Bārujivī or Bārai¹⁴⁰. Betel-leaves (pān) are often referred to in the Charyyāpas. It is interesting to refer to the Śloka from the Charyyāpada : hi-a-tāmbōla-mahāsukhēkapura khāi¹⁴¹. Here the word tāmbula is used for the Bengali word pān. Betel-leaves are to be found in abundance, more particularly in the Nāvya areas of the Vaṅga country. From Vāsudeva Image inscription of Govindachandra it is learnt that the betel-leaf cultivators lived in the village of Pāikpārā, and that they derived their wealth from the sale of betel-leaf¹⁴². The Sāhitya Parishat Copper plate grant of Viśvarūpasena refers to betel-leaves plantation thriving in Bengal during the Sena period and thereby augmenting the wealth of the people¹⁴³. In the same record the expressions are : utana-varaja, varaja-guvāka, etc., which certainly speak of the existence of betel-vines. Varaja perhaps refers to betel-leaf plantation¹⁴⁴. The land containing Varajas was regarded as a source of wealth. The same inscription also records a statement of income from seven Varajas¹⁴⁵. It thus follows that the donee Halāyudha had a lucrative income from betel-nut and betel vines¹⁴⁶.

There flourished also a lucrative trade in respect of exporting betel-nuts and betel-leaves to other parts of India¹⁴⁷. Bengal and Malabar regions have been the traditional betel-leaf growing areas in India, and it may be reasonably contended that these products were perhaps sold at exorbitant rates. In the Pratāpgarh inscription of Mahendrapāla of Kanauj there is an incidental reference to the sale of betel-nuts¹⁴⁸. As Bengal, particularly lower Bengal, has been the region par-excellence of betel-nut plantation from hoary antiquity, it may be most reasonably upheld that betel-nuts were largely exported to other parts of India, and thereby the people of Bengal did certainly carry on a lucrative trade.

(v) **Miscellaneous Products :**

Besides coconut and betel-nut, many other fruits like Āmra (mango, mangifera indica), Dālimba (pomegranate, punica granatum), Kadali or kalā (plantain, musa paradisiaca), Madhuka (honey, bassia latifolia), Kharjura (date, phoenix sylvestris), Vija (citron), Panasa or kāñthāl (jackfruit, or artocarpus integrifolia), Parkati (fig, ficus cunes), etc., were also cultivated in abundance. This is clearly borne out by the expression āmrapanasa in a large number of inscriptions¹⁴⁹. Āmrāphala (mango) has been highly spoken by Umāpatidhara¹⁵⁰. Both Āmra and Panasa (i.e., mango and jackfruit) have been most popular fruits in Bengal from very early times. The Khālimpur inscription refers to both mango and Panasa groves¹⁵¹. In the Bāngarh grant of Mahīpāla, Monghyr and Bhāgalpur grants, Irdā Copper plate of Nārāyaṇapāla, Rāmgāñj plate of Īśvaraghoshā, Manahali grant of Madanapāla, etc., there are references to saāmramadhukah¹⁵².

In most inscriptions, mango and jackfruit, i.e., Āmrāpanasa have been mentioned together as in the Rāmpal grant of Śrīchandra, Belāva Copper plate of Bhojavarman, Naihātī Copper plate of Vallālasena, etc.¹⁵³. The Chinese Pilgrim Hiuen Tsang in the 7th century A.D. has given a detailed account of the abundance of the highly esteemed Panasa (jackfruit) in Puṇḍravardhana¹⁵⁴. Like Panasa, Kadali or Kalā (plantain) was another popular fruit in ancient Bengal. Kadali is not, however, frequently mentioned in inscriptions. But plantain-plants and plantains are to be found well represented in terracotta plaques at Pāhārpur and Maināmatī¹⁵⁵ and also on sculptures and the Chandī images preserved in the Rājasāhi Museum¹⁵⁶. In this context, it is interesting to note that the plantain-plant and its fruits are not only essential food articles, but also bear magico-religious import of great significance, and therefore, from remote antiquity both have been essential ingredients in all socio-religious performances of Bengal.

Other fruits like yīja (citron), Kharjura (date), Dālimba (pomegranate), etc., are also mentioned in a large number of inscriptions like Khālimpur Copper plate of Dharmapāla, Govindapur Copper plate of Lakshmaṇasena, etc.¹⁵⁷. One Dālimba-kshetra or an orchard of pomegranates is referred to in the Govindapur Copper plate¹⁵⁸. Parkati (fig) is also mentioned in the Koṭālipādā plate of Dharmāditya¹⁵⁹. Madhuka (honey, bassia latifolia) was also widely cultivated as referred to in the Bāngarh, Manahali, Irdā, Monghyr, Bhāgalpur, Rāngaṅj plates of Śvaraghosha and others¹⁶⁰. It is also to be noted that the Rāmacharita contains a beautiful account of the cultivation of Madhuka-(madhurena) trees in Varendrī¹⁶¹. The same treatise also states that Varendrī possessed a cluster with a nice symmetry of Madhuka-trees which could not be counted by words¹⁶². It may be, however, noted here as a side reference that the cultivation of most of these fruit-plants were introduced from South-east Asia as discussed in the following pages.

It is indeed very significant to note that ancient Bengal produced also various kinds of spices. This is amply borne out by the account of the Periplus of the Erythraean Sea (first centry A.D) wherein it is specifically mentioned that Malabathram and Spikenard were exported from the Eastern region, most probably the region of the Eastern Himalayas forming parts of Bengal¹⁶³. The Rāmacharita also mentions vast fields growing fine ela-(cardamom) plants¹⁶⁴.

Another important agronomic product of ancient Bengal was Sarshapa or mustard (Brassica juncea (L) czern). The Vappaghōshavāṭa grant of Jayanāga refers to the existence of a Sarasapayānaka, i.e., mustard-channel in the Audamvarika-vishaya of Karṇasuvarṇa¹⁶⁵. It has been also stated that this expression might also refer to fields on both sides of the road full of mustard-plants¹⁶⁶.

(vi) Cotton :

Besides food-crops grown in ancient Bengal, there are also references to the cultivation of cotton-plants, the flowers of which supplied ingredients for weaving clothes. That Bengal was once a great cotton fabric-manufacturing centre is well attested to by the statement made by Kauṭilya¹⁶⁷. In the inscriptions of Vijayasena it is stated that even the ordinary rural folk were well-acquainted with the seeds of cotton (Gossypium arboreum Bombax, ceiba Linn¹⁶⁸). The early Charyyāpadas of Bengal also refer to cotton cultivation. The Charyyā-gītis contain : Sukara ēverē kapāsu phutilā, tailā vādīr pāsere johṇā vādī tā elā¹⁶⁹... The Saduktikarṇāmṛta similarly refers to :¹⁷⁰

Kārpāsāthiprachayanichitā nidhana śrōtriyaṇām I
yeshām vātyāpravīṭa kuṭīprāṇjanāntā vabhūvuh II

In this context, a particular reference may be made to the statement made by Marco Polo who says that "the people of Bengal grow cotton in which they derive a great trade"¹⁷¹. It implies that the people of Bengal used to export cotton to different parts of the world. That this cotton-trade of Bengal was most flourishing in ancient times is amply borne out by the testimony of the Periplus, Pliny and other classical writers as well¹⁷².

(vii) Flowers :

It is indeed remarkable to note that flowers were also cultivated largely in ancient Bengal. In literary texts like the Rāmacharita, Gīta-Govinda of Jayadeva and Pavanadūta of Dhōyī and in epigraphic records there are innumerable references to the cultivation of flowers like Keśara, (jussiaea repeus), Kadamba (Anthocephalus indica), Ketaka, (paudamus fascicularis), Kanaka, (pterospermum accrifolium), Mādhavī, (quisquabis indica/Hiptage madablata), Mallikā, (jasminum sambac), Nāgakeśa, or Nāgakeśara (mesua ferres), Vakula (minusops elengri), Mālati (savannah or agauosma caryophyllata), Padma (lotus, i.e., nelumbium speciosum), Pārijāta (Erithrina indica), Śirisha (albizzia lebbek), Kumuda (nymphaea lotus)¹⁷³, etc. Specially, in the Rāmacharita and Gīta-Govinda there are beautiful descriptions of these flowers. In the Rāmacharita it is stated that Varendrī had Keśara-trees near which bees hovered on account of their sweet fragrance and which were reddish-white like lotus palms and which also possessed a cluster with a nice symmetry of Madhuka¹⁷⁴. Again, that the beauty of Varendrī was greatly enhanced by a slightly opened Kanaka (i.e., dhustura or champak) and Ketaka flowers (Kanaka-ketakānām) has been also portrayed in the Rāmacharita. In fact, the land was most favourable to the growth of flowers of endless varieties and of plenty of lotuses, red and blue¹⁷⁵. It has been further stated that the elevated land of Varendrī produced large Mālati, fine Nāgakeśara and excellent Vakula-plants. The country also presented excellent fragrance diffused by Madhu, Aśoka, Pārijāta and Lavaṅga creepers with their fine foliages¹⁷⁶. The Gīta-Govinda also narrates that the country was well decorated with plants and flowers like Tamāla (garcinia xanthochymus), Chuta, Aśoka, (saraca indica), Vakula (mimusops elengi), Kimśuka, (butea frondosa), Vañjula, (or Aśoka or saraca indica), Vāsanti (lindebergia urticaefolia) and Lavaṅga (luvunga scandens) creepers¹⁷⁷, etc. The Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang also refers to abundant flowers and flowery groves in all places visited by him¹⁷⁸.

(viii) Plants and Creepers

Further, creepers and various other plants were also cultivated. It is stated in the Rāmacharita that the country produced Priyaṅgu (or aglaia roxburghiana), Lavaṅga (or cowslip creeper or luvuṅga scandens; or perugularis odoratissima) and Priyālā plants¹⁷⁹, etc. It is further stated that water was enclosed by Priyālā-plants which were unique and the land was adorned with the Karunā, Aśana and Nāgaraṅga trees¹⁸⁰. Regarding Nāgaraṅga, it is stated in the Rāmacharita that the exquisite beauty and charm of the country was enhanced by these trees¹⁸¹. The country produced also Priyaṅgu-creepers in abundance¹⁸². The land of Varendrī also had excellent gardens having sweet Āmalaki (or embelic myrobalam or phyllanthus emplica or emblica officinalis) trees¹⁸³. Even the cultivation of the Mahuā (madhucalatifolia or bassica latifolia) plants has been referred to¹⁸⁴. In the Irdā Copper plate of Nayapāladeva it is stated that the village Chhattibannā at Danton in the district of Midnapur was famous for the cultivation of Mahuā trees¹⁸⁵. Even bamboo plantation was quite common. The Rāmacharita refers to the clustered bamboo clumps increasing the beauty of the land of Varendrī¹⁸⁶. Besides bamboo, Tāla (Borassus flabellifer) or Parkati and large Gajāri trees are also found mentioned in the Rāmacharita¹⁸⁷. The Faridpur Copper plate of Dharmāditya refers to the Parkati (Ficus infectoria) tree¹⁸⁸. Further, the Gīta-Govinda gives a beautiful description of shades of the entwining foliage of the Tamāla (garcinia xanthochymus) plants¹⁸⁹.

(ix) Observation ;

It would thus be evident from a perusal of all available source materials that ancient Bengal produced various kinds of food-grains, innumerable varieties of fruits in plenty and various sorts of beautiful and fragrant flowers, creepers etc. Of all food-grains, the most important one was of course paddy. The Chinese pilgrims Hiuen Tsang and I-tsing also have left accounts containing references to all sorts of agronomic products of Bengal like rice, wheat, mango, Madhuka, coconut, jackfruit, grape, sugarcane, pomegranate, etc. Besides the cultivation of food-grains and fruits, various parts of ancient Bengal were also adorned with flowers of different colours and wonderful fragrance. The beauty of the land was further enhanced by excellent creepers and plants. A beautiful description of the agronomic products of ancient Bengal is to be found in the Rāmpāl Copper plate of Śrīchandra which describes the land of Bengal along with its grass, puti-plant, pastures with bottom and surface with mango, jackfruit, betelnut and coconut trees, salt-land and water with pits and barren tracts¹⁹⁰ : "Yathōparilikhitabhūmiriyāḥ khaśīmāvachchhinnā tṛṇaputigōcharaparyantā satalā sajalasthalā sagartaiusharā sadaśāparadhā".

VI. Crafts

Each village in ancient Bengal was basically an agronomic unit. Indeed from immemorial times agriculture has been the very life-stream of the people of Bengal. It is, however, to be noted in this context that cultivation and various agronomic products of Bengal were perhaps introduced by the non-Aryan Austro-Asiatic language speaking peoples from South-east Asia. This would be quite evident from an analysis of Sanskrit and Bengali names of various agronomic products of ancient Bengal as discussed in the following pages. However, it is to be remembered that the villages of ancient Bengal in the past were not lagging behind in respect of crafts or home industries for supplying the day-to-day necessities of life and also for exporting the surplus productions to other villages and towns and even to foreign lands. Generally, all requirements of the village were met by the village craftsmen. It implies that a village did not absolutely belong to the peasants or agriculturists. On the other hand, non-agricultural craftsmen and craftsmen-cum-agriculturists also lived in the villages for meeting all requirements of the rural people.

That there were various sorts of crafts practised in a village of ancient Bengal becomes evident from both epigraphic and literary records. It is noticeable that all crafts referred to in those records relate more particularly to agricultural needs of the people. Amongst various crafts and industries, those made of bamboo, cane, wood, clay, cotton, stone and metal may be referred to. An account of all these crafts or industries will no doubt project a glowing picture of the rural products and the composite nature of the village of ancient Bengal.

(i) Textiles :

Amongst various crafts of ancient Bengal the most important one was of course textile, cotton and silk, produced from cotton-flower, plant-fibre and yarn created by larva of a species of worm, moth or insect. Cloth and garments (vāsa) are, no doubt, described in the Vedic and other early Indian literary texts¹⁹¹. But nowhere in the early Vedic and post-Vedic texts Bengal figures as a great manufacturing centre of textile of all sorts. It is only in the Arthaśāstra of Kāuṭilya that a graphic account of the textile products of ancient Bengal has been given¹⁹². In the works of both Pāṇini and Patañjali there are specific references to raw materials of cloth-making and also to various sorts of textile. Pāṇini refers to Umā or auma (linseed),

Aurna (wool), Kārpāsa (cotton), Bhaṅgā (hemp) and Tūlā (cotton-flower). Besides, he also refers to Śālmali (silk) cotton tree or Bombax Malabaricum¹⁹³. Various kinds of textiles Similarly, Patañjali refers to Kārpāsa (cotton), Ūrnā (wool), Kauśeya (silk fabrics), Vastra, Umā (flax), Bhaṅgā (hemp), Kārpāsa (cotton), Panya-Kambala (standard blanket) and Pāṇḍu-kambala (white woolen garment)¹⁹⁴. It is thus evident that to both Pāṇini and Patañjali various ingredients for cloth-making were quite well-known. But names of textiles and their centres of production are not always mentioned excepting a few like Kauśeya, Vastra and Kambala. It is very significant to note that various textile products mentioned by Kauṭilya have been actually named after the centres of their productions. Kauṭilya has made a particular reference to a variety of such products as Kārpāsika, Dukūla, Kshauma, Patrōrṇa and Kauśeya¹⁹⁵. Manu also while describing the consequences of stealing speaks of different kinds of cloth, such as, Kauśeya, Kshauma and Kārpāsa. Again, when entailing taboos on the Brāhmaṇas regarding selling of articles in times of need, Manu refers to woven clothes from Śaṇ (hemp), Kshauma and Kambala (rug) made of sheep's hair¹⁹⁶. In the Amarakōsha all these varieties of fabrics have been elaborately enumerated as : Kshauma, Kārpāsa, Śaṇ, Kauśeya, Patrōrṇa, Dukūla¹⁹⁷, etc. Kālidāsa also refers to Dukūla, Kauśeya, Vāsa¹⁹⁸, etc.

Of cotton fabrics, i.e., Kārpāsika, those produced in Vaṅga and six other regions have been mentioned as the most excellent ones (Madhurā ... Vaṅgakan kārpāsikam śreṣṭhamiti¹⁹⁹). Seven countries producing cotton cloth are considered best, and Vaṅga is one of them. That Vaṅga was a great centre manufacturing fine cotton fabrics is also proved by the testimony of the Mānasollāsa which furnishes a long list of fabrics for the use of the king along with the places of their origins. Cotton textiles In this list of places, Vaṅga and Kaliṅga of Eastern India figure²⁰⁰. The Dukūla textile was, however, made of a kind of silk. Cowell and Thomas translate the word Dukūla as "bark-silk"²⁰¹.

In the earliest stage of culture man simply wore leaves and subsequently plant-fibre was made soft by beating or thrashing. A visual representation of Vākal-cloth is to be found on the Sāñchi railings as worn by the Sādhus²⁰². With the advancement of culture yarn was taken out of these beaten fibres and clothes were woven. This was done from fibres of Śaṇ (hemp), Pāt (jute) and denche plants²⁰³. Cloth thus produced from plant-fibres was called Kshauma, and its finer variety was called Dukūla. That is why in the Amarakōsha, these two words have been used as synonyms²⁰⁴.

Again, on the basis of texture and colouration, the Dukūla variety of textile consists of three types, namely, Śveta, Śyāma and Suvarṇa, i.e., white, dark and red or golden colour, produced in different parts of Bengal and her adjoining regions. Thus, the most pleasing soft and white coloured Dukūla was produced in the Vaṅga country, soft and Śyāma (dark or green) in colour like that of the surface of a gem in Puṇḍra country and soft and red in colour like that of the Sun in Suvarṇakudya, i.e., in South, East and North Bengal or Kāmarūpa or Burma or Suvarṇadvīpa²⁰⁵. (Vāṅgakam śvetaṁ snigdhaṁ dukūlaṁ Paundrakam śyāmaṁ maṇisnigdhaṁ, sauvarṇakudyakam sūryavarṇam maṇisnigdhōdakavānaṁ, chaturaśravānaṁ vyāmiśravānaṁ). It has been further pointed out that the red Dukūla was woven with wet mixed yarns²⁰⁶. Three types of Dukūla have been also distinguished on the basis of techniques of weaving : (1) Manisnigdhōkavānaṁ, (2) Chaturaśravānaṁ and (3) Vyāmiśravānaṁ, i.e., mixed texture or made with yarns of different colours²⁰⁷. An interesting point that emerges from the account of Kauṭilya is that all these types of the Dukūla fabrics have been actually named after the centres of their production as Vaṅgaka, Paundraka and Sauvarṇakudyaka, and the quality and nature of each have been also enumerated. The identification of Suvarṇakudya is a matter of dispute. Generally speaking, Suvarṇakudya is taken to be Kāmarūpa. But Sastri argues in favour of its identification with ancient Karṇasuvarṇa in the district of Murśidābād which is still famous for the production of its fine varieties as Reśam or silk cloth²⁰⁸.

The Kshauma textile is a coarse variety of linen mixed with cotton or made of flax²⁰⁹. It has been already pointed out that in the Amarakōsha, Kshauma and Dukūla have been made synonymous. It is stated in the Amarakōsha : "Kārpāsam vādaram prāktvaṁ Kshauma dukūladyañcha bālikam dhauta tasarayastraṁ patrōṇam kshaumiti pattavastra"²¹⁰. The most famous variety of this textile has been specifically called Paundraka (Paundrakāñcha kshauma vyākhyātam)²¹¹. It follows accordingly that the best Dukūla-linen was produced in Puṇḍra country only.

The Patrōṇa-linen (washed Kauśeya) was manufactured from leaves as the name denotes. This is made of yarn of saliva obtained from the spider's thread. In the Harshacharita, it is described as Lālātantujai, i.e., made of yarn of salva or of spider thread²¹². It is further learnt from the Arthaśāstra that the Nāgavriksha (a kind of plant being a resort of serpents), Likucha (coral tree, i.e., Antocarpus Lakucha), Vakula (mimusops Elengi) and Vata (Ficus Indica or Ficus benghalensis) trees are the primary sources from which fibres or yarns were extracted (nāgavriksha-likucho-vakula-vata)²¹³. This description of Kauṭilya is also confirmed by Kshīrasvāmī, the commentator on the Harshacharita. While commenting on Patrōṇa Kshīrasvāmī says : Lakuchavatāḍipatreṣu

kumilālō-rṇakritam patrōrṇam²¹⁴. But Kshīrasvāmī speaks of Lakucha and Vata plants only. Kauṭilya further refers to different colours of these fabrics, such as, pīta or yellow from Nāgavriksha, wheat colour from Likucha, śveta or white from Vakula and butter-colour from Vata and others (pītikā nāgavrikshikā gōdhūmavarṇā laikuchō Patrōrṇa śvetaṇakulō śeshā navaṇātavarṇā²¹⁵). The Patrōrṇa-fabrics used to be manufactured in different places of the country, such as, Magadha, Puṇḍra and Suvarṇakuḍya (Māgadhikā Paṇḍrikā Sauvarṇakudyakā²¹⁶). It has been also clearly stated that the most excellent variety of Patrōrṇa was produced in Suvarṇakuḍya (tāsām Sauvarṇakudyaka śreshthā) which may be identified with Kāmarūpa (Assam or Burma or Suvarṇa-dvīpa or Karṇasuvarṇa²¹⁷). In this context, it may be noted that red silk-cotton tree grew largely in Assam. The Nowgong Copper plate grant of Balavarman of the 10th century A.D. refers to Suvarṇavata-vriksha and also to Śālmali-vriksha denoting red silk cotton tree, i.e., Bombaz Malabaricum²¹⁸. But Sastri, as already stated, is of opinion that Suvarṇakuḍya was no other place than Karṇasuvarṇa in Murśidābād district wherein the aforesaid plants abound and wherein even today a fine variety of silk is produced²¹⁹.

Another variety of fabric is called Kauśeya, i.e., silk cloth manufactured from the aforesaid plant fibres (taya kauśeyam)²²⁰. From the account given in the Arthaśāstra it would appear that Kauśeya ²²⁰ ~~linen~~ was manufactured by fibres obtained from silk worms. Besides, Bāṇa refers to some other kinds of fabrics like Amśuka, Netra and Vādara. Kauśeya The former possibly denotes vastra in general, perhaps made from a particular material. Cowell and Thomas, however, translate the term as muslin. The ^{and other fabrics} term Netra perhaps means shot-silk garment. But the Amarakōsha speaks of it as a synonym of Amśuka²²¹. The Vādara may be translated as simply cotton cloth. In the Amarakōsha the expression is kārpāsam vādaram, i.e., of cotton. The Amarakōsha also gives meanings of other textiles as well²²². Some other textiles mentioned by Bāṇa are Pulakabandhu (gaily coloured garments) and Pushpapatta (flowered silk)^{222a}.

It would be evident that out of several kinds of fabrics described by Kauṭilya at least four, i.e., Dukūla, Kshauma, Patrōrṇa and Kauśeya were varieties of silk-cloth made with yarn produced by worms. It is generally believed that silk was introduced in all countries from China. But the way Kauṭilya speaks of Chīnapatta (tayā kauśeyam chīnapattascha chīnabhūmija vyākhyātaḥ) does not justify such a contention that the cultivation of silk-worm was introduced into Bengal or in any other parts of India from China²²³. In the first place, it is to be noted that in China Reśam (silk) was produced from Tuft-plant, i.e., mulberry (mulberry worm), but in India, i.e., ⁱⁿ Magdha,

Puṇḍra and Suvarṇakudya, Reśam was obtained from a number of trees enumerated above excluding of course mulberry plants. Secondly, the Chinese Reśam is white, and it is to be dyed, if necessary. But in Bengal, Reśam of different colours are obtained from the leaves of various trees as described above. It naturally follows that the Reśam-cultivation in Bengal or India might have an indigenous origin. In a later period, i.e., after Kauṭilya, the Reśam-cultivation might have begun in other parts of India as well. An interesting reference in this context is to be found in the Mandasor inscription of the 5th century A.D. wherein it has been recorded that the traders in Reśam from Saurāshtra established trading settlements in Mandasor and raised subscriptions for the construction of the Sun temple²²⁴.

From the account given by Kauṭilya in his Arthaśāstra it would be quite evident that the villages of North, South and East Bengal were well-known centres of manufacturing varieties of textile. This is also clearly borne out by the testimony of the Periplus of the Erythraean Sea of the first century A.D. The Periplus speaks of the great market-town Gange "through which passes a considerable traffic consisting of betel, Gangetic spikenard, pearl and the finest of all muslins—those called the Gangetic"²²⁵. The word Muslin (a foreign nomenclature) derived perhaps from Mosula city on the river Tigris in Iraq is mousseline denoting finest variety of linen manufactured in the Gangetic valley, largely exported to the Roman world where it was in great demand and highly prized, a graphic account of which has been given by Pliny in his Natural History. While speaking about the source of this linen, Pliny refers to a tree from which the people make linen for clothing and that this tree grew in the plains and no other plantations add more to the beauty of the landscape²²⁶. Pliny gives also a vivid account of the export of this linen to the Roman world. He says : "...in no year does India drain out empire of less than five hundred and fifty millions of sesterces (£ 1400, 000 sterling), giving back her own wares in exchange, which are sold among us at fifty one hundred times their prime cost"²²⁷. Consequently, the Roman emperor had to pass a decree prohibiting the use of Indian Muslins.

The identification of the market-town Gange referred to in the Periplus is as yet uncertain. Diverse opinions have been expressed and various places suggested²²⁸. But it would appear from the account given in the Periplus that Gange was a great port and market-town in the lower Gangetic valley. In a wider sense, it might have included also parts of East Bengal as well. This may be presumed from the very fact that in the subsequent periods there are ample evidences regarding the production of the finest variety of this linen in regions centering round Dacca, which came to be known as Dacca Muslins²²⁹.

The Muslins are the most delicate of all fabrics, "an ancient specimen of which was a piece to be drawn through a finger-ring". These fine Muslins were also known under such names as "Textile Breeze", and "Evening Dew or Running water". In the Roman empire these Muslins were also known under the names of Ventus textiles or Nebula. That this muslin industry in India was once highly organised and regulated by the State becomes evident from the Manusamhitā which enjoins : "Let a weaver who has received 10 palas of cotton-thread give them back increased to 11 by the Early rice-water and the like used in weaving; he who does otherwise shall pay references to muslin a fine of 10 panas²³⁰. Kālidāsa also refers to very fine cotton and silk cloth which can be blown away by breath (niḥśvāśahāya). This certainly refers to Muslins²³¹.

The manufacture of silken linen has been also referred to in some early literary texts of Bengal. By the 7th century A.D. Kshauma cloth of the Puṇḍra country was quite well-known in upper India as referred to by Bāṇa in his Harshacharita wherein there is a graphic account of various kinds of fabrics : "The palace was arranged in textures flashing on every side like thousands of rain bows, textures of linen (Kshauma), Vādara (cotton), bark-silk (Dukūla), spider's thread (Lālātantuja or Patrōrṇa), Muslin (Amśuka) and shot silk (Nētra) resembling sloughs of snakes, soft as the unripe plantain fruit swaying at a breath, imperceptible except to the touch. Some were being made by ancient city matrons. Countless and thousands of canvas and cloth pieces, divided up for various uses, awanings bright with soft, freshly dyed bark silk, manauées, whose roofs were covered all over with garments and posts swathed in strips of variegated silk, all these gave to the court an aspect of brilliance, attractive, exciting and auspicious"²³². Even the Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang speaks of various materials of which textiles were made, and in I-tsing's account there is a reference to the Buddhist monks wearing silk cloth²³³. Here, a particular reference may be made to the Rāmacharita of Sandhyākaranandī wherein Lakucha, Śrīphala, Nāgakeśarī and Vakula plants supplying raw materials for linen have been mentioned. The Rāmacharita also refers to "variegated costly garments and youthful heavenly courtesans wearing their veritable apparels"²³⁴. Besides, in still later works like Śubhaṅkara's Saduktikarnāmrīta and the Charyyāgīti there are poetic descriptions of raw materials and weaving of textiles²³⁵.

Some Arab geographers and merchants from the 9th to the 11th century A.D. made also several references to various sorts of excellent textile products of Bengal. The Arab merchant of the 9th century A.D., Sulaiman, noted that Rahma produced such light and fine linen that a robe made of that cloth could be passed through a

fingerring²³⁶. Ibn Khordabad of the 10th century A.D. made a specific reference to Muslims in Rahma (Rahmi) country manufacturing a variety of cotton fabrics which used later accounts - to be exported to the Arab world²³⁷. The identification of this Rahma country Arabs is uncertain. It has been vaguely identified with the Pāla kingdom²³⁸. Most probably, the name was used to denote Bengal as a whole. If it is accepted, Bengal thence must have produced textiles of unique fineness, which were exported to the foreign lands. Towards the end of the 13th century A.D. Marcopolo reported in his account that Bengal was a great centre of manufacturing cotton fabrics which were exported to different parts of the world²³⁹. He speaks of five or six kinds of cotton fabrics, "one of which called Pi-chi was of soft texture. Another yellow fabric called Man-Cheti was also produced²⁴⁰. In the 14th century, Ibn Batu-tah referred to Bengal producing very fine cotton cloth, and that a fine piece of such a cloth could be purchased at a very cheap rate of 30 cubits long for 2 silver coins²⁴¹. It may be very easily presumed that this excellent quality of cotton cloth was possibly a variety of Muslin²⁴².

Accounts of the Arab travellers regarding the textile products of Bengal are also attested to by the Chinese accounts of the medieval period. The cotton fabrics of Bengal have been enumerated by the Chinese writers Wang-Ta Yan and Fei-Hsin of the 14th and 15th century A.D. and also by Barboss of the 16th century A.D. It is because of their excellence that the fabrics of Bengal found ready markets at Malacca and other ports²⁴³. Besides, the Chinese pilgrim Ma-Huan who came to Bengal in the 15th century A.D. has given a vivid account of the textile products of the country. Muslins, "Of cotton fabrics they have Pi-pu of several colours. It is called Pi-pu and etc. in it is over 3 feet long. It is as fine as glossy as if painted. There is a ginger Chinese accounts yellow cotton stuff called Man-che-ti which is 4 feet broad and over 50 feet long, it is very closely woven and strong. What is called Sha-na-fu is 5 feet broad and 30 feet long; it is like Shong-lo and Pulo-tu-lo (cotton gauze). What is called Ki-pai-li-ta-li is 3 feet broad and 60 feet long. This cloth is loosely woven and coarse; it is a cotton gauze. The tuff for turban is called Sha-tu-eul (chāndar); it is five inches broad and 40 feet long and is like our San-so. Ma-hei-ma-lei is a stuff, 4 feet broad and 20 feet long on the wrong side; it is covered with ... half inch long, it is our Tu-lo-kin²⁴⁴. Here the Chinese writer gives a detailed account of various kinds of cloth which were all manufactured in different parts of Bengal.

Besides all these references to textile products of Bengal in literary records, the inscriptions from the 5th century A.D. onwards obtained from different parts of

Bengal contain also casual mention of textiles. The Deopārā inscription of the 11th century A.D. refers to Lord Śiva being dressed with a piece of variegated silken garments Textiles (Chitra Kshauma) in place of elephant's hide²⁴⁵. Not only that, the same in inscriptions inscription refers also to the cultivation of cotton and cotton seeds (kārpāsavīja²⁴⁶). It is further stated that cotton-seeds were so familiar with the people that no one could easily recognise pearls from their similarity²⁴⁷.

Literary texts contain references not only to textile products, but also to raw materials and techniques of their manufacture. This would be evident from the Charyyāgītis of the 10th - 11th century A.D. and Saduktikarnāmrīta of the 11th - 12th century A.D. In the former, there is a vivid account of the blossoming of cotton-
Raw flowers and their clearing with Dhuni (bow) and also of spinning yarn²⁴⁸.
materials Weaver's loom made of bamboo has been also referred to in the said work²⁴⁹.
and making In the Saduktikarnāmrīta, there is a specific reference to the spinning of
of textiles yarn from cotton-flower by a poor Brahmin lady in the following words²⁵⁰ :

Kārpāsāchhiprachayanichitā nīdhana śrōtriyānām /
Yeshām vātyāpravatata kuṭiprāṅganāntā vabhūvuh //

In another śloka it is stated : Vāsaḥ sūkshmaṁ vapuṣi²⁵¹.

From the above survey of all references relating to textile manufacture of Bengal, it may be reasonably contended that various sorts of textiles, both cotton and silk, were made in different parts of the country, more particularly in its northern, eastern and southern parts and attained excellence to such an extent that there was a great demand of textiles of Bengal in different parts of the world from remote antiquity. As such, Bengal could once carry on a lucrative foreign trade with various countries. But with the beginning of the British occupation in Bengal this flourishing textile industry had met with a catastrophic end, surviving today only as a relic of a decaying rural
Observation craft. Even now in certain parts of Bengal, both cotton and silken fabrics under the names of Endi (a variety of silk), Mugā (coarse silk) and Reśam (silk) are manufactured as cottage industries. As in ancient times, even today cotton and silken fabrics are called after the centres of their production, such as, Murśidābād-silk, Vishnupuri silk and Tāngāil, Dhanekhāli, Amarshi cotton fabrics, etc.

(ii) Sugar :

Next to the textile industry, another very common industrial product in ancient Bengal was indeed sugar. Bengal was certainly a great centre of sugarcane-cultivation, a reference to which has already been made. It is interesting to note in this connection Sugarcane: names that the modern vernacular names of sugarcane like Paundīā, Paundā, Pundi, etc., cultivated in different parts of Bengal appear to have been derived from the ancient name Paundraka. Terms like Ishu or Sar possibly formed the word Ikshu, the most commonly used expression in Bengal for sugarcane. Ikshu's name is pauda or puda which bears similarity with the term Paundra²⁵². The most ancient name for sugarcane and the people who cultivated and produced this plant was indeed the Paundra or Pundra. Śuśruta has made a particular reference to 'Paundraka' sugarcane which yielded sufficient quantity of juice²⁵³. The commentator states that it was so named because of its production in the Paundra country. (tatra jātā ikshuviśeshah Paundrakanāmnā....)²⁵⁴. That the Paundra country or Varendrī in North Bengal cultivated and produced sugarcane on a large scale is fully attested to by the Rāmacharita²⁵⁵. In other parts of Bengal as well sugarcane was produced from very early times and juice used to be extracted from the plants.

The classical writers like Aelian and others have made a particular reference to the cultivation of sugarcane, and they described it as a kind of honey extracted from reeds grown amongst the Prasioi²⁵⁶. Lucan states that the Indians near the Ganges used 'to quaff sweet juice from tender reeds'²⁵⁷. In the Saduktikarnāmrta there is Sugarcane and its juice a significant reference to the abundant growth of sugarcane plants in the fields and also to sounds created by Ikshuyantra. This is clear from the expression 'ikshuyantradhvanimukharita'²⁵⁸. The same work also refers to the cultivation of sugar-plants and the making of molasses²⁵⁹. The villages are stated to have been resounding with the sound of the quaffing machine and fragrance of molasses (dhvanadikshu yantramukharā grāmya gudāmodinā)²⁶⁰.

That sugar or molasses was produced largely in Bengal is also attested to by the account of Marco Polo who has stated that sugar was one of the important exports from Bengal²⁶¹. In this connection, it is very interesting to note that in the 16th century the Portuguese traveller, Barbosa, noted that Bengal was a great competitor of South India in respect of supply of sugar to various parts of India, Ceylon, Arabia and Persia²⁶². Even today sugarcane is cultivated and molasses made in various parts of Bengal. Molasses or Gur is a common sweet produced and consumed by the common people of Bengal²⁶³.

(iii) Salt :

Manufacture of salt was another basic rural industry in ancient Bengal. Salt is an invariable ingredient of food-articles, but it could not be always produced in all villages. Accordingly, salt-manufacture was confined only to places near the sea-coast. Big holes were dug for storing saline sea-water overflowing the bank. Saline water thus collected was boiled and thereby water was evaporated leaving only salt ingredient. This process of salt-production is continued even today in the sea-coast areas. The coastal regions of Midnapur, Chittagong, Barisal, Khulna and Nārayanguñj were the primary salt-producing centres of Bengal²⁶⁴.

In the inscriptions of the post-Christian period there are references to Lavanākaraḥ. The Irdā Copper plate (10th century A.D) records the grant of a village with its salt-pits (lavanākaraḥ²⁶⁵). Again, in the Rāmpal Copper plate of Śrīchandra (11th century A.D), Belāva Copper plate of Bhojavarman (12th century A.D) and in other inscriptions there are references to the donation of villages along with salt (sa-lavana)²⁶⁶. It is specifically stated in the Belāva Copper plate that a village with pasture ground, with the garden of coconut, mango, jackfruit and with salt, etc., was granted (Triṇaputigōcharaparyantā satalā soddeśā āmra-panasā sa-guvākanālikarā salavanā sajalasthalā sagartaisharā)²⁶⁷.

In this context, it is also very interesting to refer to the Chittagong Copper plate of Dāmōdara which contains a reference to a house named Lavanotsavāsrama-samyādha to the south of the village Dāmbārdama²⁶⁸. It follows that this was a salt-manufacturing area, and the house referred to might have been used for that purpose²⁶⁹. Salt is not, however, frequently mentioned in the land grants of the Pāla and the Sena kings. It has been accordingly presumed that though the manufacture of salt was known and prevalent in certain places from the 10th century A.D., it did not develop into an industry on a large scale in the northern and western parts of Bengal²⁷⁰. Therefore, it has been upheld that dampness of climate and large volume of water discharging through the Ganges and the Brahmaputra might have considerably hampered the development of salt-manufacture²⁷¹. Yet, salt-manufacture continued on a creditable scale. Even in medieval Maṅgalkāvyas there are references to salt as an article of export²⁷². The Bengali merchants used to have rock-salt in exchange of saline-water salt. At the time of the East India company, salt-trade was very lucrative, and there was a heavy competition²⁷³.

(iv) Pottery :

Among other village crafts a particular reference may be made to the making of earthenwares or pottery craft which is as old as the Mesolithic times. In Bengal, scientific excavation at a Microlithic site was conducted at Bīrbhānpur in Burdwan district. This excavation revealed the presence of microlithic industry bereft of any associated pottery finds²⁷⁴. This may imply that the pottery industry was a later introduction into Bengal. But unfortunately, in our ancient records we do not find any detailed account of the pottery-manufacture. Only in certain inscriptions there are positive references to the Kumbhakāra or potter as in the Kamauli Copper plate of Vaidyadeva²⁷⁵. In some other inscriptions like the Nidhanpur Copper plate there is a reference to Kumbhakāragartta, i.e., potter's ditch.²⁷⁶ These few references no doubt prove that the potter was an important craftsman in the village. Not necessarily that each and every village had potters engaged in making earthenwares. In many early Indian literary texts, as for instance in the Buddhist Jātakas, there are references to the localisation of the pottery-craft and the existence of the potter's guilds²⁷⁷. The Kāman stone inscription refers to a similar guild of potters²⁷⁸. Even today in many parts of Bengal a large village may have only an area at its one end on the river-side being occupied by the potters, and the same area is known as the Kumārpārā. A village peopled by the potters alone was not also unknown in ancient Bengal. These potters used to supply the needs of several villages. Available records from ancient Bengal do not, however, throw sufficient light on the details of making earthen wares and their different types and varieties. It is only in the Deopārā inscription that the poet brings in the simile of the creator with the potter²⁷⁹.

It is, however, quite well-known that in ancient times earthenwares were primarily used as domestic utensils. Accordingly, the potters used to make and supply various kinds of plates, cups, dishes, jars, pitchers, cooking utensils, lamps and even inkpots. These were no doubt the basic needs of a householder of an ancient village. Early literary texts of Bengal do not, however, contain references to this pottery industry. But this lacuna has been considerably filled in by archaeological finds discovered from different sites, namely, Pāṇḍurājār-dhibi, Rājbaḍidāngā, Pāhārpur, Bāngarh, Mahāsthāngarh, Maynāmatī and several other places²⁸⁰.

The most ancient pottery finds belonging perhaps to Chalcolithic period come from Pāṇḍurājārdhibi, Mahisdal, Nānnur and a few other places²⁸¹. This pottery is usually called black and red ware²⁸². But it would be a folly to brand all black and red ware as Chalcolithic. Even in later periods, this kind of pottery was largely made.

Next to this early pottery, there is another variety called Northern Black and Polished ware discovered from excavated sites like Chandraketugarh, Rājibāḍidāṅgā, etc.²⁸³.

Pottery There are two varieties of this kind of pottery : NBP and imitation NBP.
from The latter variety of NBP has been collected from many places of Bengal²⁸⁴.
excavated sites This kind of NBP dating from C. 4th century B.C. continued in this part

of the country till the Gupta or even the post-Gupta period. Besides these two well-marked pottery specimens of the Chalcolithic and early historic periods, excavations at different sites of Bengal have also yielded highly polished red ware and other types and varieties belonging to the post-Christian period²⁸⁵. Even various types of painted pottery specimens have been also discovered from some excavated sites.

Archaeological excavations and explorations have brought to light innumerable varieties of earthen wares and other terracotta objects, perhaps beginning from the 3rd century B.C. onwards. Terracotta objects so far discovered include all sorts of domestic utensils and also other objects like sprinklers, beads, ornaments and various other objects. It is also very significant to note that many excavated sites like Rājibāḍidāṅgā, Maynāmatī, Pāhārpur, etc., have yielded a large number of terracotta inscribed
Pottery seals which were also perhaps made by the potter²⁸⁶. Besides some excavated
objects sites like Chandraketugarh, Pāhārpur and Maynāmatī have also produced a large number of terracotta plaques meant for decorating buildings²⁸⁷. These terracotta plaques can be dated from the post-Gupta period, and this excellent terracotta art tradition continued even in mediaeval times. It is very significant to note that many of the mediaeval temples of Bengal bear wonderful terracotta plaque decorations. This was also undoubtedly an excellent pottery craft.

Again, archaeological excavations at various sites have also yielded a large number of terracotta figurines of man, animal and bird belonging to early historical period from the 4th century B.C. onwards. Other terracotta objects included balls, disc, rings, beads, bangles and many other ritual and domestic objects. All these objects have been also unearthed from different excavated sites in Bengal²⁸⁸. Pottery finds
Terracotta so far unearthed from various excavated sites certainly speak of highly flourish-
figurines ing pottery craft in different parts of Bengal²⁸⁹. Even today this earthenware craft is continued in full swing and occupies a significant place in the cultural life of Bengal. But unfortunately, pottery-making is at present a dying craft. Even in the villages, the pottery utensils are now being replaced by articles made of metals.

(v) Carpentry :

Next to pottery-craft, reference may be made to carpentry, i.e., wood-craft. Boat-making, ship-building, construction of doors, windows, furniture, etc., belong to this craft-category. Bengal is primarily a riverine tract, and as such, water-routes are the only means of communication and the transport media have been always boats, ships and ḍiṅgi, etc. In both early literature and epigraphic records there are abundant ships and materials relating to the use of boats for transport. Kālidāsa in his Raghuvaṃśa describes the Bengali people as Nausādhānodyatāna²⁹⁰. In the Haraha inscription, the Gaudas have been described as samudrāśrayān²⁹¹. It implies that the Gaudas had fleet as well. That there were naval fleet at the disposal of the rulers of Bengal and her neighbouring countries is also clearly borne out by a large number of inscriptions. In this context, a particular reference may be made to the Nidhanpur inscription which records the naval expedition of Bhāskaravarman through the Bhāgīrathī to the Gauḍa capital Karṇasuvarṇa²⁹². Besides, in the Pāla and Sena inscriptions there are frequent references to Nauvātaka, Nauvitāna, i.e., fleet of boats²⁹³. The term Nauvātaka occurs in many inscriptions²⁹⁴. Kielhorn interprets it 'as a fleet of boat' and equates it with 'Nauvitāna' as mentioned in Deopārā inscription, (pāśchātyachakra-jayakelishu yasva-yāvad gaṅgā-anudhāvatī-nauvitāna)²⁹⁵. In the Kamauli plate of Vaidyadeva 'Nauvātaka' occurs in connection with a battle in Anuttara-Vaṅga (South Bengal)²⁹⁶. It also refers to a fleet of boats. The Rāmacharita refers to the Ganges having been covered over by a fleet of boats²⁹⁷. The expression 'ṭaranī-sambhavena' has been explained as 'Naukā-mēlaken', i.e., a fleet of boats²⁹⁸. The Rāmacharita also refers to a 'Śilānaukā', which denotes a fleet of stone-boats appearing splendid when crossing the sea like bitter gourds²⁹⁹. But unfortunately, the meaning of 'Śilānaukā' is not at all clear. How can there be boats made of stone ? Does it denote boats loaded with stones ? The terms 'Naukā' and 'ḍiṅgi' are very often mentioned and described in the Charyyāpadas³⁰⁰. There are also references to sea-going vessels and also to component parts of a boat, such as, helms, oars, masts, sails, wheels, etc.³⁰¹. Besides, there were ferry services. This is evident from the designation of an officer named Tarika mentioned in the Pāla inscriptions³⁰². He might have been in charge of ferry services and also of other matters relating to the movements of peoples from one place to another³⁰³. That there took place naval battles in ancient times is also evident from the Kamauli grant of Vaidyadeva³⁰⁴. The Bhāgalpur plate of Nārāyaṇapāla records'from the illustrious camp of victory pitched at Mudgagiri where the bridge which is produced by the wall of boats of various kinds proceeding on the path of Bhāgīrathī'³⁰⁵. This certainly refers to a bridge made by a row of boats.

Moreover, some inscriptions also contain references to boats, dock-yards, etc. In the Guṇaighar inscription of Vainyagupta there are clear references to boats plying in inundated areas and also to dockyards³⁰⁶. It also refers to a channel open to boats (naukhāta)³⁰⁷. As to harbours and dockyards we have a significant reference in the Faridpur Copper plate of Mahārāja Dharmāditya³⁰⁸. This inscription refers to Nābātakhenī which has been taken to denote a dockyard³⁰⁹. In the second record of Dharmāditya there is again a reference to Naudandaka which probably implies a shelter of boats or a harbour³¹⁰.

That the ship-building industry flourished in ancient Bengal becomes evident from all available records. Here, it would be also very interesting to note that ancient Bengal had several international ports through which was carried out maritime trade with different parts of the world. In this connection, a particular reference may be made to an inscription discovered from Malay Peninsula dated C. 400 A.D. which records the story of the voyage of the Raktamrittikā-vāsa Mahānāvika Buddhagupta³¹¹. Even the Bhāṭerā inscription of Govindakeśava refers to a Nāvika, i.e., navigator³¹². From these references it is quite but natural to conclude that boat and ship-building industry highly flourished in ancient Bengal and that both the village and city people used boats and ships for transport, navigation, maritime trade and naval warfare.

Besides the making of boats and ships, wood carving and carpentry works also flourished in ancient Bengal. It may be noted that the village-houses were mostly made with perishable materials like bamboo and wood. In the Charyyāgītis there is a significant reference to the fencing of the house with mat made of bamboo-strips³¹³. The rural house-construction was primarily the work of the carpenters and as such, they were in great demand in every village. Wood-carving was also done certainly by the carpenters. In some records there are also references to personal names of the carpenters. For instance, Vishṇu Vardhaki is mentioned as a carpenter in the Guṇaighar inscription of Vainyagupta (507 A.D.)³¹⁴. Even today carpentry is a very common and essential village craft. Wonderful works of wood-craft relating to house-construction, furniture-making, image or doll-making, utensil-making, etc., are the living records of the ancient rural craft of Bengal.

(vi) Stone :

Next to carpentry, reference may be made to stone industry. Precious, semi-precious and ordinary stones were largely used for various purposes. Stone in general was used for making images. In ancient Bengal, stone sculptural specimens beginning

from the Gupta period upto the early mediaeval times are available in plenty³¹⁵. The stone sculptors of Bengal followed a particular technique in image-making during sculptures the Pāla and Sena period, which has been labelled as the product of the 'Bengal school of sculptural art'³¹⁶. Stone images could not have been produced by the ordinary stone cutters. Accordingly, it may be presumed that there were specialised sculptors for making stone images. Even the sculptors are also mentioned in several inscriptions. In the Bodhgayā inscription there is a reference to one named Keśava who was the son of a sculptor (Śilāvid) Ujjvala³¹⁷.

Stones were also used for making domestic utensils which were generally used in ritual practices. Even today stone vessels, dishes, glass, etc., are considered sacred for eating and drinking. The widows of rural Bengal are still very particular in using stone-made utensils only. It is believed that these are free from any contamination and as such, sacred and accordingly used largely for offerings in temples and other ritual practices. Besides, many ornamented objects used for decorative or religious purposes were also made of different stones.

Precious and semi-precious stones were mostly worked out for making ornaments. References to ornaments made of pearls and precious stones are to be found in a large number of inscriptions like Deopārā inscription of Vijayasena, Naihāṭi inscription of Vallālasena, etc.³¹⁸. The Deopārā inscription refers to necklaces of jewellery worn by the ladies of royal blood³¹⁹. The *Rāmacharita* contains wonderful accounts of diamond, lapis lazuli, pearls, emeralds, rubbies, sapphires and other gems as parts of jewellery³²⁰. The Deopārā inscription specifically refers to ornaments of precious stones³²¹. Such references certainly give indications to a highly specialised stone industry in villages or industrial centres of Bengal. It may be added that excavations at various sites in Bengal have also yielded all kinds of stone objects including images, utensils, beads, amulets, etc.³²². In this connection, a particular reference may be made to the discovery of a decorated slate stone plate from the excavated site of Rājibāḍidāṅgā at a depth of 4' 7" below surface. It measures 7.6 x 7.6 sq.cm. and is partly damaged. The plate bears beautiful carved petal-line around the raised border-line of an open circle in the middle, having a diameter of 4.2 cm and exhibits excellence of the art of stone-carving belonging to the 6th-8th century A.D. This plaque might have been used for ritual or decorative purposes³²³.

Even today there are several villages in West Bengal where the stone-cutters/carvers and sculptors are still continuing the age old traditional practice of stone-crafts. But unfortunately, this village craft is also facing deterioration and decline.

(vii) **Metal :**

Ancient Bengal did not lack in metal industry as well. First metals used by the people of ancient Bengal like their contemporaries in upper India were of course copper and bronze. Archaeological finds of copper and bronze objects furnish ample evidences in this regard. It may be noted in this connection that copper and bronze were also used for making vessels, tools and implements. A particular reference in this context may be made to the discovery of copper celts from different parts of West Bengal^{323a}. Archaeological excavations at Pāṇḍurājārdhibi and other places have also revealed a particular stage of culture characterised by the use of copper and bronze preceding the use of iron³²⁴. All excavated sites of Bengal have yielded varieties of copper and bronze objects belonging to both protohistoric and historic periods³²⁵. Besides, images of deities were also made of copper and bronze. Such images have been discovered from all parts of Bengal, and these mostly belong to the Pāla-Sena period. Of such images, particular references may be made to the stratified finds from Rājbaḍidāngā, Maynāmatī and other places³²⁶. It thus follows that the art of copper and bronze smelting attained great excellence in ancient Bengal as well. The making of the images of Ashtadhātu is a glowing testimony of the metallurgical skill and excellence of the people of ancient Bengal.

It has been already stated that deforestations and agricultural operations on a large scale could have been possible only with the use of iron tools and implements. The introduction of iron is undoubtedly a very important phase in the development of the Bengali culture. Iron tools are more durable and effective and as such, their demand was greater. This created a specialised craftsmen, namely, blacksmiths who were mostly engaged in making iron tools and implements like choppers, axes, knives, nail-cutters, spades, digging tools and plough-shares which were all made of iron³²⁷. It was also used for making water-container and perhaps also for cooking vessels. This is evident from the Edilpur inscription³²⁸. It is stated in the inscription that water-vessels of the Brāhmaṇas were made of iron³²⁹. Not only that, iron was also used for making all kinds of offensive and defensive weapons like spears, arrow-heads, knives, daggers and even swords³³⁰. The Tippera Copper plate of Lokanātha refers to a great shining sword of iron³³¹.

It is very interesting to note in this connection that the Agnipurāṇa refers to Aṅga and Vaṅga countries as famous for sword-making, certainly made of iron³³². The sword of the Vaṅga country is also said to be more sharp and durable. Sword is also mentioned in the Rāmacharita as Nandaka³³³. The Rāmacharita refers to weapons of war including Khadga as Khadgādilaughavikaro³³⁴. Moreover, it becomes evident from references to the knowledge of weapons and lores (Bala-vidyā and Atibala-vidyā) in the Rāmacharita that this industry of manufacturing different types of weapons thrived in Bengal in the 10th - 11th centuries A.D.³³⁵. In other verses of the Rāmacharita, swordsmen, fearful display of swords, fierce sword and the use of iron weapons are also referred to³³⁶. Again, excavations at several sites like Maynāmatī, Pāhārpur, Rājāḍidāṅgā, Bāngarh, Pāṇḍurājārdhibi, etc., have also yielded various iron objects like nails, rings, spear-heads, utensils, arrowheads, knives, cutters, etc.³³⁷. All these certainly speak of the development of the art of iron crafts.

Besides iron objects, a reference may be made to gold and silver crafts. It is most significant to note in this connection that the Periplus of the Erythraean Sea refers to the existence of a gold mine near the mouth of the Ganges³³⁸. Not only that, it also refers to a kind of gold coin called Caltis³³⁹. Nothing is, however, known regarding the identity of this gold mine. But both literary and epigraphic evidences throw light on the profuse use of gold and silver not only for making ornaments, but also for making domestic utensils. The Rāmacharita refers to many articles made of gold with fine artistic designs³⁴⁰. Even Kanakakalasa (golden pitcher) is mentioned³⁴¹. Moreover, the Rāmacharita describes Rāmāvatī as "full of gold"³⁴². The Deopārā inscription of Vijayasena refers to a fascinating jewellery made of 'precious stones, Gold and Silver necklaces, earrings, anklets, garlands and golden bracelets worn by the wives of the king's servants'³⁴³. If all these ornaments were actually worn by the wives of the king's servants, the queen and rich ladies might have worn many other ornaments made of gold and silver. In this context, a reference to the temple girls' charms whose bodies were enhanced by jewellery is extremely interesting³⁴⁴. The Naiḥāṭi plate of Vallālasena refers to necklaces of pearls worn by the ladies of royal blood³⁴⁵. The Rāmacharita contains a vivid account of ornaments set with diamonds, lapis lazuli, emeralds, etc³⁴⁶. Charming necklaces with gems and pearls are also referred to³⁴⁷. The same text gives also an account of many articles of gold bearing artistic designs³⁴⁸. Even plates, dishes and pitchers were made of gold and silver. There are also references to Guvarṇakumbha or golden jar which was placed on the top of the temple of Pradyumneśvara³⁴⁹. In this connection, the observation of the Tabaqāt-i-Nāsiri which speaks

of golden and silver dishes in the palace of Lakshmanasena is extremely interesting³⁵⁰. Lastly, a reference may be made to images of gods and goddesses made of gold and silver³⁵¹. It would thus appear that gold and silver industry flourished in the villages of ancient Bengal, and there were certainly village goldsmiths and silversmiths as prevailing today.

It has been already stated that the flourish of prolific stone and metal industry in ancient Bengal is well attested to by archaeological finds recovered from many excavated sites of Bengal. Almost all excavated sites yielded concrete Archaeological records relating to precious and semi-precious stone objects, ordinary gical finds and engraved. Beads of precious and semi-precious stones have been as well unearthed from most of the sites. Gold and silver objects including various ornaments have been also recovered from many ancient sites³⁵².

As to the precious and semi-precious stone and metal industry, it may be, however, noted that Bengal does not possess raw materials for the purpose. Most of these raw stones and metals were perhaps brought from outside. Regarding precious and semi-precious stone industry, it may be presumed that its raw materials might have been brought from the foot of the Himalayas, and it is not also certain as to whether these specialised stone crafts flourished in ancient Bengal. Alternatively, all finished stone products might have been imported from other parts of India. Stone and Metal Sources The excavated sites have also yielded a sufficient number of gold and silver objects, mostly ornaments³⁵³. It may be, however, noted that Bengal has always been a traditional centre of gold and silver crafts. This is clearly borne out by all available records. Even today Bengal is the centre par-excellence for the manufacture of all sorts of gold and silver ornaments.

(viii) Ivory :

There were also many other specialised village crafts in ancient Bengal, of which mention may be made of ivory industry. It is generally believed that the Muslim rulers introduced this industry, and Murshidabad became the chief center of this craft. But that the ivory industry once flourished in ancient Bengal long before the Muslims in India is well attested to by archaeological and other records.

Ivory objects There are ample references to both ivory-workers and their products. Ivory products have been obtained from various excavated sites of Bengal since Chalcolithic times. The earliest record of ivory comes from Pandurajardhibi (Burdwan district)³⁵⁴. Several sites of early and late historical periods like

Chandraketugarh (24 Parganās district), Rājbaḍidāṅgā, (Mursīdābād district), etc., have also yielded some ivory works³⁵⁵. The Dantakāra, i.e., ivory-carvers are also mentioned and described in many early literary texts like the Mahāvastu, the Arthasāstra, the Kāmasūtra, the Rāmāyaṇa, etc.³⁵⁶. In this connection, a specific reference may be made to the Bhāṭerā plate of Govindakeśava³⁵⁷. The Dantakāra mentioned therein was no doubt an ivory-worker. Even the palanquin's staff used to be made of ivory as referred to in the Edilpur plate of Keśavasena³⁵⁸. Besides, there are also references to various other articles made of ivory. In this connection, a particular mention may be made to some important centres of ivory carvings of Bengal. We are reminded of the present locality called Dāntora, i.e., ancient Dantapura on the bank of the river Suvarṇarekhā in the district of Midnapur^{358a}. It appears that the present Dāntora area was in ancient times a flourishing centre of ivory carvings. Another important centre today is indeed Mursīdābād which became a flourishing centre of ivory-craft from the medieval times onwards. That ivory-carving was a traditional craft of Mursīdābād district is attested to by the finding of ivory objects from the excavated site of Rājbaḍidāṅgā³⁵⁹. Again, that ivory-carvings, attained great excellence is also proved by the discovery of several specimens of ivory objects from different sites. It may be noted that even in ancient times, ivory objects used to be exported to foreign lands, more particularly in the first century A.D. as described in the Periplus^{359a}. That some villages of Bengal were once flourishing centres of ivory craft is beyond any dispute. Raw materials might have been brought from the neighbouring regions of Assam. But unfortunately, this highly flourishing craft has been gradually dying out because of the changing socio-economic life-patterns caused primarily by the lack of patronage so long extended to it and the paucity of the availability of raw materials. Yet, its value and richness of the possession of ivory objects are widely acclaimed in the Bengali society even today.

(ix) Shells :

Another popular village craft relates to making of various conch-shell or conch objects like bangles, rings, etc. Ornaments made of conch and of their wearing by women are referred to in the early literary texts. From very ancient times, Śaṅkha-bangles and Śaṅkha-rings have been very popular in Bengal. Even today the wearing of red Śaṅkha-bangle is a must for a Hindu married woman. Shell-bangle is in fact an insignia or symbol of marriage. It has been said that a woman desirous of a long life of her husband must put on conch-shell bangles. On

the death of the husband, the conch-bangle worn by the wife is broken and never
 Shell to be touched^{359b}. In the Brahmavaivarta-purāṇa it has been thus enjoined:
 bangles 'Patihīna ... na dhatte srajaṅ cha-chandanam chaiva śaṅkham sindūra-
 and ring bhūṣaṇam'.³⁶⁰ So also is the shell-ring. Besides the religious sanctity
 attached to them, these shell-objects are also supposed to bear magical import
 as a protector against all sorts of evil influences. It is very significant to note
 in this context that shell-objects have been found in good numbers from almost
 all the excavated sites of Bengal dating from C. 3rd century B.C. like Chandraketugarh,
 Rājbadidāṅgā, Bāngarh, etc.³⁶¹.

In this respect, a particular reference may be made to Śaṅkha (conch) and
 cowrie shells. The former is a sacred object as an attribute held by one hand of
 Vishṇu. It is an essential perquisite in all religious matters, and its blowing is
 auspicious in all socio-religious rites and ceremonies. As to cowrie shells it may
 be noted that these were all throughout used as mediums of exchange. Even during
 the Gupta period when coins made of metal were in currency, cowrie-shells continued
 to be used as the most popular medium of exchange. This is clearly borne out by
 Conch the statement of Fa-hien who states that "cowrie is in use"³⁶². Inscriptions
 and and literary records bear ample testimony to the cowrie currency³⁶³.
 cowrie

All excavated sites of Bengal yielded also many cowrie shells testifying
 to their wide currency in ancient Bengal and its continuance till recent times. In
 the Dharmasūtras and other texts there are also references to Śaṅkhabalaya-kārīṇa
 or rather Śaṅkhakāras. Again, there are expressions like Śaṅkhavalayakāraṇa-
hattaraka, gajadantaśaṅkhamayam³⁶⁴, etc. It is likely that these expressions refer
 to both the Śaṅkhakāras and Dantakāras. It is from this Śaṅkhakāra that the name
 Shell- of the modern conch-shell object-maker, i.e., Śaṅkhāri has been derived.
 objects The Śaṅkhāri community of today is wholly engaged in conch-shell craft.
 makers The members of this community are widely distributed over different
 parts of Bengal. In the city of Dacca a large section of the Śaṅkhāris is concentrated
 in one of its particular area which has been named after them as Śaṅkhāripārā.
 An important centre of the Śaṅkhāris in West Bengal is at Rājibāghinī in the district
 of Bāñkurā. The Śaṅkhāris who make and sell conch-shell products are also called
Śaṅkha-banik, i.e., trader in conch-shells.

The once flourishing conch-shell craft is also now facing decay caused
 by many socio-economic factors. New life-patterns and gradual urbanization have

changed the traditional value and attachment to conch-shell ornaments. Synthetic ornaments have replaced those made of conch-shells. Besides, supply of raw materials and high cost of shells which are to be mostly imported have also proved disastrous to this craft. It is also a dying craft of Bengal.

(x) Bamboo and Cane :

Among other indigenous village crafts of ancient Bengal a particular mention may be made of bamboo and cane crafts, of which a picturesque description has been given in the Charyyāgītis. The village houses were mostly made of perishable materials like bamboo, wood, cane and clay. In the Charyyāgītis, there is a significant reference to the fencing of the house with mats made of bamboo-strips.³⁶⁵ Baskets, etc. Besides, different sorts of baskets were also made of cane and strips of bamboo. These were all of great artistic excellence. This is no doubt an indication of the artistic skill and creative sense of the people of Bengal from bygone days. Today every attempt is being made to bring about a revival of this wonderful village craft.

(xi) Mask and scroll :

Besides, there are also many other village crafts which are being carried on through centuries in Bengal. Of such crafts a particular reference may be made to mask-making and scroll-painting. The former craft is as old as prehistoric times, and in Bengal even today it is a living craft. The wearing of masks and performances of all sorts of socio-religious rites accompanied by singing and dancing are said to possess magical potency associated primarily with fertility cult. Scroll-painting is also another traditional village craft of hoary antiquity. These paintings very closely reflect the Buddhist, Jaina and Hindu pantheons³⁶⁶. The scroll-painters of Bengal are known as Paṭuā, Chitrakāra, Paṭikār/Paṭidār, etc. They are found widely distributed over different parts of West Bengal.

(xii) Observation :

Most of the village-crafts discussed above are now dying out due to both external and internal factors. The progressive trends of civilization bearing seeds of Western life-patterns infiltrating into villages have made tremendous impact on the traditional village arts and crafts. This so-called civilizing forces brought about significant changes in social, economic and religious life and thought of the simple village people as well, and as such, changing attitudes and life-patterns

reacted sharply on most traditional arts and crafts resulting in minimising their demands and utility. The inevitable result has been its gradual decline, and most of the traditional arts and crafts are dying out. Every attempt is now, however, being made to revive or revitalise and in other words, to animate and nourish some of the crafts to prosper, for at least catering to the drawing room needs of the towns-folk. Here also the traditional vigour, natural life-patterns and spiritual contents have been lost altogether. In fact, most of the village crafts have been divorced wholly from their respective traditional contents and utility.

VII. Trade Centres and Communication

From the above discussions relating to ancient village crafts of Bengal, it becomes evident that the villages were mostly self-sufficient in respect of both agricultural and industrial requirements. Surplus products of the producers were naturally sold or exchanged. The peasants would require craft products and the craftsmen, agricultural produces. Naturally so, a common scheduled centre of a large village or a group of small villages became absolutely necessary for selling and purchasing all rural products. Such a centre turned into a village market.

Fortunately, both literary and epigraphic records very often speak of the village-market. The term used in the inscriptions for this kind of market is Hatta³⁶⁷. Generally, the term Hatta is supposed to denote a village-market, and it is in use even today in rural parts of Bengal. But its connotation has changed. Market Now-a-days, the term Hatta (colloquial hāt) denotes a weekly or byweekly market at a scheduled site where peoples from all neighbouring villages assemble for trading. For daily market, the usual term used today is ḥāzār which meets either in the morning or evening. In ancient times as well, a large village used to hold a daily market in the morning. Very often, such a ḥāzār met at a central place surrounded by a number of small villages.

In the inscriptions we frequently meet with such terms as Hatta, Hattikā, Hattapanakai, Hatta-vāra, Hattiyagriha, etc.³⁶⁸. The term Hattavāra probably denotes a big market and Hatta, an ordinary one. But today the latter term bears the meaning of the former which meets weekly or byweekly. It is very significant to note that Hatta in the Bhāṭerā Plate there is a distinct reference to 'Hattiyagriha' meaning market-shop³⁶⁹. Even today in the villages there are thatched huts as market-shops. In the Khālimpur Copper plate the term Hattikā occurs, and the Dāmōdarpur Copper

plate of the time of Kumāragupta refers to Hattapānakaiḥ which has been interpreted as meaning "along with market places and tanks"³⁷⁰.

The village-market was also a great source of income. There might have been both private and state controlled markets. In the case of the market owned by the state, taxes were perhaps levied on sale proceeds. This revenue was certainly collected by the state officials and deposited with the state treasury. There might have been also markets owned by private persons. Even today, in the villages markets are privately owned and managed, and all market-dues collected become the income of their owners. In the inscriptions, there are also several references to market-dues and market-places. The Khālimpur inscription records the grant of villages along with the market-places³⁷¹. The Irdā inscription similarly mentions the grant of a village along with its market-place (sa-hatta)³⁷². The Khālimpur inscription refers also to market-dues as well. The term used is Hattikā which has been explained by Kielhorn as market-dues³⁷³. The expression in the inscription refers to the grant of four villages along with their Hattikā³⁷⁴. This implies that the market was perhaps owned by the king, and while granting the villages a specific mention has been made of the market-dues which would be also vested with the donee. No significant reference is, however, to be found in the inscriptions regarding the details of privately owned markets.

From the meagre information obtained from the available sources, it may be presumed that there were regular trading centres in the villages as well. But it is not known for certain as to what extent the villages were intercommunicated. There are of course several references to public roads. The Chittagong plate of Dāmōdara mentions such a Rājapatha passing by the side of a village³⁷⁶. In this connection, a particular reference may be made to the discovery of remains of two ancient embanked roads in the neighbourhood of Dhanora³⁷⁷. There might not have been many regular roads connecting villages. It is, however, almost certain that there were pathways for land-communications. Besides intercommunications between the villages by land, there were also means of water-communications through various kinds of water-transport. Both in the early literature and epigraphic records there are sufficient materials relating to the use of boats and ḍiṅgi for water transport. The plying of boats and ḍiṅgis are frequently referred to in the Charyyāpadas³⁷⁸. This is evident from the pada : Gāṅgā Jaunā mājhere

vahai nāi³⁷⁹. In the inscriptions as well the term 'ṇau' meaning boats occurs frequently³⁸⁰. There are also references to Nauvāta and Nauvātaka meaning perhaps navy³⁸¹.

It would thus appear that intercommunication between the villages was maintained both by land and water, and as such, people from distant villages could also meet together in small and large markets which have been always centres of great attraction for economic, political, social and religious communications of the village people. In fact, the village-markets were indeed the very nerve centres of the rural people of ancient Bengal.

VIII. Medium of Exchange : Currency

In this context, a brief reference may be made to the medium of exchange and the currency system prevalent in the ancient villages of Bengal. In other words, it is to be found out as to how the market-transactions were carried out in ancient Bengal. It is quite well-known that from hoary antiquity all exchanges in rural Bengal were carried out by barter system. Subsequently, along with barter cowries or shells were largely used as currency. The use of cowries is frequently referred to in both literary and epigraphic records³⁸². It is very significant to note in this connection that the Gupta rulers issued various types of gold, silver and copper coins. Yet, the cowries continued to be the common medium of exchange in the rural areas. This is attested to by the account of Fa-hien who visited India during the time of Chandragupta. It is known from the account of Fa-hien that the cowrie was largely used in rural Bengal in the Gupta period^{382a}. This observation of the Chinese pilgrim is corroborated by the discovery of cowries during excavations at a number of early and late historical sites of Bengal belonging to the Gupta and post-Gupta Cowrie periods. Excavations at different sites yielded numerous cowries currency of various sizes and even in hoards indicating wide currency of cowries in ancient times³⁸³. Cowries in fact are being largely used by the people of Bengal from early times as currency. From the Rāmacharita it is learnt that the army of the king Madanapāla was maintained by the payment in cowries³⁸⁴. According to Minhāj, when the Muhammadans came to Bengal, they found the people using cowrie shells in all transactions³⁸⁵. When the king desired to make any monetary gift, says the Muslim historian, "the lowest gift he used to confer was a lakh of kownies"³⁸⁶. From another Muslim source it is learnt that the trade in Bengal was carried on by the medium of cowrie which was the current

money of the country³⁸⁷. The Bengali Charyyā-padas also refer to the use of Kavadī (cowrie) and Vōdī (budī³⁸⁸) (kavadī na lei, vōdī na lei suchchhadē pār karēi). There is nothing surprising at the use of cowrie shells even in a commercially developed community. As late as 1750 A.D., duties or taxes were collected even in Calcutta in cowries, and many bazar-transactions were also carried on through cowries³⁸⁹.

Regarding the actual use of coins as the medium of exchange a reference is to be first made to the punch-marked coins. Like other parts of India, this kind of coin is indeed the oldest available specimen in Bengal as well. Such coins have been obtained in large numbers from both excavated and unexcavated sites³⁹⁰. These are mostly made of copper and silver bearing primarily various symbols or motifs³⁹¹. Their earliest dating is attributed to 7th - 6th century B.C. and latest 3rd century B.C. All punch-marked coins of ancient Bengal cannot be, however, attributed to such an early period. Some of these coins did actually belong to a very late period. These coins were not perhaps issued by any state authority, but by the guild organisations or corporations. These coins were current in Bengal even upto the early medieval periods along with regular coins.

With the establishment of the Maurya dynasty a regular coinage was perhaps introduced, though no coins bearing any positive indication of their issue being made by the Mauryan kings have been discovered yet. From this time, however, we come across several words in both literary and epigraphic records denoting different denominations of coins. Some of these terms are Gandaka, Kākanika, Purāna, Kapardaka, etc. The Mahāsthān Brāhmī inscription refers to a coin called Gandaka and probably also to Kākanika³⁹². The word Gandaka has been explained as a small piece of coin of the value of four cowries, and Kākanika is referred to in the Arthasāstra as a 'sub-multiple of the copper coin Kārshāpana³⁹³. Besides, epigraphic records belonging to the Gupta period mention two other kinds of coins, viz., Dināra and Rūpaka as media of exchange even in purchasing land. Silver and copper Rūpakas designated as Rūpya-rūpa and Tāmra-rūpa respectively are also mentioned in the Arthasāstra³⁹⁴. It is generally held that the term Dināra which is derived from the Latin Dinarius aureus denotes gold, and Rūpaka denotes silver coin of the Gupta monarchs. Concerning the rate of exchange between the two, we get valuable information from the Baigrām Copper plate inscription³⁹⁵.

The epigraphic records furnish also details of the purchase of land at the price of 6 Dināras for 3 Kulyavāpas and 8 Rūpakas for 2 Dronavāpas of land. The Rates of customary price in that locality was 2 Dināras for each Kulyavāpa. exchange Thus 1 Kulyavāpa was equivalent to 8 Dronavāpas in area. It is thus evident that the rate of exchange between the Dināra and the Rūpaka coins was 1 : 16³⁹⁶. The Copper plate grants of the Sena kings refer primarily to two coin-denominations, viz., Purāna and Kapardaka-purāna³⁹⁷. These are usually mentioned in connection with the income from particular plots of land donated by the kings. It seems that Purāna and Kapardaka-purāna were interchangeable terms, and the term Kapardaka was prefixed to Purāna³⁹⁸.

Again, in some land-grants the income derived from particular plots of land is described in figures only as 200 in the Edilpur plate of Keśavasena, 500 in the Śaktipur plate of Lakshmaṇasena, 500 in the Madanapāḍā plate of Viśvarūpasena, 100,60,140,50,25 and 50 /ⁱⁿ the Sāhitya Parishat Copper plate of Viśvarūpasena, etc., without making any reference to any coin-denomination³⁹⁹. If there were two different kinds of coin circulating side by side, it is certain that one or the other would have been mentioned in connection with these figures. Secondly, it is well known that the Purāna was a silver coin weighing 32 Ratis or 58 grains⁴⁰⁰.

IX. Measurements

From very ancient times, the people of Bengal found out various methods of measuring both cultivable and non-cultivable lands. Both inscriptions and literary records furnish necessary information regarding diverse ways by which land used to be measured. Detailed information is, however, to be found in the inscriptions beginning from the Gupta period.

In the inscriptions various terms have been used while referring to land-measurements. It is, however, very difficult to determine the actual denotation and connotation of all these terms and their modern equivalents to the prevalent means of measurements. However, it is necessary to discuss these terms and find out their plausible explanations and equations.

In the inscriptions of the Gupta period two terms are frequently mentioned, viz., Kulyavāpa and Dronavāpa. The term Kulyavāpa is generally

supposed to denote an area of land which could have been sowed with one Kulyavāpa of seed, and Drōṇavāpa has been taken as an equivalent to 1/8th of a Kulyavāpa in area^{400a}. This equation is to a certain extent corroborated by the details obtained from the Pāhārpur Copper plate inscription of the Gupta year 159⁴⁰¹ (479 A.D.). In this inscription, it is recorded that the first plot of homestead Kulyavāpa land consisted of 1.1/2 drōṇavāpas, the second 4 drōṇavāpas, the third and fourth 4 drōṇavāpas and 2.1/2 drōṇavāpas (or 2 drōṇavāpas and 2 ādhavāpas) respectively corresponding to an area measuring 1.1/2 Kulyavāpa land⁴⁰². It will be evident that 1 Kulyavāpa is equal to 8 Drōṇavāpas and that 2 Ādhavāpas are equal to 1/2 Drōṇavāpa⁴⁰³. Accordingly, 1 Drōṇavāpa would be equal to 4 Ādhavāpas and 8 Drōṇavāpas to 1 Kulyavāpa⁴⁰⁴.

On the basis of these equivalents, Sircar contends that 1 Kulyavāpa of land is larger in area than one Bighā of modern times⁴⁰⁵. (1 Kulyavāpa = 128 - 160 bighās of land). This is also the opinion expressed by Bhattasali⁴⁰⁶. But other scholars like Guha have gone to the extent of pointing out that one Kulyavāpa is equivalent to 14 bighās in the Kāchchār district⁴⁰⁷. From these possible equivalents it appears that 1 Kulyavāpa of land is larger than 1 Bighā of land (twenty Kāthās; 1 Kāthā = 720 sq ft.)

Besides Kulyavāpa, there are other terms as well, such as, Pātaka and Bhū-pātaka which are frequently mentioned in the inscriptions of the Khadga, Chandra, Varman and Sena kings⁴⁰⁸. The earliest reference to Pātaka is most probably to be found in the Gunāighar Grant of Vainyagupta of the Gupta year 188 (A.D.507)⁴⁰⁹. It is recorded that an area measuring 11 Pātakas was granted. Altogether 5 plots of land of varying sizes were donated. These plots are⁴¹⁰:

- (1) First plot contained 7 Pātakas & 9 Drōṇavāpas
- (2) Second plot contained 28 Drōṇavāpas
- (3) Third plot contained 23 Drōṇavāpas
- (4) Fourth plot contained 30 Drōṇavāpas
- (5) Fifth plot contained 1.3/4 Pātakas

Accordingly, 8.3/4 Pātakas and 90 Drōṇavāpas are equal to 11 Pātakas of land;
11 Pātakas = 8.3/4 pātakas and 90 drōṇavāpas;

Therefore 2.1/4 or 9/4 pātakas = 90 drōṇavāpas;

$$1 \text{ pātaka} = \frac{90 \times 4}{9} = 40 \text{ drōṇavāpas}$$

It would thus appear that $2\frac{1}{4}$ Pātaka will be equivalent to 90 Drōnavāpas and 40 Drōnavāpas = one Pātaka. Therefore, 1 Pātaka of land would be 5 times larger than 1 Kulyavāpa⁴¹¹. Besides, the inscriptions belonging to the post-Gupta period refer to many other terms in connection with the land-measurements. These are Ādhaka, or Ādhavāpa, Unmāna or Udāna, Kāka or Kākinika, etc.⁴¹². In some later inscriptions, there are other terms like Bhū-khādi, Khādikā, Hala, Bhū-hala, Kedāra or Bhū-kedāra, Drōna⁴¹³ etc.

Most of these terms denoting land-measurements are not in use today, and their modern equivalents can hardly be ascertained. As to Unmāna it may be said that 12 Angulas or digits were perhaps equivalent to 1 cubit, and 32 cubits to 1 Unmāna. Regarding Hala and Kedāra, it may be noted that 1 Hala is equal to 12 Kedāras. In certain regions of East Bengal these two terms are used even today. Other terms and their equivalents may be stated as :

1 <u>Kulyavāpa</u>	= 8 <u>Drōnavāpas</u>
1 <u>Pātaka</u>	= 40 <u>Drōnavāpas</u>
5 <u>Kulyavāpas</u>	= 1 <u>Pātaka</u>
1 <u>Ādhaka</u>	= 16 to 20 seers
1 <u>Drōna</u>	= 64 to 80 seers
1 <u>Kulya</u>	= 512 to 640 seers or 12 maunds, 32 seers to 18 maunds
4 <u>Kākas/Kākinīs</u>	= 1 <u>Unmāna</u>
50 <u>Unmānas</u>	= 1 <u>Ādhi</u>
4 <u>Ādhis</u>	= 1 <u>Drōna</u>
4 <u>Kudavas</u>	= 1 <u>Prastha</u>
4 <u>Prasthas</u>	= 1 <u>Ādha</u> (<u>ādhaka</u> or <u>ādhavāpa</u>)
4 <u>Ādhas</u>	= 1 <u>Drōna</u>

Some of these terms denoting units of land-measures are also to be found mentioned in certain literary works. The Amarakōsha refers to Drōna, Marika, Adaka⁴¹⁴ etc. The term Kākinī is referred to in one of the Āryas of the Triśatikāya of Śrīdhara⁴¹⁵. In the Śuvaṅkarī, there are also references to Ādhi, Drōna, etc. According to the Śuvaṅkarī formula, 4 Kākas or Kākinī would be equivalent to 1 Unmāna and 50 Unmānas to 1 Ādhi and 4 Ādhis to 1 Drōna⁴¹⁶. In the Āryas of Līlāvatī there is also a reference to another term, viz., Kudava⁴¹⁷. The equivalents of all these terms may be stated as :

4 <u>Kuḍavas</u>	= 1 <u>Prastha</u>
4 <u>Prasthas</u>	= 1 <u>Ādha/Ādhaka/Ādhavāpa</u>
4 <u>Ādhas</u>	= 1 <u>Drōṇa</u>

It is very significant to note that the term Kuḍava does not occur in the inscriptions⁴¹⁸.

Besides all these units of land-measurements, there was another very common method of measuring land. This is the Nala-unit, i.e., the land used to be measured by Nalas or reeds varying in length from one region to another. The measurement of land by the Nalas was no doubt a very common practice in ancient Bengal. In the inscriptions, there are frequent references to this kind of measurement. Both in the Gupta and Sena inscriptions the most common expression is : ashtaka-navaka-nalena nalabhyām or ashtaka-navaka nalēna, i.e., the land was measured by 8 or 9 Nalas⁴¹⁹. In the Baigrām Copper plate, it is stated that 3 Kī ulyavāpas and 2 Drōṇavāpas of land were measured by Ashtaka-navaka-nalabhyām.⁴²⁰ As to the import of Ashtaka-navaka-nala, a particular reference may be made to the Faridpur and Baigrām Copper plates wherein the land-surveyor has been referred to as : Dharmasīla-sīvachandra - hastena and Darvvi-karmma-hastena⁴²¹. The expression Hasta is very significant. It is not known for certain whether Ashtaka or Navakanala denotes 8 or 9 Hasta-measurement. If we, however, accept that it refers to Hasta-measures, it may be assumed that 1 Hasta is equivalent to 19 inches, and in that case, Ashtaka-navaka-nalas would correspond to an area of 12.8 ft or 14.3 ft.⁴²²

Apart from these Ashtaka and Navakanalas, the Pāhārpur plate inscription contains a reference to Shastaka-nadir-apavinchchya⁴²³. It implies that Shastaka-nala, i.e., a nala of sixth digit was also used for land measurements. It has been already pointed out that in many inscriptions the length of the Nala used to be measured by a person's hand⁴²⁴. It would thus appear that the Nalas of different digits were used for measuring lands in different parts of Bengal⁴²⁵. From the Sena inscriptions it becomes evident that there were at least four kinds of Nalas in use for measuring lands. As for instance, the Samatatiya-nala was the standard of measurement not only in Samatata region, but also in the Khādi-Vishaya of the Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti⁴²⁶. Again, Vṛishabha-śāṅkara was perhaps used for measuring land in Uttara-Rāḍha of the Vardhamāna-bhukti and Vyāghrataṭi in Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti⁴²⁷. Another kind of Nala-

measurement was used in Varendrī. In the Tarpaṇḍighi plate of Lakshmaṇasena, the expression is : tatratya-deśa vyavahāra-nalēna, i.e., the land was measured by the nala standard in use in the country⁴²⁸. Besides, a Nala of 56 cubits was in use at Vetadḍachaturaka in Paśchimakhātika of Vardhamāna-bhukti⁴²⁹. Moreover, a Nala measuring 22 Hastas was also in use in the north-eastern part of the Dacca district as evident from the Bhowāl Copper plate of Lakshmaṇasena⁴³⁰.

It would be thus clear that various kinds of land-measurements were in use in different parts of ancient Bengal. As most of the inscriptions contain information relating to grants, purchases and sales of lands, land-measurements were necessary to denote the areas donated or sold. This further proves that the people of ancient Bengal were thoroughly acquainted with the land-survey, and as far as possible, accurate measurements of land were faithfully made and recorded.

X. Village Administration

Like all tribal settlements, the villages of ancient Bengal were also self-administered units. Unfortunately, sufficient records regarding the village administration in ancient Bengal are not available till the expansion of the imperial authority over the villages. No authentic information regarding the pre-Mauryan village administration of Bengal can be gathered. It is perhaps during the time of the Mauryas that the imperial authority was extended over the villages, and some of them might have been brought under the direct administrative control of the Magadhan authority. The extension of the imperial authority over the villages became more and more ~~growing~~ with the beginning of the rule of the Imperial Guptas, and this pattern continued till the Muslim conquest.

A large number of epigraphic records from the Gupta period onwards bearing elaborate details regarding the purchase, sale and gift of land made by the king and villagers throw considerable light on administrative patterns of the ancient villages of Bengal. While recording purchases or gifts of lands, all sorts of official formalities were strictly adhered to, and a large number of officers who were entrusted with diverse functions have been introduced. The expansion of the royal authority becomes further evident with the rise and growth of feudalism or Sāmanta-nripatis. The beginnings of a form of feudal structure in ancient Bengal can be most fruitfully traced from the Gupta period onwards⁴³¹.

Both the Mauryas and the Guptas introduced a sound administrative machinery. The kingdom was divided into several integral administrative units like the Bhuktis, Vishayas, Mandalas or Vithis, Khandalas, Chaturakas and lastly Grāmas or Pātakas.⁴³¹ It appears that all these administrative units were created with the sole purpose of controlling various kinds of land-transaction and the collection of taxes and maintenance of law and order throughout the kingdom. Even the government officials were posted in the villages for this purpose. In spite of this elaborate and effective administrative machinery, the villages in ancient Bengal continued to enjoy considerable autonomy in respect of all matters affecting them. This becomes evident even from the inscriptional records from the Gupta period onwards. The general village administrative pattern as recorded in the inscriptions is based on the primitive or traditional village administrative system.

It is quite well-known that like all other parts of India, the villages of ancient Bengal were also so many little republics in which all the inhabitants of a village took active part in all affairs concerning them. In inscriptions there are frequent references to Pañchakula, Ashtakula and also Ashtakulādhikarāṇa.⁴³² The Pañchakula appears to be analogous with the tribal Pañchāyet. It consisted of five persons, perhaps selected from amongst the village inhabitants who were responsible for the village administration. In Nilakantha's commentary on the Sabhāparvan of the Mahābhārata the five forming the Pañcha have been named as : Samāhartā, Sannidāta, Gonaka, Lekhaka and Sākshī.⁴³³ The term Pañchāyet Pañchakula occurs also in several inscriptions.⁴³⁴ Goshal suggests that the body of Pañchakula was concerned with financial matters of various kinds including those connected with land.⁴³⁵ It appears, however, that Pañchakula was the body par-excellence of the villagers looking after not only its financial aspects, but also all other matters relating to the village. This body was no doubt given a recognition even by the imperial authority, and it might have been remodelled to suit the imperial purpose. But the bedrock of the Pañchakula was indeed the archaic Panchāyet system. Even the Maurya and Gupta imperial authorities did not directly interfere with the workings of the village Pañchakula. Instead, its active co-operation was always sought for. This becomes evident from all available epigraphic records.

Besides the Pañchakula, there are also references to Ashtakulādhikarāṇa or Ashtakula as referred to in a number of inscriptions.⁴³⁶ Scholars

differ as to the composition of the Ashtakulādhikarāṇa. There is, however, little doubt that the Ashtakula was almost similar to the Pañchakula organisation, the difference being that the former consisted of eight members. It has been suggested that the term Kula denotes a group which is the owner of an area of land that could be cultivated by 6 bullocks and 2 lāṅgalas⁴³⁷. In ^{that} case, Ashtakula might have been composed of 8 such Kula representatives. It is not, however, perfectly known whether this kind of interpretation conforms to the real nature and character of the body. On the other hand, from Dhanaidaha Copper plate inscription of Kumāragupta it is learnt that the Ashtakulādhikarāṇa might have been composed of members consisting of the Brāhmaṇas, Kuṭumbas, Mahattaras, Gosthakas⁴³⁸, etc. Accordingly, it may be contended that the Ashtakula was perhaps a larger body than the Pañchakula, the former being endowed with the authority over a large vilalge or several villages. But unfortunately, no details of the composition and working of the Ashtakulādhikarāṇa are available from the records. The fact remains that these traditional bodies continued inspite of all sorts of direct interference in the village affairs by the central authority. There is, however, little doubt that the members of both the bodies represented the village people and were entrusted to look after all affairs concerning the villages.

Besides these traditional bodies administering the villages, the imperial authority also introduced a system of gradation of villages for the purpose of direct administration. A detailed account of the formation of the graded groups of villages consisting of 10 villages, 100, 200, 800 villages, etc. are to be found in the Manusmṛhitā and Arthaśāstra of Kauṭilya⁴³⁹. It implies that even from Graded grouping of villages Mauryan times all efforts were made to bring the villages under the direct control of the state authority because of the very fact that the heads of such graded groups of villages were directly responsible to the state authority. Even in epigraphic records, there are several references to such graded grouping of villages as for instance, Daśagrāma and Daśagrāmikādi or headman of ten villages is frequently referred to in the inscriptions⁴⁴⁰. This graded grouping of villages formed parts and parcels of the imperial administrative structure. Originally, each village was a unit by itself and was headed by Grāmika or Grāmapati. In the inscriptions frequent references to Grāmika have been also made⁴⁴¹. Not only that, there are also references to personal names of some Grāmikās, such as, Nābhaka, the Grāmika of the village Chaṇḍagrāma. Yashtidatta, Śrīdatta, Dhanasvāmin, Suvarṇayaśa, Mahidatta, Rājyadatta, Hina-datta and other village headmen⁴⁴².

Details regarding the actual position of the Grāmika are, however, insufficient. Even it is not known for certain whether he was an elected or an appointed officer in charge of the village. It is, however, from the Smṛiti-texts that an account of the actual position and functions of the village headman can be obtained. According to the Manusmṛitā, the king appointed a headman over each village as well as heads of ten, twenty, hundred and thousand villages⁴⁴³. In the inscriptions, the Grāmika is more particularly mentioned in connection with purchases and gifts of land and the maintenance of village temples, tanks, etc⁴⁴⁴. He was perhaps responsible also for all other affairs relating to the village. It is not definitely known also whether the Grāmika was actually the headman of the Pañchakula. Probably, he was so, and that with the help of the Pañchakula advisory body, the Grāmapati or Grāmika used to look after the village affairs. Besides, in the inscriptions there are frequent references to other persons along with the Grāmika⁴⁴⁵. They are the Brāhmaṇa, Mahattara, Kutumba, Pustapāla and others. Moreover, the word Akshudra-prakṛiti occurs in the Dāmōdarpur Copper plate of Budhagupta (482 A.D.⁴⁴⁶). But the meaning of Grāmika of Akshudraprakṛiti is not also very clear. It is further learnt from the same inscription that it was vested with the authority of looking after all purchases of lands, etc. Not only that, even many other persons of the village, such as, the traders or businessmen, cultivators and other actively participated in all matters relating to industry, trade and commerce. It would thus appear that a complete harmony prevailed in the village, and all affairs relating to the village were commonly dealt with, and in fact, nobody was neglected. However, it appears to be certain that the Grāmika was the headman of the village and his position was also duly recognised by the imperial state authority. From the early Vedic times, the institution of Grāmika thus continued uninterrupted in the village, and even with the rise and growth of the imperial authority as well it retained its traditional position and bearings.

In the imperial administrative structure, next to the Grāmika was perhaps Daśagrāmika or the officer in charge of ten villages. In this connection, a particular reference may be made to Gōpa as referred to in the Arthaśāstra of Kauṭilya⁴⁴⁷. The Gōpa was perhaps a state official placed in charge of a unit of villages. It is learnt that this officer was entrusted with the power of

setting up village boundaries, recording the number of plots of land cultivated or uncultivated, gardens, fences (vata), forests, temples, roads, cremation grounds, feeding houses (sattra), places of pilgrimage, pasture grounds, etc.⁴⁴⁸. He was also in charge of registering all gifts, sales, charities and tax remissions, etc. Dasagrāmika and Gopa Not only that, he was also the census officer recording the member of cultivators, cowherds, merchants, labourers, slaves and even animals. It is really surprising that even proper records were made regarding the members of each house including their āya (income) vyāya (expenditure), ajiva (occupation) and even their nature and charita (character⁴⁴⁹). These functions of the Gōpa as described in the Arthasāstra are not, however, to be found enumerated in the inscriptions of Bengal. Instead, with the extension of the imperial authority some other officers were appointed in each village. One of these important state officials was of course Pustapāla who is frequently mentioned in the inscriptions⁴⁵⁰.

The Pustapāla was undoubtedly a record-keeper of the village who used to keep records of all matters relating to the village. In several inscriptions, the Pustapālas are also mentioned by names, such as, Durgādatta, Arkkadāsa, Viṣṇudatta, Vijayanandin, Sthānunanandin, Naranandin, Gōpadatta, Bhaṭanandin, Jammabhūti, Vinayasena, Patradāsa, Rishidatta, Jayanandi and Vibhudatta⁴⁵¹. The Pustapālas or record-keepers were often consulted by the Adhikarana⁴⁵². For instance, the Pustapālas, Durgādatta and Arkkadāsa, were consulted by the district authority of Pañchanagarī in 448 A.D. as recorded in the Bāigrām inscription⁴⁵³. The names of record-keepers are also to be found in the Nandapur Copper plate inscription⁴⁵⁴. The primary duty of the Pustapāla was to enquire into all matters relating to purchases, sales, gifts and donations of land and to furnish detailed and correct reports on all matters. In all inscriptions referring Pustapāla to purchases, sales and gifts of land, the Pustapāla figures prominently. As the Pustapāla was the record-keeper, all matters are to be referred to him. In the Dāmōdarpur Copper plate inscription of Budhagupta (482 A.D.) it is stated that the Pustapāla Patradāsa granted an appeal made by the Grāmika Nābhaka⁴⁵⁵. This is also clear from the Bāigrām Copper plate of the Gupta year 128 (448 A.D.) which records that two family heads Bhoyila and Bhāshkara applied to the Pustapāla for purchasing fallow lands, and the latter named Durgādatta and Arkkadāsa after making necessary enquiries granted the said prayer⁴⁵⁶. From many other inscriptions it is learnt that the land could be donated only after the clearance given by the Pustapāla. It is known from the Dāmōdarpur

Copper plate of Kumāragupta (448 A.D.) that according to the decision of the Pustapāla, the land measuring 5 prōṇas with the right of using canals for watering the field , lying to the west of the village of Airāvata-Gōrājya, was given to the petitioner⁴⁵⁷. Not only that, even the donated land used to be inspected by the village elders, royal officials and house-holders⁴⁵⁸.

It is very interesting to note in this connection that the Pustapāla used to be helped in his work by a board of recordkeepers^{458a}. In the Pāhārpur Copper plate inscription it is stated that the board of the record-keepers was composed of Dhṛtivisthū, Virōchana, Rāmadāsa, Haridāsa, Śaśinandin, Suprabha, Manudatta and that it was presided over by the chief record-keeper named Divākaranandin⁴⁵⁹. Thus it appears that there were several assistants of the Pustapāla, and they actually formed the board. Besides these, there were other persons Pustapāla to assist the Pustapāla. One such officer was in charge of looking Pustapāla and his board after the demarcation of land. In the Baigrām Copper plate inscription of 448 A.D., an officer named Darvikarma who was in charge of demarcating lands is mentioned⁴⁶⁰. There was also a surveyor entrusted with the work of surveying lands. In the Faridpur Copper plate inscriptions of the time of Gopachandra and Dharmāditya, it has been recorded that the land was actually measured by Dharmasīla and Śivachandra who were certainly the land-surveyors⁴⁶¹. They all appear to have been the assistants of the Pustapāla.

Besides, there are frequent references to Mahattaras in the inscriptions⁴⁶². The term Mahattara perhaps refers to the headman of the village or the leading man of the locality⁴⁶³. In that case, the Mahattara may be equated with the Grāmika. According to Pargiter, the Mahattaras were men of position in the village, i.e., leading men. He even suggests that the word Mātabbar or Mātabar, a common title for the headman of a village in East Bengal, though generally derived from the Arabic Mutabar (trustworthy or reputable), is more probably a corruption of Mātarbar, i.e., Mahattara-vara, "the chief of the leading Mahattara men"⁴⁶⁴. Ghosal, however, regards Mahattaras not as "private individuals", but as officials and administrative agents⁴⁶⁵. Majumdar suggests that the Mahattaras may be the representatives of the people⁴⁶⁶. It has been also presumed that Mahattaras represented the landed gentry⁴⁶⁷.

The actual position and functions of the Mahattara is not, however, quite clear. It appears that the Mahattaras were government officials, and their

posts were filled up by the state authority. This would be evident from the details of his functions given in a number of inscriptions. In the Mallasārul Copper plate inscription of Vijayasena it is stated that the Mahattara Hinadatta looked after the village Andhakaraka⁴⁶⁸. It is further learnt that the Mahattara-
 Position Suvarṇayasa looked after the village Nirvṛtavāṭaka, Mahattaras,
 and Yashtidatta and Śrīdatta, after Vaṭaballaka, Mahattara-Dhanasvāmin,
 functions after the donated lands in the village of Kapisthavāṭaka, Mahattara-
 of the Mahattara Bhaṭṭavāmanasvāmin, after the lands donated to gods or Brāhmaṇas
Mahattara in the village of Koḍḍavira, Mahattara-Jivasvāmī, after the land of the village
 Śālmaliṇvāṭaka and Mahidatta and Rājyadatta inspected all gifts made to gods
 or Brāhmaṇas in the village of Gōdhagrāma, etc.⁴⁶⁹. Thus in inscriptions, there
 are names of a number of Mahattaras looking after matters relating to lands
 and other village affairs. It appears that like the Pustapāla, the Mahattara was
 also perhaps another state official. But it is not known whether he was superior
 or inferior in position to the Pustapāla.

Besides the Mahattara, there occurs also a reference to another officer, namely, Mahāmahattaka which perhaps literally means the great headman⁴⁷⁰. As the name implies, Mahāmahattaka might have been a superior officer to that of Mahattara. This becomes evident from the Chittagong Copper plate
Mahā- of Dāmōdara which states that the order of the king for granting
mahattaka 5 Drōṇas of land was actually conveyed through the Mahāmahattaka⁴⁷¹. It, therefore, appears that he was perhaps a superior state officer who was to communicate the royal order to the Mahattara for implementation.

Moreover, in the inscriptions, the Kutumbinas are also frequently referred to⁴⁷². The exact meaning of the term Kutumbin is not also clear. According to Basak, Kutumbina undoubtedly refer to ordinary householders or family men, i.e., men being Kutumbas or relatives⁴⁷³. Bhandarkar thinks that Kutumbins were cultivators⁴⁷⁴. But Ghosal interprets Kutumbina as the heads of the household⁴⁷⁵. Ghosal also regards the Mahattaras, the Kutumbins and even the Kutumbins Prakritis not as "private individuals", but as officials and administrative agents⁴⁷⁶. But the evidence of the Khālimpur Copper plate does not support this contention. For any person concerned with administration is not necessarily an official, as for example, there are also non-official members of the municipalities and district boards and assessors and jurors as at present⁴⁷⁷. The Kutumbins, therefore, might have been the representatives of the people or relatives or

kinsmen. However, it appears from the inscriptions that the Kutumbins possessed considerable power regarding the sale and purchase of lands in the village. The present Bengali word Kutum meaning relatives is perhaps a derivation from the ancient term Kutumbin. In that case, the Kutumbins might have been the relatives of the purchaser and seller of any land and their presence during the transaction was required.

There were also many other junior or senior officers in the village. It may be noted in this connection that all these official positions were created with the extension of the imperial authority over the villages. Before that, the village was undoubtedly a self-governed unit with the Pañchakula and its headman Grāmika who was responsible for all affairs affecting the life and activities of the villagers. The situation, however, changed considerably with the observation the Mauryas coming into power and subsequently with other imperial dynasties like the Guptas, Pālas and Senas when the royal authority was exercised through a number of officials appointed in the villages. This picture becomes abundantly clear when we go through the details of the working of the village officials. It may be, therefore, contended that with the wide extent of the imperial authority and the establishment of feudal structure, the village of ancient Bengal gradually lost its autonomous character, and instead of being a self-governed unit, it was transformed into the lowest unit of the administrative organisation established by the imperial authority. This would be evident from other details relating to the land measurements and collection of revenues made from villages by the state.

XI. Village Revenue

The village in ancient Bengal was the fountain of revenues of the state. The main economic foundation of ancient Bengal was primarily agrarian in character. Therefore, the land was the principal source of revenue. In this sphere as well the inscriptions furnish sufficient information. Revenues were generally collected from agricultural lands. These were collected by the heads of the village units like Grāmapati and Daśagrāmika or head of ten villages⁴⁷⁸.

In the land-grant records of the Gupta rulers, the terms like Bhāga, Bhōga, Kara, Hiranya, Uparikara, etc., are to be found frequently mentioned⁴⁷⁹.

The exact nature of these kinds of revenue is not distinctly known. The term bhāga denotes land-revenue paid in kind. There occurs also a reference to an officer in charge of the grain-share called Shashthādhikrita⁴⁸⁰. The term occurs also in the Arthasāstra and the Manusmṛiti. It is quite possible that he collected the sixth part of produce as the share of the king⁴⁸¹. The term bhōga perhaps denotes periodical supplies of fruits, firewood, flowers and the like, which the villagers had to supply in kind⁴⁸². There is also a reference to an officer called Bhōgapati who was perhaps a collector of the bhōga^{482a}. The term kara perhaps denotes a kind of general property-tax levied periodically. The Arthasāstra mentions three types of kara : (i) regular tax, (ii) emergency tax and (iii) profit tax. Perhaps these three kinds of kara were levied in Bengal as well. Hiranya was probably a tax to be paid in gold levied upon certain special kinds of crops distinguished from the tax in kind (bhāga) which was charged upon ordinary crops⁴⁸³. Uparikara was a tax levied on temporary tenants⁴⁸⁴. Perhaps, it was an additional tax. Besides, the villagers paid taxes for protection against thieves and robbers, and this kind of tax was perhaps collected by an officer called Chaurōdhara-nika⁴⁸⁵. Custom-dues and toll-taxes were also collected from villages by the officer called Śaulkika⁴⁸⁶. Fines for criminal offences, ferry dues, etc., were other heads of revenues collected from the villages. Probably, the officers designated Daśāparādhika and Tarika were responsible for collecting taxes from fines for criminal offences and ferry-dues respectively⁴⁸⁷. Tax was also collected from market, i.e., Hatta or Hattika. Perhaps, this tax was collected by Hattapati as referred to in the Rāmgūñj inscription of Śivaraghosha⁴⁸⁸. Tax was also imposed on markets⁴⁸⁹. Pindaka was another kind of tax⁴⁹⁰. Pindakara is mentioned in the Arthasāstra as well⁴⁹¹. Pindaka is the same as Pindakara. The commentator Bhaṭṭasvāmī is of opinion that the tax imposed on the whole village was known as Pindakara⁴⁹². Kielhorn identified the term Pindaka with Bhāga-bhōgakara. But this term appears to stand for Hiranya (payment in cash) mentioned in other inscriptions⁴⁹³.

From the above details obtained from inscriptions it would appear that various kinds of tax were actually levied and extracted from the villagers, and for which again, many officers were employed. This picture of various taxes and levies is, however, largely available from the records issued during the period when the imperial power exercised its absolute authority over the villages. It has been already pointed out that all these levies were actually realised by the state authority from the time of the Mauryas. Before that, there were of

course some kinds of revenue to be paid either in cash or kind to the king. But all other levies as described above were subsequently imposed to augment the resources of the state treasury, a detailed account of which is to be found in the Arthasāstra and the Smṛiti works. More levies were imposed during the time of the Guptas, the Pālas and the Senas when the royal authority could bring the villages under their direct administrative control.

XII. A. Village and People

From the above survey of the village and rural life of ancient Bengal it would appear that each village was a self-contained and self-sufficient unit. As at present, the village in ancient Bengal was primarily agricultural. It does not, however, mean that a village was bereft of any industry and craft. On the other hand, both agriculture and industry developed equally. Along with this development there was no lacking in trade and commerce. But the village economy in Bengal has remained essentially agricultural through centuries. There were small and large villages, and the settlement of the agriculturists, and craftsmen was largely conditioned by the size and population of the village as well as by its economic potentiality.

Originally, each village was the habitat of the aboriginal and ancient peoples who were engaged in both food-gathering and food-producing activities. Along with this economy developed village industries which were primarily concerned with agricultural and food-gathering operations. With the gradual process of development, the villages made also advancements in diverse fields of activities which became more and more accentuated by the settlement of the more progressive and advanced people in villages. This happened with the infiltration of the advanced people from Upper India, more particularly with the coming of the Aryans and Aryanization that followed. As a result, all sorts of people, advanced or less advanced and primitive indigenes or aboriginals lived in the villages under distinct socio-economic codes of life. A perusal of the literary and archaeological sources reveal that various sections of the people beginning from the Brāhmaṇas occupying the topmost position of the social ladder upto the Antyajās and the indigenes/aboriginals lived in the villages. From the study made in the preceding pages in regard to agricultural products

and crafts a fair picture emerges about the different sections of peoples living in the village. The Brāhmaṇas, the land-owning Mahattaras, Kuṭumbins, the Kshetrakāras, Bārujibis, landless labour, craftsmen like weavers, the Karmakāra, the Kumbhakāra, the Kaṇsakāra, the Mālākāra, the Chitrakāra, the Tailakāra, the Mōdaka, the Tāmbulika, the Saunḍika, the Dhīvara or Jālika, the Village people Gōpa, the Nāpita, the Rajaka, the Ābhira and the Naṭa rendering all social services thronged the villages. There were many other peoples in the villages like the Bāuri, the Charmakāra, the Ghaṭṭajīvi or Pāṭni, the Dolāvāhi, or Pāṭni, the Vyādha, the Hāḍi, the Dōm, the Jōlā, the Bhagatita, the Vedyā, the Māmsacheda, the Chaṇḍāla, the Kōl, the Bhilla, the Śavara, the Pulinda, the Meda, the Paunḍrika, etc., rendering all sorts of menial services to the other classes of peoples. In some big and prosperous villages lived also the Śreshthīs as in Southern Rāḍha and Bhurīśreshthī (Bhursut) which was a village par-excellence of the Brāhmaṇas. Finally, were the Antyajās and the Ādivāsīs who were not allowed to live inside the village, but always outside its periphery.

All these diverse peoples conglomerated only in a large village. There were also villages with only some or a few of all these peoples. These villages may be called multitudinous^s and are larger in sizes. But there were also villages peopled by a single community. Such a village may be called unitary and is smaller in size. Generally, a unitary village was peopled by one particular community of the craftsmen or Antyajās or underdogs of the Brahmanical society. References to such villages are abundantly found in literary works, such as, Chaṇḍālagrāma. There were also some villages peopled by a single section of the several upper or middle caste groups. But a village was generally peopled by more than one community for meeting its needs.

These peoples again belonged to diverse ethnic and cultural groups. It has been discussed in the following chapters as to how all these peoples belonging to multi-racial and multi-cultural groups penetrated into Bengal from different parts of India and made their settlements all over Bengal and also as to how they contributed to the ethnic and cultural composition of the Bengali people. It has been also discussed that most of the village peoples had a primitive tribal base or origins and some of them in course of time succeeded in heightening their socio-economic position. This happened only after the Aryanization of the villages.

An analysis of the different classes of people of the village would reveal also that the class or socio-economic differentiations have been made largely on the basis of vocation which was again considered as the principal criterion for the social ranking and status. The Brāhmaṇas undoubtedly occupied the topmost position in the village. They were not, however, the actual producer of wealth. Those who produced wealth and made the village prosperous were not given any higher social status. There were of course land-owning classes who enjoyed a little higher position. The artisans and the landless labourers have not been also given any higher status and so also, the traders and the merchants. Then there were the primitive peoples and the Antyajās who were all untouchables.

This kind of class differentiations in the ancient villages of Bengal was, however, made after the Aryanization (discussed in the following Chapters) of the villages of Bengal. With the establishment of the Brahmanical hold, the socio-economic stratifications became more and more rigid. This would be evident from a perusal of the deterioration of the position held by certain sections of the people of a village. Classic examples may be cited in respect of the merchants and the craftsmen. It may be noted that before the 7th century A.D., the position of the merchants/traders and craftsmen appears to have been not at all low. A review of the epigraphic records points out that they were great helpers and integral parts of the administrative machinery. The craftsmen like Dhīmān, Viṭapāla, Mahīpāla, Śāśideva, Karnabhadia, Tathāgatasar and the merchants like Buddhāmītra, Lokadatta, Raṇaka and other artisans like the Tantuvāya, the Karmakāra, the Kumbhakāra, the Kāṁsakāra, the Śāṅkhakāra, the Takshaṇa, the Sūtradhara, the Svarṇakāra, the Chitradhara and the merchant class like the Taulika, the Mōdaka, the Tāmbuli, the Gandhika, the Suvarṇavaṇik, the Tailakāra, the Dhīvara, etc., enjoyed high social position and played important roles in the governmental affairs. This was so because of the very fact that the artisans and merchants were considered as the real producers and distributors of wealth. The Śūdras and the Antyajās were bereft of any social prestige whatsoever though they were also the producers of wealth. They had been relegated to a very low position. In fact, all sorts of manual labour was looked down upon by the Brāhmaṇas sitting at the top.

From the 8th century A.D., the situation as delineated above changed considerably. Industry and commerce declined and agriculture became the primary

economic source of the village. With the decline of industry and commerce, the position of the artisans and the merchants also deteriorated because they had little part to play in the production and distribution of wealth. If the position of the merchants and craftsmen could have been retained in tact then in the Bṛihaddharma-purāṇa and Brahmavaivarta-purāṇa, they would not have been recognised as fallen or downtrodden.

It would appear from a perusal of the literary texts and epigraphic records that the Brahmins were all powerful, and they enjoyed a privileged position in all spheres of the village life. They introduced separate rules for different caste groups, but they themselves were outside the jurisdiction of rules and regulations designed for other caste orders. There were again differences in respect of norms of guiding the relationship between different castes. Since the Brahmins were beyond the purview of the social norms, they naturally had their own taboos or prohibitions in respect of their own life-patterns. As for instance, they were prohibited from taking meals from the lower caste peoples and the Antyajas. In general, no food was to be taken by a Brāhmaṇa from a Śūdra. Violation of this rule can be, however, mitigated by the performance of purificatory rites. But at the same time, it has been enjoined that during distress and danger, even the Brāhmaṇa could take cooked food, Pāyasa and even water from the low caste peoples, for which, however, he had to repent only. The Brahmins formulated norms and rules for regulating marriages. Each Brahmanical caste has been all throughout an endogamous social unit, but most curiously, relaxations have been made for the Brahmins. As for instance, a Brahmin could marry a woman of lower caste order, but at the same time, it has been laid down that the said married woman is not to be on a par with a pure Brahmin wife. Jīmūtavāhana lays down that even if a Brahmin enters into sex relation with a woman of a lower order, he can not be accused of moral turpitude. The sin thus committed can be simply done away with by repenting. It appears from Jīmūtavāhana that it is more sinful to marry a woman of a lower order than to have any sex relation with her. Even Vyābhichāras committed by the Brāhmaṇas and other peoples received sanctions under different garbs. That this actually happened becomes evident from Prabodha-chandradaya-nāṭaka wherein a Brahmin is described to have uttered : "My mother is not of good order, I have married a Sat-Kshatriya woman ; in this respect, I am superior to my father". This becomes further clear from all sorts of sex-licenses practised by the Brahmins and others, more particularly in the cities and towns. Though the Brahmins were not the

actual producers and distributors of wealth, they enjoyed all sorts of privileges, social and economic. A review of the textual references reveals that the Brahmins themselves were responsible for introducing all social laxities, and in fact, the whole social atmosphere of the village of ancient Bengal was polluted by the Brahmins. This was so more particularly because of the very fact that the Brahmins from Upper India came to Bengal with very few womenfolk, and as such, they had no other alternative but to take their wives from the local people and even to satisfy their sexual urge with all other classes of women who were otherwise considered as low and untouchables in the society.

Next to the Brahmins, were the people belonging to the Madhyama caste group, who enjoyed a little better position than the Antyajās or underdogs of the ancient villages of Bengal. The ancient villages of Bengal were primarily peopled by these Antyajās comprising all the ancient indigenes and the tribal aborigines. A long list of these Adhamas and Antyajās can be prepared from the available sources. Many of the Antyajās were again untouchables. It would be quite relevant to know a little about the general life-patterns of these Antyaja people of ancient Bengal.

There were many villages in ancient Bengal wholly peopled by the Antyajās. This becomes clear from a study of the names of the villages, many of which actually bear the name of the community to which the dwellers belonged/ belong even today. There are again many villages, the names of which are either of Austric or Dravidian in origins. These two points clearly submit that there were villages par-excellence of the Antyajās and tribal peoples as well.

In general, the dwellers in the villages belonged mostly to the different sections or classes of the people. After the Aryanization of the villages, the services of the Antyajās were essentially required for doing all sorts of unclean and manual works. They were not, however, allowed to stay inside the village along with others. On the other hand, the Antyajās lived outside the village periphery in their thatched huts. They were untouchables to the Brahmins and even walking over their shadows were considered to be a sin. Their general life-patterns have been also vividly described in some literary texts. These common people were at the mercy of government officials as well as of the social leaders. They had no leader of their own. They were quite helpless in all social affairs of the village.

A glowing account of the condition of these people has been given in the Saduktikarnāmrta wherein the poet says : "The children are ill of hunger, body lean and thin like a dead body". They had nothing in possession. They had to simply beg even for a needle for knitting their wornout clothes. They lived in abject poverty. And the Antyajās wore torn-out clothes and with their eyes in the cavity out of hunger they have been described as crying for food and their house-wives with tears praying for rice. In another place of the said work, the poet describes an Antyaja's house as : "The posts are moving, the mud-wall falling down and the straws of the roof are flying away and the house is being thronged by the fox in search of earth-worms. The Prākṛita-paiṅgala similarly has drawn a gloomy picture of the common people of the 9th and 10th century Bengali villages as : "I am a helpless woman and my beggar husband always takes poison. What will happen to me". These are indeed the common words of the Antyaja people. Similarly, in the Charyyāpadas as well the same pathetic picture of these downtrodden people has been depicted. It is stated : "My house on a Tilā (high place/mound/small hill-top) is bereft of any neighbour, no rice in pot, always hungry, but my family is growing like that of the fox and I have no food⁴⁹⁴". Since this was the general condition of the people, the Sādhakas of the Charyyāpadas refer to the void by giving an account of the sufferings and miseries of the people and argue that the only way to escape from all these is the attainment of Nirvāna (Salvation). The poets of the Charyyāpadas scorn at the Brahmin-controlled society ridiculing the Brahmin as Nedā-bāmun (bald-headed brahmin). They also express their non-adherence to all enjoyments. It is, however, to be noted that the Siddhāchāryas included both the Brahmins and the people of the lower order. Most of the Brahmin Siddhāchāryas were Antyajās : perhaps originally persons belonging to the lower order of the society.
life

During the Aryanization some of the peoples belonging to the lower order were perhaps elevated to Brahmanhood. Kukkurīpāda and Luipāda appear to have been elevated to this high position. There is no trace of any Aryan element in their names nor any indication to the effect that they were Brahmins before. Accordingly, it may be said that they came from lower orders of the society. If they were not so, it becomes very difficult to explain as to how they should represent so vividly the domestic life-patterns of the common people of the village. On the other hand, this can explain better their attitude towards the Brahmins and also their protest against the Brahmanical iron curtain.

The villages of ancient Bengal were no doubt mostly self-contained and self-sufficient. Many of the villages were also prosperous and the life was quite easy-going. The village life-patterns, however, differed from one section of people to another. The well-to-do class led a life of pleasure. It was indeed a life in milk and honey including pursuing sensuous life. On the other hand, hunger, poverty, exploitation, and all sorts of sufferings and miseries pervaded the village life of ancient Bengal. The common people were always at the mercy of the richer and more prosperous sections of the villagers. The Antyajās and others who were deprived of their living had to pass a life of miseries and sufferings. This grim picture of the people of ancient Bengal has been continuing from very ancient times till today.

That different sections of people lived in the villages of ancient Bengal becomes evident also from an examination of details of food-articles, dress and ornaments, sports and festivities of the people of ancient Bengal. An account of the agronomic products, village industries, general economic condition in the villages, etc., has been already given. Here only a few salient points may be briefly delineated.

While dealing with food-articles of the people, a particular reference may be made to the Prākṛta-paiṅgala wherein details of food-articles have been described itemwise⁴⁹⁵. Food articles as described in various records consisted of rice, ghee (clarified butter) prepared from cow's milk, fish and leaves of jute. Fish and meat which are the most common and popular food-articles were/are not, however, eaten by the Brāhmaṇas outside Bengal. Both fish and meat were/are available in plenty in Bengal, and the Bengali Brahmins had broken their taboo on fish and meat eating. For giving a Sastric sanction Bhavadeva-Bhaṭṭa urged that "there is no crime in eating fish and meat" excepting on certain days⁴⁹⁶. The Bṛhaddharma-purāṇa (II.5. 44-46) recommends for the Brāhmaṇas only those fishes which are white and bear scales. The Madana-pāḍā Copper plate inscription of Viśvarūpasena and Barrackpur Copper plate of Vijayasena refer to eating of fruits like mango, jack-fruit, betel-nut, coconut, etc. All these fruits, plants are all mentioned in those inscriptions⁴⁹⁷. Hiuen-Tsang in his account has also referred to the cultivation of jack-fruit trees in Varendra and other places⁴⁹⁸. As to the cultivation of other plants and products, a detailed discussion has been already made in the preceding pages. Most significantly, no reference to Dāl or pulse is found in the Charyyāpadas, Prākṛta-paiṅgala,

Naishādasharita and Saduktikarnāmrta. It appears that in ancient Bengal, people were not accustomed to consume Dāl as a primary food - item as it is now. Dāl was perhaps a later introduction from Upper India. Rice was of course the principal food-article of both low and high people. Next comes fish and meat which are frequently referred to. Deer-meat was most favourite for the primitive aborigines like the Śavaras and the Pulindas, the Nishādas, etc. Besides, drinking appears to have been quite common, though disapproved in the Bṛhaddharma-purāṇa (II.6.98). The Charyyāpadas present a lively account of the wine shop and the fermentation of wine with fibres of roots of plants. Chewing of betel and betel-leaves along with camphor is also referred to in one of the songs of the Charyyāpadas. As to the custom of eating, a glowing account has been given in the Prākṛita-paiṅgala which represents a wife serving her husband with worm rice on plaintain leaf, ghee, milk, fish-curry, Nālitāśāk. The Naishādasharita has presented an account of the marriage feast as well. A rich banquet consisted of several vegetables, fish curries, meat, sweet cakes, drinks, etc. This was followed by chewing of betel-leaves⁴⁹⁹. It has been already pointed out that the ordinary people or the Antyajās could hardly manage to have all these food-articles. They were satisfied with simple boiled rice, vegetables, fish and a little sweet, if obtained. It appears that there has been no change in food-articles and food-habits since bygone days.

Regarding dress and ornaments of the village people, a picture can be drawn from both the literary accounts and archaeological records including inscriptions, terracotta plaques, sculptures and paintings. It would be evident that the dress of the higher classes was different from the dress of the common people. The higher classes of people used to wear short and long Dhoti and also trousers, shorts and Luṅgi, and the lower garment was always kept below the navel with the help of a girdle. More prosperous people used to wear dress of various colours bearing different designs. The texture of their clothings was also finer. The upper garment of the higher classes consisted of scarfs as well. They used to keep long hair falling on their shoulders. Sometimes, hair was arranged in top-knots. Even the male folk used to wear all sorts of ornaments like earrings, necklaces, armlets, bangles, bracelets anklets, girdles, etc. Sometimes, they were even accustomed to use crowns, diadems and caps. The females of the higher class wore Śāḍī (woman's cloth) keeping the upper part mostly uncovered. Even there are indications from the terracotta plaque representations at Pāhārpur regarding wearing of Śāḍī in the present day Bengali fashion. Sometimes, they also used to cover the upper part of the body with a dress like blouse, Kucha-bandha and other types of garment for covering their breast. They used to bear long hair falling on the neck and some-

times arranged in knots on the top or bun at the back. They wore all sorts of ornaments, crown, diadem Kundalas, earrings, necklaces of pearls and gold, armlets, bracelets, anklets, ornamented girdles, etc. Some of these ornaments were also inlaid with precious stones.

But the dress of the common people was, however, different. The males generally wore a short and narrow Dhoti. They were also used to wear trousers, shorts and Luṅgis. Tunies were also used. Simple ornaments like earrings, bangles, armlets, necklace, etc., were worn. Like the people of the high classes, they were also used to have long hair falling on their shoulders and sometimes arranged in knots. The Antyajās and the primitives were even bereft of these essential garments and ornaments. The Śavaras used to wear girdles of leaves and short Dhotis. Their jackets and Dhotis were mostly worn out. Even the females of the common people wore simple Śādīs, shorts or trousers with the upper portion being left uncovered. The Antyaja women decorated themselves with leaves and flowers. Various ornaments worn by them like earrings, necklace, etc. were all made of flowers, fruits, etc.

Both inscriptions and literary texts refer also to the use of various cosmetics, collyrium, etc., by the women. From the Saduktikarnāmṛta it is learnt that the village women used to put collyrium on the forehead. Similarly, in the Āryasaptasatī there are references to the application of collyrium on the forehead and eyes and lac on feet⁵⁰⁰. Most interestingly, there is a reference to the use of vermillion inside the partings of the hair of the married woman as indicated in the Manahali Copper plate inscription of Madanapāla⁵⁰¹. Other cosmetics included sandal wood powder, lac, etc. The womenfolk were even used to redden their lips with vermillion. It would appear that in respect of dress/garments as well there has been very little change amongst the village people. The continuity of Bengali tradition till today becomes evident also from a study of the village sports, amusements and festivities.

From both literary texts and archaeological records consisting mostly of the terracotta plaques discovered from Pāhāḍpur and Maynāmatī it is possible to draw a picture of games and music of the village people of ancient Bengal. There existed differences in respect of sports or games played by the higher and the lower sections of the villagers. It appears from the study of the Pavanadūta

and the Charyyāgīti that dice and chess games were perhaps most popular with Games, the high class peoples. Dice-playing was undoubtedly the most ancient music and game in India, but it is not known exactly when the game of chess dance was introduced into Bengal. The Charyyāpadas give a vivid account of the chess-playing⁵⁰². But the games of the lower people mainly consisted of running, fighting, wrestling and all other kinds of physical exercises. In the Pavanadūta, there are of course references to water-games and gardening. These were perhaps mostly confined to the women belonging to the high class.

Besides games and sports, villagers also used to engage themselves in all sorts of musical and theatrical performances. The Rāmācharita (III, 29) refers to different kinds of Muraja or tabor. It is stated that the city of Rāmāvatī was resonant with the music of tabor of many varieties. This was specially practised in Varendrī⁵⁰³. It appears that this playing on the tabor was primarily performed by a special class of people whose occupation was to play on different musical instruments. There are also references to Vīṇā or lyre with thirty-two strings in the Bauddhagān-ō-dōhā. The commentary on the Rāmācharita also refers to Muruja, i.e., flute. The Gītāgovinda has given an account of Kṛṣṇa's flute⁵⁰⁴. References to several other musical instruments like Padhaha (Gongs), Mādala (drums), Dundubhi (a kind of Kettledrum) and Vīṇā (lyre) are to be found also in the Charyyāpadas⁵⁰⁵. The Āryasaptasati also refers to Vīṇā⁵⁰⁶. In accompaniment with all these musical instruments, singing and dancing used to be performed by village people. There are again frequent references to both music and dancing in literature, inscriptions and in the representations on the terracotta plaques discovered from Pāhāḍpur and Maynāmatī. The Bhuvaneśvara inscription of Bhaṭṭabhadradeva refers to the meeting hall of music implying thereby that there used to be a separate hall meant for singing and dancing⁵⁰⁷. The Rāmācharita gives also a beautiful account "of the pleasing notes of different musical instruments, which were sonorous, deep and sweet which produced full effect through the acquisition of the harmony of the vocal music and which excelled the performances of the celestial musician". In the next Śloka, a reference has been also made to dancing passionately⁵⁰⁸. Though this account refers more particularly to singing and dancing at the palace of Rāmāvatī, there seems to be little doubt that those musicians and dancers were perhaps mostly the Naṭa and Naṭis who lived primarily in the villages excelling in musical and dancing performances. Further, the representations on the terracotta plaques from Pāhāḍpur depict dancing in different postures in accompaniment with musical instruments⁵⁰⁹.

These representations deal with the singers and dancers of the village people of different sections. Again, the Charyyāpadas gives a vivid account of the singing and dancing of the people belonging to the lower classes, more particularly of the Dōms, the Śavaras, etc.⁵¹⁰. In the Charyyāpadas, there is a fascinating account of a Dombī dancing on a lotus bearing 64 petals⁵¹¹. The songs of the Charyyāpada also refer to the performance of Buddhanātaka in accompaniment with songs and dances⁵¹². Similarly, the Āryasaptasati speaks of the dancing of womenfolk⁵¹³. All these singing, dancing and theatrical performances were perhaps done by the professional village peoples who were engaged in all these amusements, these both in the villages and towns.

From a study of the village life of ancient Bengal, it would be evident that in a large village there were several classes of people, the high, middle and the commoners. But the life of the common people, both men and women, was quite distinct from those of the higher classes. Both men and women were engaged in their daily activities from dawn to dusk. A beautiful description of the village women has been given in the Saduktikarnāmrta of the poet Lakshīdhara. This account refers more particularly to the Kulastrīs of the ancient villages of Bengal. The poet says : "Her covered head is bent down with shame of its own accord, her talk is regulated, soft and sweet, as if by these, this lady is loudly speaking of her family prestige"⁵¹⁴. Śaraṇa similarly gives a vivid account of the busy life of the village men and women. It is said that the peasants have left the homes at dawn for agricultural works and their women coming back to home after completing their morning works before the return of their husbands⁵¹⁵. This refers to the common people. The Deopārā inscription also refers to the simple life of the common people and also as to how the wives of the rich people in the villages used to be trained by the wives of the town people or the city-dwellers in respect of wearing ornaments and other behaviour patterns. It is stated in the inscription that through the grace of the king, the Brāhmaṇas versed in the Vedas have become the possessors of so much wealth that their wives have to be trained by the wives of the townspeople to recognise and distinguish pearls, pieces of emerald, silver coins and gold from their similarity with seeds of cotton, leaves of Śāka, bottle gourd flowers, developed seeds of pomegranate and the blooming flowers of the creepers of pumpkin-gourd (Beninkasaceriaprā)⁵¹⁶. It thus appears that even the wives of the rich Brahmin living in the village had no knowledge about the precious and semi-precious stones which are in particular the rich treasures of the townsmen.

They were acquainted more intimately with seeds and fruits. The richer people of the village could even afford to purchase precious stones, but failed to differentiate or distinguish or recognise them. That is why the wives of the city-bred people were engaged to train the rich women of the village to make differentiation or distinction between the above mentioned precious stones and seeds and fruits. This was done by comparing the precious stones with the floral specimens like leaves and fruits with which the village people were more acquainted and which were their usual ornaments. These rich peoples exploited also other sections, particularly peasants. From Manu and Kauṭilya, it is learnt that the peasant women had to work under the order of the village headman who lived on the share of the agricultural produces of the villagers. Yet, these women had to do unpaid works - filling granaries, taking out things from the house, cleaning and decorating houses, working in the field, etc. Even raw materials used to be taken free from them⁵¹⁷. Here are the germs of feudalism and the motivation to exploit the poor people, and that even the women were not excluded.

The picture of the Antyajās is, however, entirely different. They mostly lived outside the village and engaged themselves in all sorts of unclean and manual work. The Charyyāpadas have given beautiful accounts of the Śavaras, the Dōmbas and the Dōmbīs in different songs⁵¹⁸. It is stated that in the country and of the house of the Śavara, cotton-flowers have blossomed and the Śavaris rejoiced because Kaṅguchina fruits have ripened. The Śavari girl wearing peacock's feather and Guṇjari garland and Kuṇḍalas is also described as roaming in the forest⁵¹⁹. Similarly, a picture of the Dōmbas and the Dōmbīs has been also drawn by the poets of the Charyyāpadas. Abject poverty of these people is the characteristic feature of the village life of ancient Bengal. In spite of their poverty, they, however, led a happy life of merriment engaged in music and dancing.

The Village people of ancient Bengal led a simple and happy life no doubt. Some of them became of course wealthy, and they separated themselves from the bulk of the village folk. Since the villages in ancient Bengal were purely agricultural, all their activities and life-patterns centered round agriculture. They had perhaps little tendency to lead a life of ease and comfort including their abjectiveness to sensuous laxity. They had their own ideals and adhered strictly to their respective socio-religious customs, rites and practices. At the same time, the village people were averse to the townfolk. They did not like

the life-patterns of the city-bred people. A vivid account of the dislike of the village folk for the ways of life of the townsfolk has been given in the Āryasaptasati. It is stated : "Oh Sakhi ! walk with straight steps, give up, all customs of the town"⁵²⁰. It is perhaps because of this that Vātsyāyana in his Kāmasūtra has urged the city-bred Nagaraka to introduce the city culture amongst the village people⁵²¹. In fact, the village life was in contrast to the city life. This will be evident from a resume on city-life in ancient Bengal.

B. CITY : PEOPLE AND LIFE

Though from very early times the settlements of the ancient people of Bengal in general centered round the villages or rural areas, and the origins and development of the Bengali culture have been all throughout basically village-oriented yet like other parts of India and of the world ancient Bengal was not devoid of any cities or towns. Since the main concern of the present dissertation relates to the ancient people and culture of Bengal, which are primarily rural in nature and character, here only a generalized treatment of the city-life has been made to focus on certain basic differences in city and village life patterns.

It is generally held that with the spread of human settlements and growth of population, industries and crafts, commerce, diverse religious approaches, etc., cities, market-places, ports, harbours, etc., sprang up along the river valleys or trade routes or by the sea-sides of Bengal for meeting the growing needs of a developing society. A lively and growing society with active creative faculties in all spheres of life would create cities to serve its higher needs. These needs of a developing society are political, administrative, religious, commercial, etc. Some of these independently or jointly and more particularly localization and specialization of industries gave rise to cities and their growth, and as a result, urbanization began. With the passage of time, these cities became more and more complex and variegated along with the growing needs of the people. The process of urbanization and growth of cities in ancient Bengal followed the same trends and patterns as can be witnessed in many other countries. These processes are primarily the growth of population, consolidation and expansion of political apparatus social and economic necessities, industrialization and commercialization and religious behaviour patterns. Accordingly, arose business centre like Tāmralipti, military centres like Koṭivarsha, Bāṅgaḍ, Vikramapura, etc., administrative centres like Rāmāvatī, Lakshmaṇāvatī, Vijaypurī, etc., and religious

centres like Karṇasuvarṇa, Sōmapura, Puṇḍravardhana, etc., in different parts of Bengal. A list of ancient cities of Bengal has been prepared and their number is not less than 141 as referred to in literary texts and epigraphic records (Map. 8)

From very early times, several terms have been used in the literary and epigraphic records to denote a city or town, such as, Nagara, Pura, Purī, Pur, Nagarī, Pattani, Sthāniya, etc. Of these terms, Nagara and Pura denote city or town in general, though the latter originally meant only a fort. But later on, the two terms became synonymous. The term Sthāniya, more particularly, refers to an administrative center and Pattana, to a port. Most interestingly, the names of the cities in ancient Bengal are generally to be found with suffixes Nagara and Pura. Thus there are cities named as Puṇḍravardhananagara (present Mahāsthān, Bogrā dist. Bāṅglādeś), Śūranagara (identity uncertain, West Bengal), Vardhamānanagara (present Burdwan in West Bengal), Skandanagara (unidentified; Rāmāvatīnagara probably in North Bengal), etc. Similarly, there are cities also ending with the word Pura as Vardhamānapura, Gauḍapura (Gauḍa in North Bengal), Dantapura (modern Dānton, Midnapur, West Bengal), Sīṃhapura (Sihapura in Rāḍha, West Bengal), Pāhāḍpur (Rājsāhi, Bāṅglādeś), etc. Again, the same city has been also sometimes mentioned with the suffixes of either Pura or Nagara. As for instance, a reference may be made to Puṇḍravardhananagara and Puṇḍravardhanapura. The names of some cities again end with the word Grāma, such as, Suvarṇagrāma, Saptagrāma (Hugli dist. West Bengal), Falgugrāma (Faridpur dist. Bāṅglādeś), etc. Cities were also named after the ruling monarchs. These were primarily capital cities and administrative centres like Rāmāvatī (Rāmāvatīnagara named after the Pala king Rāmāpāla), Vijayanagara (named after the Sena king Vijayasena), Śūranagara (named after the Śūra ruling family), Lakshmaṇāvatī (Maldah, West Bengal, named after Lakshmaṇasena), etc. Again, some cities are named after a country/region/territorial unit like Puṇḍravardhananagara, Rāḍhāpurī (named after the territorial unit), etc. Further, there were cities named after the predominant tribe living therein, such as Puṇḍravardhana (city of the Puṇḍra tribe), Gauḍapura (city of the Gauḍa tribe), etc. Some ports and market-towns are again found named after metals as Tāmralipti (Copper; present Tamluk), Suvarṇagrāma (gold; present Suvarṇagrāma, a village, opposite of Munsiguñj in the district of Dacca, present Bāṅglādeś), Karṇasuvarṇa (gold; Rāṅgāmātī, in the district of Mursīdābād, West Bengal), etc. Further, many cities are also named after rivers, tanks, etc., such as Trivenī (present Trivenī), Pushkarāṇa (Pōkharṇā), etc. Several other cities are again found named after flowers creepers,

moon and also demon. An analysis of the names of these cities would reveal also their respective nature and character. Again, there were capital cities bearing the names of the kingdoms. This is clear from Hiuen Tsang's account which refers to four principal capital cities and kingdoms bearing identical names Puṇḍravardhana (Mahāsthān, North Bengal), Samatāṭa (South and East Bengal), Karṇasuvarṇa (West Bengal) and Tāmralipti (South and West Bengal)⁵²². Thus the cities of ancient Bengal were named variously.

Many cities sprang up in different parts of Bengal in the period from 3rd century B.C. to 12th century A.D. Accounts of these cities are to be found in both literary and epigraphic records. Archaeological excavations have also brought to light ruins of a few old cities. In this context, particular references may be made to the unearthing of the ancient city and monastery relics from Pāhāḍpur (Rājsāhi dist), Maināmatī (Comilla, Bāṅglādeś), Mahāsthān and Puṇḍravardhana (Bogra dist., Bāṅglādeś), Karṇasuvarṇa and Raktamṛttikāmahāvihāra⁵²³, etc. These centres served political, economic and religious purposes. Bāṅgaḍ (Dinājpur, West Bengal) was a fort and a capital city⁵²⁴. It is learnt that all cities were not uniform in size, in population and in their respective nature and character. This would be clear from the accounts of the four cities of Bengal given by the Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsang⁵²⁵. Some cities were large and others, small. In general, the cities were surrounded either by a wall, ditch or trench. The boundaries of a city was well-marked by wall, ditch, trench, river, roads, etc. In ancient times, a city contained palace in the centre, big houses, ponds/tanks, gardens, temples, etc. Roads in the cities in general ran parallel from North to South and East to West. On both sides of the roads were residential houses, shops, etc. In the suburbs of most of the cities were the monasteries, temples, etc., wherein lived the monks, priests, etc., accounts of which have been given by the pilgrim Hiuen Tsang⁵²⁶. All these religious establishments were largely maintained by the city people.

Most of the big cities were crowded with palatial buildings as in the case of Rāmāvatī described in the Rāmācharita⁵²⁷. Similarly, Puṇḍravardhana has been described as the 'crest jewel of Varendrī'. Here, it would be interesting to give an account of the prosperous condition of the cities of ancient Bengal as can be gleaned from the accounts of Rāmāvatī and Puṇḍravardhana given by Sandhyākaranandī in the Rāmācharita. Rāmāvatī was a beautiful and prosperous

city with rows of palaces. It is stated that the sky was illuminated with a network of rays diffused from the ornaments set with diamonds, pearls, emeralds, lapis lazuli, rubies, sapphires, etc. The city was decorated with very fine and costly articles made of gold bearing artistic designs. The city looked charming on account of variegated garments of fine texture and also mask, black aloe, sandal, saffron and camphor. The whole atmosphere was vibrated with the pleasing notes of various musical instruments which were sonorous, deep and sweet and which produced full effect through the acquisition of harmony with the vocal music and which excelled the performances of Tumbara, the celestial musician⁵²⁸. Similar accounts of Puṇḍravardhana and Vijayapurī are also to be found. Some of the cities originated and developed centering round the religious and pilgrimage centres. These were also the capital cities. Other cities were primarily commercial such as, Tāmralipti, Bhurīśreshṭhikā, etc.

Peoples belonging to all sections or classes engaged in diverse vocations lived in the cities. In the capital or administrative or military centres, the king, administrators and other officials, etc., lived primarily. The religious or pilgrimage centres were also loci of educational institutions. As such, in these cities lived the monks, worshippers, pilgrims, teachers, students, etc. The businessmen, traders and craftsmen dwelt primarily in trade and industrial centres, which were under the control of the Śresthīs, Sārthavāhas, Kulikas and other guild chiefs. Besides, in all these cities lived different craftsmen like the Karmakāra, the Kāṁsakāra, the Śāṁkhakāra, the Mālākāra, the Sūtradhara, the Sauṇḍika, the Tantuvāya, the Svarṇakāra, the Suvarṇavanik, the Gandhavanik, the Aṭṭalikāra, etc. Again, for the services of the city peoples lived the Rajakas, the Nāpitas, the Gopas, etc. Besides, for rendering manual labour and doing all unclean jobs were the Antyajās like the Doms, the Chaṇḍālas, the Dōlāvāhis, the Charmakāras, Māṁsachhedakas, etc. Since the last group of peoples belonged to the lowest order of the society and were untouchables, they were not allowed to live inside the city area, but in its peripheries only. It is quite evident that for the services to be rendered to the city people, even the craftsmen and the Antyajās lived in and near a city for earning their livelihood.

From the available accounts of the ancient cities of Bengal, it appears that the cities in general were rich and prosperous. All wealth actually flowed into the cities. The cities were also the distributors of money. The concentration of wealth and provisions of all amenities of life gave the people of the towns

or cities the freedom of living. In contrast to the Bengali village life, the life of a city-bred man was entirely different. The life of a Nagaraka in ancient Bengal was not perhaps different from the one presented by Vātsyāyana. Accordingly, while presenting a picture of a city life of ancient Bengal, a particular reference is to be made to Vātsyāyana's ideal of city life. Vātsyāyana has also made a particular reference to the ladies of the royal courts of Gauda-Vaṅga who were most shamelessly engaged in all sorts of erotic affairs with the palace Brahmins, officers and even servants. He says that in the cities the rich people used to engage even the maid servants for their pleasures. The city-bred people had also Vararamā and Devadāsīs who were used to be sold as movable property⁵²⁹. Right of enjoyment with them becomes also clear from Jīmūtavāhana's prescriptions⁵³⁰. Jīmūtavāhana has actually referred to the practice of keeping female City-bred slaves who were "women kept for enjoyment"⁵³¹. Besides, there are records referring to licenses and erotic life-patterns of the city people as described in Dhōyī's Pavanadūta and Sandhyākaranandī's Rāmacharita and also in inscriptions. In both literary and epigraphic records, praiseworthy words have been expressed in favour of the courtesans, court-dancers and court-ladies. The Edilpur Copper plate of Keśavasena refers to the ladies of the city as gazing upon the king at the time of passing through the city⁵³². The king also used to maintain harem. This is clear from the Belāva Copper plate⁵³³. It is said that Sāmalavarman had his own "seraglio which was full of the daughters of many kings". This shows that even after the 8th century A.D., the erotic life-pattern of the city people continued unabated. In this connection, an interesting reference may also be made to the Rājatarāṅginī which gives an account of the Devadāsī of a temple of Puṇḍravardhana⁵³⁴. This Devadāsī was the great dancer Kamalā who excelled in dancing, singing and playing on musical instruments. The institution of Devadāsī figures also prominently in the later period. It was more particularly so with regard to the temples in the cities or in their neighbourhood. The Devadāsīs though offered to the deities, were in fact Vararamā or Devavaravanitā. They became the close associates of the rich people to satisfy their desires. It was perhaps because of this that Dhōyī, Sandhyākaranandī and Bhavadevabhāṭṭa have spoken highly of their beauty, dress and experience in erotic affairs. Dhōyī refers to these women in a temple erected by the Sena king Lakshmaṇasena in Suhma⁵³⁵. The Rāmacharita (III.37) refers to Deva-varavanitā of Rāmāvatī. Similar references to the Devadāsīs are also to be found in the Deopārā inscription of Vijayasena and Bhuvaneśvara inscription of

Bhaṭṭabhavadeva⁵³⁶. The Deopārā inscription refers to "100 beautiful females, Devadāsīs the charms of whose bodies were enhanced [by wearing] of jewellery⁵³⁷". In fact, Bhavadevabhaṭṭa records that though dedicated to the Viṣṇu temple, these Devadāsīs have again animated "Kāmadevatā and that they were the prison-houses ^{of the} passionate and refuge of all beauties and meeting hall of music, dalliance and beauty"⁵³⁸. In this context, a particular reference may be made to Savarōtsava on the Daśamī day during the Durgā-pūjā when even the city-women dressed in leaves and covering their bodies with clay danced in erotic postures singing all sorts of erotic songs, and the people believed that if this is not done, the goddess Durgā will not be pleased. So also was with the Holi-utsav for pleasing Kāmadeva. This kind of sexual behaviour patterns are said to be pleasing to Durgā in the Bṛhaddharma-purāṇa. It appears that erotic lifepattern is fully illustrated during these festivals, and all these are being done in the name of the deities to justify their own wild and primitive life.

Erotic activities were quite common in the royal courts which gave incentives to other sections of the people in the city. Even the higher sections of the people were not punished for any sexual crime. Here, a reference may be made to a story in the Sek-Śubhadaya cited by Sen as to how a person of royal family committing a sexual crime escaped and women concerned was, however, dishonoured. In fact, characterlessness, living in pomp and grandeur, listening to eulogy, spending time in association with the court ladies, engagement in erotic activities, etc., were the patterns of the court-life, and their glowing accounts are to be found in all contemporaneous poems, inscriptions and also in representations of paintings, sculptures, etc.

It is not known for certain as to when the city court life in ancient Bengal became polluted/vitiated by licentious behaviour patterns. Perhaps, the development of Tantric cults and degradation of Buddhism and Brahmanism were largely responsible for sexual laxity and licentious life. The degradation of the city-life in this particular field of decency and sexual laxity affected its healthy development. In fact, both literary texts and epigraphic records of the later period are fully replete with references to such a prevailing condition in the city and the same prolonged in diverse forms.

All cities were not, however, alike in their respective nature and character. There were of course very few large cities like Rāmāvatī, Puṇḍravardhana and Tāmralipta, and in later periods some other large administrative centres grew up. Most of the cities were, however, small and their number was more numerous in comparison. Some of those small cities again originated and developed centering round religious establishments. A few of the small cities were again no better than prosperous villages. That some villages actually developed also into cities is proved by their very names ending in Grāma as already indicated. The small cities were not certainly so wealthy and prosperous as the large cities. Unfortunately, the contemporary texts or inscriptions hardly furnish any relevant information regarding the life-patterns of the people of the small cities.

The ancient cities of Bengal started, however, decaying with the decline of foreign trade which was the main channel of the flow of gold into the cities. This decline of foreign trade began more particularly from the 7th century A.D. The Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsang in the 7th century A.D. saw four principal cities, Puṇḍravardhana, Samatāṭa, Karṇasuvarṇa and Tāmralipti. Excepting the last one, three other cities were primarily administrative centres. From the 8th to the 9th century A.D., several large cities sprang up and their description indicates that they were mostly administrative and military centres, such as, Rāmāvatī, Lakshmaṇāvatī, Vijayapura, Vikramapura, Suvarṇanagara, etc. There were of course some other cities with religious, educational and other cultural bearings like Triveṇī, Sōmapura, Karṇasuvarṇa, Paṭṭikera, etc. Even archaeological excavations, as already pointed out, have brought to light remains of some cities which were primarily administrative centres and secondarily religious as Mahāsthān, Bāngarh, Rāmāvatī, Puṇḍravardhana, Karṇasuvarṇa, Paṭṭikera, etc. It would appear that in the earlier period the cities were primarily commercial, and subsequently, other cities grew up and developed centering round administrative and military establishments. The early medieval period, however, witnessed increasing growth of several commercial and business cities. In reality, all the primary cities of Bengal grew up around industry, trade and administrative centres.

The life-patterns of the city-people as briefly delineated above relate more particularly to the rich and prosperous cities, and their depiction primarily refers to the court and rich man's life. The city-bred persons' ways of life again centered round wealth and prosperity. It was indeed an easy life, a life of ease and comfort and also of amusements. A city-bred man had enough time and

opportunity to lead a sensuous life-pattern. This is in marked contrast to the village life-pattern. There were of course a few rich people even in the villages. But most of the village people living on food-producing activities and manual labour were poor. The poverty of the village people has been most glaringly described in some of the works wherein they have been portrayed as moving about with a decaying body wearing tottered clothes, eyes in the cavity due to hunger, begging for food, etc. In such a case, the common man and woman of the village had no other alternative but to lead a simple life. Both men and women were engaged in different works from dawn to dusk for earning their simple livelihood. The village woman has been actually called a simpleton by

Village life and city life Vātsyāyana, and she has been spoken of as very light and fickle⁵³⁹.
A beautiful description of the village woman has been given in the

Saduktikarnāmrta : "...the covered head is bent down with shame of his own accord ; her gait is slow and eyes are fixed on her feet, her talk is regulated, soft and sweet as if by these, this lady is loudly speaking of her family prestige". Similarly, Śaraṇa has also spoken highly of the busy life of the village women : "...peasants have gone to the fields for ploughing leaving their homes at dawn and their women are hastily coming home after finishing their business in the mart before the return of their husbands"⁵⁴⁰. Not only that, even the poor people of the village were exploited by the well-to-do villagers and government officials or the village headman who lived mainly on the share of the produces given by them. It has been already pointed out as to how the peasant women used to be engaged for doing all sorts of unpaid works, both in the fields and houses. As to the untouchables and the Antyajas, their life was most deplorable indeed.

The village people because of their poverty and lack of amenities had to lead a simple life with a greater sense of morality, higher ideals and religious fervour. That is why, the village people disliked the ways of life of the city-people. The Saduktikarnāmrta has made a specific reference to this fact that the village people did not like the ways of life of the rich people of the city. Even many writers have also asked the village people to give up the idea of imitating the city life-patterns. In fact, Govardhanācharya (Āryasaptarśati) has asked the village people to give up the ways of life of the city people. He says : "Oh Sakhi ! walk with straight steps and give up all customs of the town".⁵⁴¹

The villages of Bengal have mostly remained unchanged throughout centuries. This is not, however, true in regard to cities which have undergone

transformations or changes or have been wiped out altogether leaving only their remains underneath. It has been already pointed out that in ancient times, cities of Bengal were primarily commercial centres, many of which decayed due to natural causes like shifting of rivers, lack of water communication and provision for opportunities of obtaining articles of trade. In some of these business centres, administrative and military headquarters were also established serving both the purposes of regulating trade and running of general administration. Even on the decline of the commercial importance of a city, the administrative establishment continued for some time. The capital cities, however, changed very often with the successive ruling dynasties or kings. Not only that, even a particular king established more than one administrative centres or metropolises in his kingdom. Human agencies like invasion, natural calamities and other activities of natural agencies sometimes brought about the end or disappearance of a capital city. The religious cities growing around sectarian religious establishments passed through changes or decayed due to the decline of the popularity of the concerned religious beliefs and practices. An analysis of the causes leading to the decay or disappearance and transformation or changes of the cities of ancient Bengal would show that both natural and human agencies were operative separately or jointly in bringing about the decline or ruination of a city.

The cities have disappeared or passed through changes, but the villages have remained more or less stationary through ages, excepting of course that some villages grew and developed into cities. These were indeed mostly small cities which were no better than prosperous villages. Even a modern Bengali village today reminds one of the nature and character of the ancient villages. The Saduktikarnāmrta has given a wonderful description of the village with rich paddy-plants due to heavy monsoons, men-folk engaged in all sorts of agricultural operations, cows returning home at dusk, women busy in their domestic works and dressing themselves after their hard work and the younger ones sleeping. "In the Hemanta season, paddy-plants are harvested and kept in heaps in the courtyard; cows, bulls, goats are fully satisfied with food after returning and the whole village becomes charmed with the sound of Ikshujantra". The picture of a village as given in the Saduktikarnāmrta is not at all different from that of a modern village of Bengal.

Not only that, simplicity of life has been the characteristic trait of the village life throughout centuries. Their ways of living, food-articles, dress, manners and customs and even religious behaviour patterns have undergone little changes. The simplicity of the village women becomes evident even from Deopārā inscription⁵⁴². On the other hand, the ways of life of the people of the cities certainly changed considerably from age to age. This has been primarily due to contact with other alien cultures, some of which were perhaps superior in material cultural assemblages. Large scale cultural acculturations had also taken place in the cities, but the villages have remained through centuries little affected by such cultural contacts and changes because of their isolation. Further, the city people were more elastic and accommodative in regard to other alien cultural traits. The village people have been, however, all throughout more conservative in their approaches to different spheres of life. Isolation, conservativeness, self-contained economic self-sufficiency, etc., are the primary factors for the unchanging nature of the life-patterns of the people of the villages of Bengal.

The cities were/are no doubt rich and prosperous in respect of concentration and distribution of wealth. But the cities of ancient Bengal like their modern counterparts have been always dependent on the villages. The city did not produce anything for subsistence and raw materials for industrial products. For all these the cities were/are to depend entirely on the villages. As a result, it cannot be said that there was no contact between the village and the city. On the other hand, there were regular land and water communication links between the villages and the cities. As at present, the cities had to depend on the village people not only for supplying food articles, but also for manual labour. Accordingly, there were lively contact between the city-dwellers and the villagers. As a result of this kind of contact, the ways of life of the city people infiltrated into the villages. Here, a particular reference may be made to Vātsyāyana who has strongly upheld the city-life as an ideal one. That is why he prescribes that those who are living in the villages are to imitate and introduce city life-patterns in the villages. This he has done by drawing a vivid picture of the life-pattern of a Nāgaraka. A Nāgaraka is advised to give a taste of city-life amenities to the village by starting clubs, social gatherings, giving company to the people, assisting them and rendering them all help and co-operation⁵⁴³. What Vātsyāyana has said appears to have been in operation all throughout

centuries. A specific instance as to how the city people did actually initiated the village people to the city's ways of life may be cited from the contents of the Deopārā inscriptions as already referred to. It is stated that the wives of the rich Brahmins of the village were taught to distinguish between floral seeds and precious stones⁵⁴⁴. Not only so, even the village people working in the cities for cash-earning after coming back to their respective villages very often inducted the village people to the city-ways of life. All these produced contact between the cities and the villages, and as a result, the village life became vitiated or polluted as happening today. The vices of the city-life penetrated into the village life. Accordingly, even the village life became greatly affected and contaminated by the vices of the city-life. It can not be, however, said that all villages became polluted in such a fashion. There had been/are villages which are/were of course free from city-vices and contaminating traits of the city life. This has been so because of their self-sufficient economy and isolation. It is in this respect that the villages and the village life-pattern of Bengal based on agriculture and crafts, unchanging land system, class differentiations, etc., have remained mostly unchanged throughout centuries. But it was only during the last few centuries that lively cultural contact between the villages and cities caused by easy communications, influx of the village people into cities, spread of education, yearning for cash-earning, business transactions, etc., has produced tremendous changes in the traditional village life-patterns of Bengal.

It is in the villages that all ancient peoples of Bengal including the aborigines/indigènes made their settlements and dwellings. The aborigines and the indigènes were perhaps the oldest settlers in the village settlements. Accordingly, all these peoples have been treated in the following chapters.

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CHAPTER THREE

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22. *Ibid.*
23. *Ibid.*, pp. 291-93 ; Majumdar, *IB*, pp. 170-71.
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31. Maity & Mukherjee, *op.cit.*, pp. 95-110 (Khālimpur CP Ins. of Dharmapāla) ; pp. 258-271 (Nalḥāṭī CP Ins. of Vallālasena), pp. 271-277 (Govindapur CP Ins. of Lakshmanasena), pp. 312-321 (Madanpādā CP Ins. of Viśvarūpasena) and pp. 321-333 (Sāhitya Parishat CP Ins. of Viśvarūpasena).
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75. Ibid, p. 51.
76. Ibid, pp. 326, 330.
77. Ibid, pp. 325, 328 ; Majumdar, IB, p. 141.
78. Ibid, p. 107.
79. Ibid, pp. 51, 53.
80. Ibid, pp. 99, 107.
81. Majumdar, IB, pp. 96-97.
82. Ibid, pp. 48, 54.
83. Ibid, p. 50.

84. Ibid, pp. 49, 55.
85. Ibid, pp. 35, 40.
86. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, p. 353.
87. Ibid, p. 361 ; Majumdar, IB, pp. 35, 41.
88. Majumdar, IB, pp. 102, 104.
89. Ibid, Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, p. 293.
90. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, pp. 55, 57 ; SPP, 1339 (BS) No. 3, p. 145.
91. Ibid, p. 70.
92. Ibid, p. 70.
93. Majumdar, IB, p. 166.
94. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, pp. 100, 108.
95. Majumdar, IB, p. 41.
96. Ibid, pp. 35, 41.
97. Ibid, pp. 35, 40.
98. Ibid.
99. Ibid, pp. 124, 129.
100. Ibid, p. 115.
101. Childe, SE, p. 22.
102. Dasgupta, EPD, pp. 16-20, 35-43.
103. Ancl, No. 14, pp. 1-48.
104. Ibid, pp. 36, 38.
105. Dani, PHPEI, p. 87 ; Goswami, EB, p. 32 ; Dasgupta, EPD, pp. 16-20, 35-43.
106. Dani, PHPEI, p. 87.
- 106a. Dasgupta, EPD, pp. 14, 16-20.
107. Ibid, p. 14.
108. Ibid, p. 29.
109. Bridget and R. Allichin, BIC, pp. 198-99.
110. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, pp. 67, 70 ; IHQ, Vol. VI, pp. 56, 59, 60.
111. EJ, Vol. XV, pp. 307, 311.
112. Watters, OYCTI, Vol. II, pp. 184, 189, 191 ; Beal, BRWW, Vol. II, pp. 191, 194, 119-201.
113. Majumdar and etal, RC, III, p. 90 ff.
- 113a. RVM, Canto. IV, 36-37.
- 113b. Majumdar & etal, RC, Kavi Prasasti, V. 13, pp. 189-90.
- 113c. Ibid.
- 113d. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, pp. 39-40.
- 113e. Shamasastri, AS, Bk. IV, p. 131.
- 113f. Hemachandra, ACM, IV, 233 ; JACS, Vol. 61, 1941, pp. 166-71.
- 113g. Majumdar and etal, RC, III, verse, 17B, p. 91.
- 113h. Śrīdharadāsa, SKM, 2/84/3 ; Ray, VI, (1st Pt.) p. 135.
- 113i. Ibid, 2/136/5 ; Ibid, p. 136.
- 113j. Ray, VI, p. 176.
114. Charyyāgītī, Śavarapād, No. 50, Dasgupta, BOCG, p. 117.
(Kaṅguchina pākelā re, kaṅguchina kāgani, i.e., paddy.)
115. Majumdar, IB, pp. 89-90.
116. Ibid, pp. 129 ff.
117. Ibid, pp. 85, (Anulie Ins.), 94 (Govindapur Ins.), 101, (Tarpandighi Ins.).
118. Ibid, pp. 85, 101.
119. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, pp. 39-41 ; Sircar, SI, p. 82.
120. Śrīdharadāsa, op.cit, 2/136/5.
121. Das, Rājādīdāhā, p. 42.
122. Ibid.
123. Ibid.
124. Ibid.
125. McCrindle, AIDP, p. 122 ; Majumdar, HB, Vol. I, p. 650, HAB, p. 338.
126. Ibid.
127. Śuśruta, Nītisāra 45, 138-140 ; Majumdar, HAB, p. 338 ; McCrindle, AIDP, p. 122, f.n.3.

128. Majumdar, etal., RC, III, verse 17, p. 91.
129. Śrīdharadāsa, op.cit., 2/84/3 ; 2/136/5 ; Ray, VI (1st Pt.) p. 136
130. Majumdar, HB, Vol. I, p. 650 ; Ray, VI, p. 169 ; JBORS, IV, p. 437.
131. Sen, CV, p. 196
132. Majumdar, IB, pp. 5, 8, 24, 63, 66, 74, 79, 96, 102, 104, 137-38, 179-80, 125 ff.
133. Ibid., pp. 63, 66 (Barrackpur CP of Vijayasena), 5, 8 (Rāmpāl CP of Śrīchandra), 74, 79 (Nalhātī CP of Vallālasena), 102, 104 (Tarpandīghī CP of Lakshmanasena), 96 (Govindapur CP of Lakshmanasena), 137-38 (Mādanapādā CP of Viśvarūpasena), 179-80 (Calcutta Sāhitya Parishat CP of Kaśavasena), 24 (Belāva CP of Bhojavarman) etc.
134. MASB, I, p. 90 ; Majumdar, HB, Vol. I, p. 651 ; HAB, p. 349.
135. Majumdar, IB, p. 125.
136. Majumdar & etal., RC, III, V.19, p. 93
137. Ibid., p. 93
138. Ibid., pp. 92, 93
139. Majumdar, IB, pp. 140, 146, 148 (Calcutta Sāhitya parishat CP of Viśvarūpasena), p.180
140. EI, Vol. XXVII, pp. 26-27.
141. Dasgupta, BOCG, p. 116 ; Charyyāgītī, Śavarapād, No. 28.
142. EI, XXVII, pp. 26-27 (Vāsudeva Image Ins.).
143. Majumdar, IB, pp. 141, 147 (Sāhitya Parishat CP of Viśvarūpasena).
144. Ibid., pp. 140, 146, 148
145. Ibid.
146. Ibid., pp. 141, 148
147. Niyogi, EHNI, p. 33.
148. EI, XIV, p. 176 ff.
149. Majumdar, IB, pp. 5, 8 (Rāmpāl CP of Śrīchandra), 21, 24 (Belāva CP of Bhojavarman), 63, 66 (Barrackpur CP of Vijayasena) ; Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, p. 119 (Monghyr CP of Devapāla) (Irdā CP of Nayapāladeva), 168 (Bhālgapur CP of Nārāyaṇapāla), p. 263 (Nalhātī CP of Vallālasena).
150. Sen, Vbh, p. 233.
151. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, p. 109.
152. Ibid., p. 202 (Bāṅgade CP of Mahīpāla), 119 (Monghyr CP of Devapāla), 168 (Bhālgapur CP Nārāyaṇapāla) 363 (Rāmgāṇī CP of Isvaraghosha), 215 (Manahali CP of Madanapāla), EI, XXII, p.150 ff, XXIV, p. 43 ff (Irdā CP of Nayapāladeva).
153. Majumdar, IB, pp. 5, 8 (Rāmpāl CP of Śrīchandra), 63, 66 (Barrackpur CP of Vijayasena), 24 (Belāva CP of Bhojavarman).
154. Beal, BRWW, II, p. 194 ; Watters, OYCTI, Vol. II, p. 184
155. Pāhārpur Terracotta plaques, No. 70 Majumdar, HB, Vol. I, pp. 451, 651.
156. Ibid.
157. Majumdar, IB, pp. 96-97 (Govindapur CP of Lakshmanasena) ; Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, pp. 99-101, 107.
158. Majumdar, IB, pp. 96-97.
159. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, pp. 80, 82
160. Majumdar, IB, pp. 153-154 Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, pp. 202, 215, 119, 168, 363 ; EI, XXII, p. 150 ff ; XXIV, P. 43 ff.
161. Majumdar & Others, RC III, V.21, p. 94
162. Ibid.
163. Schoff, PES, p. 47.
164. Majumdar & others, RC, III, V.18, p. 92
165. EI, Vol. XVIII, p. 601.
166. Ibid.
167. Shamasastri, AS, BK, II Chap. XI, pp. 83-84
168. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, pp. 248, 255.
169. De, CGP, pp. 220-21 Charyyā 50 ; Sastri, BGD, p. 41.
170. Śrīdharadāsa, SKM, 2/84/6, 2/136/5, 5/31/2 ; Banerji, SKM, pp. 87-93.
171. Yule, BSM Vol. II, p. 115.
172. Schoff, PES, pp. 47, 71, 257-58 ; Pliny, NH, (trans) BK XII, pp.18-19.

173. Majumdar & others, RC III, pp. 90-95ff; Lakshminārāyaṇa GGJ, pp. 27, 39, 40, 41, 45, 47 ff; Majumdar, IB, p. 76 (Naiḥātī CP of Vallālasena), p. 162; Sen GGJ, pp. 1, 8, 12 ff.
174. Majumdar & others, RC, III, 21B, p. 84
175. Ibid, III, V. 22B, p. 95.
176. Ibid, II, V. 22, p. 55.
177. Lakshminārāyaṇa, GGJ, pp. 27, 39, 40, 41, 45, 47 ff; Sen GGJ, pp. 1, 8, 12 ff.
178. Watters, OYCTI, Vol. II, pp. 184, 190-91.
179. Majumdar & others, op.cit, III, V.18, pp. 92-93; II, verse 22, p. 55.
180. Ibid, III, V.16 p. 90; V.19, p. 93; V.13, p. 88.
181. Ibid, III, V. 13, p. 88.
182. Ibid, III, V. 18, p. 92.
183. Ibid, III, V.16 p. 90.
184. Ibid, III, V.21, p. 84.
185. El, XXII, p. 150 ff; Ray, SPP, 1347 (BS), p. 185.
186. Majumdar & others, RC, III, verse 17, p. 91.
187. Ibid, I, V.21B, p. 17; IV verse 34A, p. 141.
188. Maitly & Mukherjee, CBI, pp. 80, 82.
189. Lakshminārāyaṇa, GGJ, pp. 27, 42.
190. Majumdar, IB, pp. 5, 8.
191. Macdonell & Keith, VINS, Vol. II, p. 291; (Ed) Majumdar & others, HCIP, Vol. I, (The Vedic Age) p. 393.
192. Shamasastri, AS, Chap. XI, pp. 83-84; Basak, KAS, pp. 52-53, 117, 18.
193. Ashtādhyāyī, V. 2.4; IV. 3.158; IV. 3.134; VII. 3.5; VI. 2.82; IV. 2.82; Agarwala, IKP, pp. 208, 211, 214.
194. Patañjali's MB, IV. 1.55; V. 1.3; IV. 3.42; I.I.II; V. 1.3; V. 2.4; IV. 1.55; 1.242-43; Puri ITP, pp. 103, 128, 134, 185.
195. Shamasastri, AS, Ibid.
196. Vidyābhūṣaṇa Shyamakanta, MS, XII, 64; X, 87; pp. 172, 303.
197. Bhattacharyya Tarkaratna, AKB, p. 158, (Patrōnārṇ dhautakauśeyam vahumulayam mahādhanam).
198. Upadhyaya, IK, p. 198.
199. Shamasastri, AS, p. 84.
200. Manasollasa, III, 1017-20; (Ed) Majumdar & others, HCIP, Vol. V. (Struggle for Empire) p. 518.
201. Cowell & Thomas, HC, p. 125; Kane, HC, pp. 55; Uchchhavāsa, IV, p. 14 line 26.
202. El, Vol. II, pp. 108, 380 (Two Sāñchi Ins. Nos. 102 & 217).
203. Agrawala, IKP, p. 208 (Kauṭilya refers to Sana and Atasi in place of Umā and Bhaṅga).
204. Kane, HC, Uchchhavāsa, IV, p. 14; Bhattacharyya Tarkaratna, AKB, p. 158.
205. Basak, KAS, Vol. I, p. 52.
206. Shamasastri, AS, p. 84.
207. Ibid.
208. Sastri, VPG, p. 14.
209. Basak, KAS, p. 117; Ray, VI, p. 175.
210. Bhattacharyya Tarkaratna, AKB, p. 158.
211. Shamasastri, AS, p. 84; Basak, KAS, p. 117.
212. Kane, HC, Uchchhavāsa, IV, notes, p. 55.
213. Shamasastri, op.cit, p. 84.
214. Kane, op.cit, p. 55.
215. Basak, KAS, p. 53.
216. Ibid.
217. Ibid.
218. JASB, LXVI, Pt. I, p. 285.
219. Sastri, VPG, p. 14.
220. Shamasastri, AS, p. 84; Basak, KAS, pp. 53-118, ff.
221. Kane, HC, p. 55; Cowell & Thomas, HC, p. 125.
222. Bhattacharyya Tarkaratna, AKB, p. 97.

223. Shamasastri, AS, p. 84.
 224. Fleet, CII, Vol. III, p. 86; Sircar, SI, pp. 394-95.
 225. Schoff, PES, p. 47; Majumdar, CAI, p. 308.
 226. Pliny's NH, BK. XII, 18-19.
 227. Majumdar, CAI, p. 338.
 228. Majumdar, HAB, pp. 340, 344-45.
 229. Majumdar, ibid, p. 342.
 230. Vidyabhushan Shyamakanta, MS, Chap. VIII, Śloka, 397. p. 244.
 231. Upadhyaya, IK, pp. 198-99, 270.
 232. Cowell & Thomas, HC, p. 125.
 233. Watters, OYCTI, Vol. I, pp. 147-48, 151, 287, 340; Beal, BRWW, Vol. I, pp. 67-68.
 234. Majumdar, etal, RC, pp. 87-93.
 235. Śrīdharadāsa, SKM, 2/84/6, 2/136/5, 5/31/2; Banerji, SKM, pp. 87-93, Sastri, BGD, p. 41 (Charyyā 24 Śāntipād)

Tulā dhuni dhuni asure asu
 asu dhuni dhuni niravara sesu
 Tufā dhuni dhuni sune āhāriv
 Suna lala āpanā chatarui.

236. Ed. Majumdar & others, HCIP, (The Age of Imperial Kausaj), Vol. IV, p. 404.
 237. Ray, VI, p. 178; Elliot & Dowson, HH, Vol. I, p. 5; Sen, GCG, Vol. I, p. 391.
 238. Ed. Majumdar & others, HCIP, Vol. IV, pp. 409-410, (Ed) Majumdar, HB, Vol. I, p. 122, Hodivala, SIMH, pp. 4-5.
 239. Yule, BSM, Vol. II, p. 115; (Ed) Majumdar & others, HCIP, Vol. V (Struggle for Empire) p. 14 Vol. VI, (The Delhi Sultanate) p. 644.
 240. JRAS, 1895, pp. 529-33.
 241. Hussain, RIB, p. 235.
 242. Gibb, RIB, p. 267; Hussain, ibid.
 243. Ed. Majumdar & others, HCIP, Vol. VI, (The Delhi Sultanate), p. 644.
 244. Bagchi, Extracts from Three Works, relating to Bengal; Ma-Huan, VBhA Vol. I, pp. 119, 120, 127.
 245. Majumdar, IB, Vol. III, V. 31, pp. 49, 56, 45, 55; Maitty & Mukherjee, CBI, pp. 248-49; 255-57.
 246. ibid.
 247. ibid.
 248. De, CGP, Charyyā, (26 pp. 116, 118; Dasgupta, BOCG, p. 123.
 249. ibid.
 250. Banerji, SKM, p. 393; Ray, VI, p. 180.
 251. ibid.
 252. JBORS, IV, p. 437; Ray, VI, p. 10; Sen, CV, p. 196.
 253. Śūśruta, Nīlīsāra, 45, 138-140, Ed. Majumdar sastri, AIDA, (McCrindle) p. 122, f.n. 3.
 254. ibid.
 255. Ed. Majumdar, Basak & others, RC, III, V. 17b, p. 91.
 256. Ed. Majumdar Sastri, MAIDP p. 122; Ed. Majumdar, HB, Vol. I, p. 650.
 257. ibid.
 258. Śrīdharadāsa, SKM, 3/5/28.
 259. ibid, 2/84/3; 2/136/5.
 260. ibid, 2/136/5.
 261. Yule, BSM, Vol. II, p. 115.
 262. Buarte, Barbosa, Hakluyt Society, London, Vol. II, 112, 146.
 263. Watt, DEPI, Vol. VI, Pt. II, p. 58 ff.
 264. Ray, SPP, 1347, (BS) p. 185; VI, p. 171.
 265. EI, Vol. XXII, pp. 155-158.
 266. Majumdar, IB, pp. 5-14; EI, Vol. XII, p. 136.
 267. Majumdar, IB, p. 14; Maitty & Mukherjee, CBI, p. 239.
 268. ibid, pp. 158-162.
 269. Ray, SPP, 1347, (BS) p. 188.

270. Ed. Majumdar, HB, Vol. I, p. 66
271. Ibid.
272. Maṅgalkāvyā, Ray, VI, (1359 BS), p. 185 ; Bandyopadhyaya KKC, p. 360 ; Ed. Majumdar, VDI (Madhya Yug) Vol. II, pp. 219, 222-23, 226, 155.
273. Ray, VI, p. 196
274. Ancl, No. 14, p. 36 ; Dasgupta, EPD, p. 19.
275. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, p. 337.
276. El, Vol. XII, p. 65 ff ; XIX, p. 115 ff ; Bhattacharya, KSV, (in Bengali) p. 41.
277. Maitra, SONEI, pp. 267-85.
278. El, Vol. XXIV, p. 329 ff.
279. Majumdar, IB, p. 53.
280. Dasgupta, EPD, pp. 11-34 ; Das, Rājāddidāṅgā, pp. 41, 42 ; Qadir, GTP, pp. 30-33 ; Dikshit, MAI, No. 55 ; PA, No. I p. 47, Goswami, EB, p. 32.
281. Dasgupta, EPD, pp. 11, 45 ; Bridget and Allchin, BIC, p. 198.
282. Bridget & Allchin, op.cit., p. 198 ; Dasgupta, EPD, pp. 17-28, 30-45.
283. Das, Rājāddidāṅgā, pp. 41-42 ; Bridget & Allchin, BIC, p. 293.
284. Bridget & Allchin, BIC, p. 293 ; IAAR, from 1964 onwards.
285. IAAR from 1964 onwards.
286. Das, Rājāddidāṅgā, pp. 50-73 ; MAI, No. 55 ; PA No. I, p. 47.
287. Saraswati, ESB, pp. 108-110 ; Majumdar, HAB, p. 645 ; Qadir, GTP, pp. 29-30 ; PA No. I, p. 47 ; MAI, No. 55.
288. Majumdar, HAB, pp. 342, 349, 643-652 ; Saraswati, ESB, pp. 97, 101, 103, 110-11 ; Dikshit, EP (MAI No. 55), IAAR, 1954-55, pp. 19-20, 23, 1955-56, pp. 61-62, 1956-57, pp. 29-30, 73-74, 1957-58, pp. 51 ff ; 72 ; 1958-59, pp. 55-56, 76-78, 1959-60, pp. 50 ff, 77-78 ; Das, Rājāddidāṅgā, pp. 50-73.
290. RVM, Canto IV. 36 (Vaṅgān-utkhāya tarasa-neta nausāadhanodyatān/nichakhāna jayastambhan gaṅgā-srōtantareshu sah).
291. El, Vol. XIV, p. 110 ff ; Sircar, SI, p. 385 ; Ray, VI, p. 183 ; IA, 1917, pp. 126-27 ; Sen, SHAIB, p. 246.
292. El, Vol. XII, p. 65 ff ; XIX, p. 115.
293. Maity and Mukherjee, CBI, p. 373 (Nauvāṭa) ; Majumdar, IB, pp. 48, 54.
294. El, Vol. IV, p. 248 ff.
295. Majumdar, IB, pp. 48-54.
296. Maity and Mukherjee, CBI, pp. 373, 381 (for Nauvāṭa) ; Maitreya, GLM, p. 14, IHQ, Vol. VI, p. 648 ; El, Vol. II, p. 351 ; Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, p. 98 (for Nauvāṭaka) (Khālimpur CP of Dharmapāla).
297. Majumdar, etal, RC, II, V. 10, p. 46.
298. Ibid, RC, II, V. 10, p. 46.
299. Ibid, I, V. 4, p. 4.
300. Dasgupta, BOCG, pp. 101, 121, 124 (naukā) , (vāhai nai, nai means boat ; Āge nāb na bhita disai ; nāb means boat ; bheīā means raft ; nābe means boat). [Āissi jāsi dōmbi Kāhari nābē] Dasgupta, op.cit., p. 119.
301. De, CGP, pp. 118-119.
302. Maity and Mukherjee, CBI, pp. 100 (Khālimpur CP of Dharmapāla), 168, 182 (Bhāgalpur CP of Nārāyaṇapāla), p. 202 (Bāngādā CP of Mahāpāla), p. 215 (Manahali CP Grant of Madanapāla) (for Tarika, Tarika-an officer in charge of ferry boats. He looks after the boats, realises fares and maintains an account).
303. Ibid, p. 182 ; Sen, SHAIB, p. 541.
304. Maity and Mukherjee CBI, p. 373 ff.
305. Ibid, pp. 167, 174 ; IA, Vol. XV, pp. 304-310.
306. Ibid, pp. 67, 70.
307. Ibid, p. 67.
308. Ibid, pp. 76, 78.

309. Ibid, pp. 67-77.
310. Ibid, pp. 80, 83.
311. Das, Rājāśāṣṭāgā, pp. 56-58.
312. PASB, 1880, p. 141 ; El, Vol. VXIX, p. 277 ; Ray, VI, p. 184.
313. Dasgupta, BOCG, p. 117, Charyyā, 50 (Chārivāse gaḍḍāre diyā chañchālī).
314. Maitly and Mukherjee, CBI, p. 67 ff.
315. Saraswati, ESB, p. 23 ff ; (Ed) Majumdar, HB, Vol. I, pp. 450-451.
316. Ibid, pp. 37-38.
317. Maitly and Mukherjee, CBI, p. 112.
318. Majumdar, IB, pp. 52, 55 ; 47, 49 ; Maitly and Mukherjee, CBI, pp. 252, 246 (Deopārā Ins. of Vijayasena) ; IB, pp. 72, 77 ; CBI, pp. 260-264 (Nāthātī Ins. of Vallālasena).
319. Majumdar, IB, pp. 47, 49, 52, 55. (Deopārā Ins. of Vijayasena).
320. Majumdar, etal, RC, III, VV, 33-34 pp. 103-104.
321. Majumdar, IB, pp. 47, 52.
322. Sankalla, PAPJAP, p. 238 ; Sinha, SW (CI, 1961, WB & Sikkim), p. 4 ; Dasgupta, EPD, pp. 8, 12, 23, 80, 64 (Plate XLIV), 86.
323. Sinha, SW, (CI, 1961, WB & Sikkim) pp. 4, 9 ; Majumdar, HAB, pp. 625-36.
- 323a. Dasgupta, EPD, pp. 11-34.
324. Dasgupta, EPD, pp. 11-34 ; Bridget & Allchin, BIC, pp. 198, 99, 330-38.
325. Ibid.
326. Das, ADFM, pp. 36-38, 46-48 ; MASI, No. 55 ; PA, No. 1, p. 47 ; Qadir, GTP, p. 33.
327. Ed. Majumdar, HB, Vol. I, p. 656.
328. Majumdar, IB, pp. 123, 128.
329. Ibid.
330. Ed. Majumdar, HB, Vol. I, p. 656.
331. El, Vol. XV, pp. 301-315.
332. Pañchānen Tarkaratna, AP, Adhyāya 245, Ślokaś 21-27, pp. 475-76 ; (Khaḍgalakṣhaṇam... tikṣhāśchhedasahā Vāḡāśtikṣhāh Syuśchāḡadeśājāh ... śreshṭhām Khaḡam prakīṭritam) Majumdar, HAB, p. 349.
333. Majumdar, etal, RC, I, V, 19, p. 15 ; IV, V, 43A, p. 148.
334. Ibid, I, V, 48, p. 36 ; IV, V, 43A, p. 148.
335. Ibid, I, V, 21, p. 18.
336. Ibid, II, V, 15B, pp. 49-50.
337. Majumdar, HB, Vol. I, p. 656 ; Majumdar, HAB, p. 349.
338. Majumdar, CAI, p. 308.
339. Schoff, PES, p. 47.
340. Majumdar, etal, RC, III, VV, 33-34, p. 104.
341. Ibid, III, V, 23A & B, pp. 95-96.
342. Ibid, III, VV, 39-40A, pp. 106-107.
343. Majumdar, IB, p. 42 ff, p. 52.
344. Ibid, p. 42 ff, 55.
345. Ibid, p. 68 ff.
346. Majumdar, etal, RC, III, VV, 33-34, p. 104.
347. Ibid.
348. Ibid.
349. Majumdar, IB, pp. 54-55, 49.
350. Raverty, TIN, Vol. I, p. 557 ; Elliot & Dowson, HH, Vol. II, p. 309 ff.
351. Banerji, EISMS, p. 140 ; Majumdar, HB, Vol. I, pp. 449-474 ; HAB, p. 626 ; Saraswati, ESB, pp. 29-32.
352. Majumdar, HAB, pp. 461-462.
353. Dasgupta, EPD, p. 33 ; MASI, No. 53 ; Ahmed, Mahāsthān, pp. 34-35.
354. IAAR, 1961-62, p. 43 ; Ed. Roy Burman, IWITIA, (CI, 1961), pp. 6, 79.
355. IAAR, 1957-58, p. 51 ; 1958-59, p. 56 ; 1959-60 Pl. LIV - 12, 13 ; Ed. Roy Burman, IWITIA, (CI, 1961), pp. 1, 6, 26, 43.

356. Mahāvastu, SBE, III, 113, Sl. 6-11; Motichand, Prince of Wales Museum Bulletin, No. 6, 1957-59 p. 8; Shamasastri, AS, Roy Burman, IWITTA (Cl, 1961), pp. 6, 26, 43; KMS, 1.3.16
357. El, XIX, pp. 277, 286
358. Majumdar, IB, p. 127 ff.
- 358a. Roy Burman, IWITTA (Cl, 1961), p. 84
359. IAAR, 1964
- 359a. Schoff, PES, p. 45-61 ff.
- 359b. Majumdar, HAB, p. 359; IHQ, XXII, pp. 144-45.
360. BVP.
361. Majumdar, HB, Vol. I, p. 656; Das, Rājāśāhī, p. 42
362. Legge, FRBK, p. 43
363. De, CGP, p. 174, Charyyā, 26
364. Pañchānan Tarkaratna, BDP, Uttara-Khaṇḍa, XIII adhyāya, pp. 339, 345-46
365. Dasgupta, BOCG, p. 117, Charryā, 50
366. Mitra, TCWB, (Census 1951) p. 308
367. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, p. 48 (Dāmodarpur CP Ins. of the time of Kumāragupta I, 448 A.D.); Majumdar, HAB, p. 344
368. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, pp. 100-101, for hattika (Khālīmpur CP of Dharmapāla); 48, 49, for hattapana-kaiḥ (Dāmodarpur CP of Kumāra Gupta I); El, XIX, p. 282 ff; Hattiyagriha (i.e., shops) (Bhātera plate p. 282 ff, hatta-vara (i.e., big market) (Bhātera plate); El, IX, p. 277ff, XXII, p. 150 ff; IA, LVM, p. 161 ff hatta (i.e., market). According to Prof. Sircar, the term Hattapanakaiḥ means 'with the right of using the canals excavated for watering the field'. It may also mean 'along with market-places and tanks'...
369. El, XIX, p. 282 ff.
370. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, pp. 100-101; 48 ff.
371. Ibid, p. 108 ff.
372. El, XXII, pp. 155-158
373. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, pp. 100-101.
374. Ibid, El, Vol. IV, p. 254
375. Ibid, p. 108
376. ARASI, 1922-23, p. 109; Majumdar, IB, p. 161. (Chittagong CP of Dāmodaradeva).
377. Ibid.
378. Dasgupta, BOCG, p. 101 (Naukā i.e., boat); p. 119 (nāve, i.e., boat).
379. De, CGP, p. 60
380. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, p. 98 (Khālīmpur CP of Dharmapāla); pp. 373, 381 (Kamauli CP of Vaidyadeva); pp. 167, 174 (Bhāgalpur CP of Nārāyaṇapāla for nauvāṭa).
381. Ibid, pp. 373, 381 for nauvāṭa (Kamauli CP of Vaidyadeva); 98 for nauvāṭaka (Khālīmpur CP of Dharmapāla); 167, 174 for nauvāṭa (i.e., multitudes of fleet, Bhāgalpur CP of Nārāyaṇapāla).
382. Majumdar, IB, p. 51 (big cowries emanated); Charyyāpadas, (BGD, 28); Majumdar, HB, Vol. I, p. 669; Raverty, IIN, p. 554; Renaudot, AAIC, p. 17 ff.
- 382a. Legge, FRBK, p. 43
383. Das, Rājāśāhī, p. 42; Ahmed, Mahāsthān, pp. 34-35.
384. Majumdar and et al, RC, Chap. IV, verse 36 p. 143; Majumdar, HB, Vol. I, pp. 668-669; Niyogi, EHNI, Vol. I, p. 279.
385. Raverty, IIN, p. 556; Hamilton, DOH, Vol. II, p. 556
386. Ibid.
387. Renaudot, AAIC, p. 17 ff; Elliot & Dowson, HHI, Vol. I, p. 5 ff.
388. De, CGP, p. 174; Charyyā, 14
389. Wheeler, ERBI, p. 223
390. ARASI, 1922-23, p. 109 (in the neighbourhood of Berāchāmpā, 24-Parganas); 1930-34, p. 255 (near Manda, Rājāśāhī); 1922-23, p. 74 (riverbed at Tamluk); ARDM, 1935-36, p. 5 (at Wari Bator, Dacca); Chaudhuri, CECAM, Benerji, PM, pp. 14-15; Goswami, EB, pp. 30-32; JASBNS, Vol. XXVIII, p. 127; Sircar, SSAAMI, p. 5; Ahmed, Mahāsthān, pp. 34-35; Qadir, GTP, pp. 20-21; ARASI, 1928-29, pp. 87-97; 1926-27, pp. 140-49.

391. Ibid.
392. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, pp. 39-40.
393. Shamasastri, AS, BK II, Chap. XII, pp. 88, 95.
394. Ibid., pp. 86-87.
395. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, pp. 50-53.
396. Ibid., Sircar, SI, p. 343 n. 5 ; Sen, SHAIB, p. 521. (In the Balgrām plate there is a reference to rūpakas, 8 rūpakas being equivalent to a 1/2 dināra which means that dināra was worth 16 rūpakas in value).
397. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, p. 263 (for Kapardakapurāṇa, Naihātī CP of Vallātasena) ; 274-75 (for purāṇa- Govindapur CP of Lakshmanasena) ; 281, 286 (Mādhānagar CP of Lakshmanasena) ; p.293 (Sundarvan CP of Lakshmanasena) ; pp.298, 300 (Tarpandighi CP of Lakshmanasena for Kapardakapurāṇa p.306 ; for Kapardakapurāṇa Ānuliā CP of Lakshmanasena).
398. Ibid., Majumdar, HB, Vol. I, p. 668 ff.
399. Majumdar, IB, pp. 125, 130 (Edilpur CP of Keśavasena) ; EI, XXI, p. 211 ff (Śaktipur CP of Lakshmanasena) ; Majumdar, IB, pp. 137, 138 (Madanapāḍā plate of Viśvarūpasena) ; p. 1401. (Sāhitya Parishat CP of Viśvarūpasena).
400. Majumdar, HB, Vol. I, p. 668, Bhandarkar, IN, p. 139.
- 400a. Niyogi, EHNI, pp. 89-96 ; Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, pp. 44-58, Majumdar, HB, Vol. I, pp.651-52.
401. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, pp. 53-58.
402. Ibid., pp. 55, 57.
403. Ibid., p. 58.
404. Ibid.
405. Ibid., p. 44.
406. Ray, VI, (1st Pt.), p. 242 ; Niyogi, EHNI, p. 107.
407. Ibid.
408. Majumdar, IB, p. 68 ff, 14 ff ; EI, XXI, p. 211 ff.
409. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, pp. 65-70 (Gunaighar CP of Vainyagupta).
410. Ibid.
411. Ibid., pp. 65-70.
412. Majumdar, IB, pp. 106, 170-172, 178-179 ; Shamasastri, AS, p. 95 (Kākaṇi).
413. Ibid., pp. 112, 115, 166 ; EI, XIX, p. 285 ; Bhāratavarsha, 1349-1350 (BS), Pt. I, pp.263f, 384.
414. Ray, VI, p. 230.
415. Ibid., pp. 230-31.
416. Ibid.
417. Ibid.
418. Ibid.
419. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, pp. 49-53.
420. Ibid., pp. 49-53.
421. Ibid., pp. 80, 51.
422. Pargiter, IA, 1910, p. 215.
423. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, p. 83.
424. Ibid., pp. 51, 84.
425. Majumdar, HB, Vol. I, p.652.
426. Majumdar, IB, p. 63.
427. Ibid., pp. 74, 78, 87.
428. Ibid., pp. 100, 102, 84 ; Sen, SHAIB, p. 568.
429. Ibid., p. 96 (Govindapur CP of Lakshmanasena).
430. EI, XXVI, p. 13.
431. Sharma, IF, pp. 214, 225.
432. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, p. 59 for Ashtakulādhikarāṇa (Dāmodarpur CP of Budhagupta, 482 A.D.) ; 42 (Dhanaidaha CP of Kumāragupta).
433. MBH, Sāhāparvan, Chap. V.
434. Sen, SHAIB, p. 505 ; Sharma, IF, pp. 163-64.

435. Ghosal, CHRS, pp. 238, 255, 257-58; Sen, SHAIB, p. 505.
436. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, pp. 42, 43, 59.
437. Ray, VI, p. 421; Niyogi, EHNI, pp. 82-85.
438. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, pp. 42-43.
439. Shamasastri, AS, Bk. II, Chap. I, p. 45.
440. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, p. 100 Ibid. (for Daśagrāmika, Daśagrāmkadī-Khālīmpur CP of Dharmapāla).
441. Ibid., p. 59 (Mahattara-ashtakulādhikaragrāmika-kutumbina-Dāmodarpur CP of the time of Budhagupta, 482 A.D.); Mahattara, i.e., village headman).
442. Ibid., pp. 58-61 (Dāmodarpur CP of Budhagupta), 88-95 (Mallasarū CP of Vijayasena).
443. Vidyabhusan Syamakanta, MS, VII, 115-130 pp. 178-180.
444. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, p. 59, for Grāmika (Dāmodarpur CP of Budhagupta).
445. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, p. 59 (Mahattara-kutumbina Brāhmaṇa-ashtakulādhikaragṇa pustapāla, etc.).
446. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, p. 59.
447. Shamasastri, AS, Bk. II, Chap. I, p. 46; XXX V, p. 161.
448. Ibid.
449. Ibid.
450. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, p. 59 (Dāmodarpur CP Ins. of the time of Budhagupta, 482 A.D.), p. 50 (Baigrām CP Ins. of Gupta yr. 128 (448 A.D.); p. 62 (Dāmodarpur CP Ins. of Budhagupta, 476-495 A.D.); p. 47 (Dāmodarpur CP of Kumāragupta, 448 A.D.).
451. Ibid., pp. 50, 52 (Baigrām CP Ins. of Gupta yr. 128, 448 A.D.); p. 62 (Dāmodarpur CP Ins. of Budha Gupta, 476-495 A.D.), p. 72 (Dāmodarpur CP Ins. of Gupta yr. 543 A.D.), p. 59 (Dāmodarpur CP Ins. of Budhagupta of 482 A.D.); Sen, SHAIB, p. 503.
452. Ibid., p. 50 (Baigrām CP of Gupta yr. 128, 448 A.D.) Sen, SHAIB, p. 503.
453. Ibid.
454. Sen, SHAIB, p. 503.
455. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, pp. 58-61.
456. Ibid., pp. 50-53.
457. Ibid., p. 49.
458. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, pp. 59-60 (Dāmodarpur CP Ins. of Budhagupta, 482 A.D.).
- 458a. Ibid., p. 56 (Pāhārpur CP Ins. of 479 A.D.)
459. Ibid.
460. Ibid., p. 53.
461. Ibid., pp. 79-87.
462. Ibid., p. 119 (Monghyr CP. of Devapāla).
463. Majumdar, HB, Vol. I, p. 268.
464. IA, XXXIX, p. 213.
465. Ed. Majumdar, HB, Vol. I, p. 272.
466. Ibid.
467. Ibid.
469. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, pp. 88, 91 (Mallasarū CP of Vijayasena; Mahattara, i.e., village headman).
470. Majumdar, IB, pp. 161-62; 138-39; 126 (Chittagong CP of Dāmodaradeva, Madanapādā CP of Viśvarūpasena, Edilpur CP of Keśavasena).
471. Ibid., p. 162 (Chittagong CP of Dāmodaradeva).
472. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, p. 59 (Dāmodarpur CP of Budhagupta); p. 42 (Dhanaidaha CP of Kumāragupta); p. 202 (Bāngadā CP Ins. of Mahipāla); p. 215 (Manahali CP of Madanapādadeva).
473. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, p. 131.
474. IA, 1919, p. 80.
475. Majumdar, HB, Vol. I, p. 269.
476. Ibid.
477. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, pp. 96, 100, 106, 107.
478. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, p. 100 (for Daśagrāmika, Khālīmpur CP of Dharmapāla); Sharma, ib. pp. 7, 89.

479. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, pp. 184, 202, 203, 215-16 (Bhāga & Bhoga) 101, 184, 202-03, 215-16, 225, 239, 263 (Kara & Hiranya).
480. El, IV, p. 243 ff.
481. Shamasastri, AS, Bk. II, Chap. XV, p. 101; Ray, VI, p. 243; Shyamakanta, MS, Chap. VII, p. 131.
482. Majumdar, HAB, p. 330.
- 482a. Ibid, p. 314.
483. Majumdar, HAB, p. 330; Shamasastri, AS, Bk. II, Chap. VI, pp. 58-61, Chap. XV, p. 101; Bk. V, Chap. II, pp. 273-74.
484. Ibid.
485. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, pp. 167, 183 (Bhāgalpur CP of Nārāyaṇapāladeva), 202 (Bāngad CP Ins. of Mahipāla), 215 (Manahali CP of Madanapāladeva), 224 Rāmpal CP of Śrīchandra), 363 (Rāmgāñj CP of Isvaraghoshā), 100 (Khālimpur CP of Dharmapāla); Sen, SHAIB, p. 570, CBI, p. 180 (In ancient Bengal, citizens had to pay a separate tax known as Chaurōddharana; the revenue on this head was spent on maintaining sentries for the prevention of theft and dacoity. Chaurōddharanika was perhaps the head of the department entrusted with the charge of collecting this tax).
486. Niyogi, EHNI, pp. 193-194; Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, p. 100 (Khālimpur CP of Dharmapāla), 118, 129 (Monghyr CP of Devapāla), 167, 181 (Bhāgalpur CP of Nārāyaṇapāladeva), 202 (Bāngad CP Ins. of Mahipāla); 215 (Manahali CP of Madanapāladeva), 224 (Rāmpal CP of Śrīchandra); 363 (Rāmgāñj CP of Isvaraghoshā).
487. Majumdar, HAB, p. 315; Maity & Mukherjee, CBI (for Tarika), pp. 100, 168, 182, 202, 215.
488. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, p. 363; Ray, VI, p. 244.
489. Ibid, p. 101.
490. Ibid, pp. 96-100, El, IV, pp. 243, 245 ff; Niyogi, EHNI, p. 186.
491. Shamasastri, AS, (8th edn) Bk. II, Chap. XV, p. 101.
492. Ibid, Ghosal, CHHRS, p. 37.
493. El, IV, p. 254, note. 7; Gopal, ELNI, pp. 38 ff.
494. Majumdar, A, Charyyāpada, pp. 33-39.
495. Ed. Ghosh, Chandramohan, Prākṛta-Paiṅgala, p. 403.
496. Vidyaratna Girish Chandra, Prāyaścitta-Prakaraṇa, pp. 67-68.
497. Majumdar, IB, pp. 130, 66.
498. Watters, OYCTI, Vol. II, pp. 184, 185.
499. Majumdar, HAB, p. 459.
500. Kasinath Durgaprasad, Āryasaptasati, p. 57; Banerjee, SKM, p. 154, Śloka, 577.
501. Maity & Mukherjee, CBI, pp. 214, 219; PD, VV. 40, 42, 43, 44; Majumdar, HAB, p. 462.
502. Dasgupta, VBP, 1355 (BS), p. 266; Ray, VI, p. 57.
503. Ed. Majumdar and et al, RC, Chap. III, V. 29, p. 101.
504. Mukhopadhyay, GGI, pp. 10, 34.
505. Basu, Charyyāpada, pp. 98, 99.
506. Kasinath Durgaprasad, Āryasaptasati, p. 186.
507. Majumdar, IB, p. 41.
508. Ed. Majumdar & et al, RC, Chap. III, VV., 35-37, pp. 104-105.
509. Dikshit, EP, Pl. No. XXXIV, XXXIX, XLIII, & LI.
510. Basu, Charyyāpada, p. 88.
511. Ibid, p. 49.
512. Ibid, p. 88.
513. Kasinath Durgaprasad, Āryasaptasati, pp. 83, 141.
514. Sharma, SKM, p. 138; Hussain, Everyday Life in the Pāla Empire, p. 171.
515. B.C.Law Vol. Pt. II, p. 259.
516. Majumdar, IB, p. 54.
517. Shyamakanta, MS, Chap. V, 150, p. 148; Shamasastri AS, Bk. II, Chap. XXIII, pp. 128-29.
518. Dasgupta, VBP, 1355 (BS), pp. 255-57.
519. Basu, Charyyāpada, pp. 230-51.
520. Kasinath Durgaprasad, Āryasaptasati, p. 87.
521. Chakradar, SLAI, pp. 103-104.

522. Wetters, OYCTI, Vol. II, pp. 184-193.
523. MAI, No. 55 ; Khan, F.A, Maināmatī, 1955 ; Ahmed Nazimuddin, Mahāsthān, Das, Rājādidāṅgā.
524. Goswami, EB.
525. Wetters, OYCTI, Vol. II, pp. 184-94.
526. Ibid.
527. Ed. Majumdar and etal, RC, Chap. III, p. 103.
528. Ibid, pp. 108, 204.
529. KMS, V. 6 41 ; VI, 8, 9.
530. Colebrooke, Jimutavāhana's Dāyabhāga, VII, pp. 105, 108, 109.
531. Ibid, Dāyabhāga, p. 159.
532. B.C.Law Volume, Pt. II, p. 256 ; Majumdar, IB, p. 23.
533. Majumdar, IB, p. 23.
534. Stein, RJTN, IV, 332, IV, 422.
535. PD, V. 28 ; Majumdar, HAB, p. 465.
536. Majumdar, IB, pp. 49, 55, 35, 40.
537. Majumdar, IB, p. 55.
538. Majumdar, IB, pp. 35, 40-41.
539. Chakladar, SLAI, p. 104.
540. Banerjee, SKM, p. 545, Śloka 2005 ; Ray, VI, Pt. I, p. 407.
541. Govardhanacharya, Āryasaptastī, V. 140 p. 87.
542. Majumdar, IB, p. 54.
543. KMS, IV, Chakladar, SLAI, pp. 103-104.
544. Majumdar, IB, p. 54.

CHAPTER - FOUR
THE ABORIGINS IN BENGAL

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To the so-called Aryans of the Āryāvarta or Madhyadeśa, Bengal was an unholy/impure land not to be traversed by the Śishta peoples, i.e., Aryans, and if at all traversed by any one of them, his person became contaminated, and hence he was to be purified by the performances of some prescribed purificatory rites. This stigma of unholiness or impurity was attributed to the otherwise potential or prosperous territorial unit of Bengal, perhaps because of its ethnically and culturally alien peoples who were quite apart or distinct from the Aryans living in the Āryāvarta. Bypassing the Aryan terminology as such, it may be held out that Bengal along with some other territories was earmarked as a land par-excellence of the Asishtas, i.e., impure peoples who were no doubt averse to so-called Śishta or Brahmanical ways of life. This naturally raises a fundamental question : who were these Asishtas peoples of Bengal ? Apparently, they were no other than the various non-Aryans or non-Brahmanical peoples belonging to diverse primitive or aboriginal tribal communities of different ethnic and cultural affiliations. Taking into consideration the traditional view it may be presumed that with the eastward movements of the Aryans bearing the torch of Brahmanical culture, some of the original or indigenous primitive peoples of the land submitted and were admitted within the Brahmanical cultural fold, while others retreated further towards East and took refuge in different parts of Bengal. Naturally so, those retreating peoples continued to entertain a hostile attitude towards the invading or infiltrating Aryans. On the other hand, the Aryans also nourished an ethnic and cultural apathy towards them. Undoubtedly, the Aryans confined themselves within the geographical frontiers of the Madhyadeśa or Āryāvarta for a long period, and in course of time, disregarding all injunctions on traversing the eastern horizon of India they started pouring into Bengal under various pretexts and conditions with the primary object of Aryanizing or Brahmanizing its peoples who were so long abhorrent towards them. This story of the gradual Aryanization/Brahmanization of Bengal has

been reconstructed in the following chapter. But for the purpose of obtaining a clear perspective of the Brahmanization of Bengal and also for a proper understanding of the nature and character of the indigenous primitive tribal peoples of Bengal before and after their Brahmanization, it is indeed a desideratum to project a picture of these peoples by laying stress on their ethnic and cultural bearings. As it would be an enormous task to delineate all individual aboriginal tribal peoples of Bengal prior to their Brahmanization, a selective treatment of some of the tribal communities belonging to diverse ethnic and socio-cultural groups has been attempted in the present chapter.

At the very outset, therefore, it is necessary to categorise the various communities of the primitive tribal people of Bengal into different sections or groups. While doing so, a particular emphasis has been laid on the accounts of castes and tribes contained in the early literary texts and inscriptions which very often embody accounts of these peoples, and from which it has been possible to present each tribal or non-tribal community in its proper historical and ethnological perspectives. But there were/are also many other tribal communities in Bengal which have been either vaguely or faintly referred to or totally bypassed or ignored. These are the typical aborigines who are extant even today in different parts of Bengal and who have largely succeeded in retaining their original tribal characteristics through centuries. Most of these aboriginal tribal communities are again to be directly affiliated to the primitive tribes of Chhotanāgpur. In fact, all these aboriginal tribal communities of Bengal bearing identical names and ethnic and cultural characteristics appear to have migrated from that direction. Some of these tribal communities of Bengal have been again partially/wholly Brahmanized and transformed into different caste orders in the Brahmanical social hierarchy. In this context, it is to be always borne in mind that the four traditional Brahmanical caste orders are most significantly absent in Bengal, and as such, all Bengali caste groups have been recognised as Śūdras. The implication is that all caste orders including even those belonging to the superior social position next to the Brāhmaṇas originally belonged to the non-Aryan tribal communities of Bengal and outside. Not only that, even tribes of foreign extractions coming from different directions of the North, North-east and West got settled in Bengal and were gradually Brahmanized and assimilated within the Brahmanical framework ; but they were all relegated to very low social positions . Again

many tribal communities were only partially assimilated and classed as untouchables occupying the lowest social position and treated as the underdogs of the Hindu society.

With the purpose of tracing or determining the aboriginal tribal communities of Bengal and their surviving remnants in the framework of a large number of so-called Brahmanical caste-groups of today, it is necessary to make an analytical study of each caste order in its entirety with all its historical and ethnological bearings. But this is also a stupendous task, and as such, a classification of various caste orders has been attempted on the basis of the above noted characteristics, and from each classified group, a selection of some well-known caste groups has been made for the purpose of a detailed treatment of each of these selected individual castes. Tribal affilia-
tions of
various
castes

Lastly, an analytical study of the various caste orders as described in several early and later literary texts including their present position has been attempted to show as to what extent and how they are to be affiliated to the aboriginal tribal communities, and also as to how they have been upgraded or degraded in the Brahmanical social hierarchy.

Accordingly, the treatment of the present subject-matter in the following pages has been made under some categories : First, the primitive tribal peoples distributed over different parts of Bengal, who have not yet been fully assimilated into Brahmanism and as such, not directly mentioned or referred to in the Brahmanical texts, and also those who have till today retained their aboriginal tribal names and characteristics along with their racial and ethnological or sociological bearings have been studied. It is only in some cases and in certain areas that these aboriginal peoples have been partially/fully influenced by Brahmanism and have formed into degraded castes bearing their original tribal names and other characteristics. In other words, such groups of the tribal peoples occupy the transitional stage of being transformed into Brahmanical castes. The second group consists of several un-Aryan tribal peoples of diverse ethnic and cultural affiliations, who are referred to and described in the literary texts and epigraphic records. They are indeed still retaining their separate identity in respect of their language and culture; but many others have been partially Brahmanized, and their separate identity as tribal communities can not be

so easily traced or they have been surviving as small isolated communities in remote areas. The third group consists of a host of tribal peoples of foreign extractions who infiltrated into Bengal under diverse conditions and pretexts and who subsequently made permanent settlements and comingled with other peoples in such a way as to loose their separate identity and existence or surviving as a small community at remote/isolated areas, but their remnants may be markedly traced in many other common caste orders, high and low. The fourth group is composed of several territorial tribal groups bearing regional names which might have been given by those very peoples who were once predominant in those areas, and the members of each of which belonging to various ethnic and cultural stocks played a significant role in the history, culture and general composition of the Bengali people. But unfortunately, the identity of some of those peoples have been completely lost in the milieu or amalgam of diverse peoples while others have been assimilated within the Brahmanical fold retaining their original tribal names in somewhat distorted forms, but relegated to very low social position. The fifth group consists of innumerable extant castes holding various socio-economic grades, for which a detailed treatment has been attempted castewise. Selected caste orders of each socio-economic group have been studied to trace or determine their historical bearings and original ethnic and cultural identity of each with the purpose of projecting diversities of the composition of the Bengali people and culture.

I. Extant Tribal Communities ;

The tribal peoples form a major section of the population of the subcontinent of India. While giving a cursory picture of the tribal peoples of Bengal, it is necessary to refer to the Census enumerations made in the Census Reports of 1931 and 1941 only, because these are the two latest reports covering the whole of Bengal before its partition in 1947. In 1931 Census Report the total number of the tribal peoples in India was not less than $2\frac{1}{2}$ crores, and out of 100 Indians $5\frac{1}{2}$ persons belonged to the tribal communities. Further, about 1% of the 20% of these tribal peoples returned themselves as Christians, and the rest claimed to have been affiliated to Hinduism. In the Census Reports of 1931, only 5 tribal communities of Bengal have been enumerated districtwise as¹ :

<u>Tribe</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>District</u>
1. Chākmā	135508	Hilly Chittagong and Chittagong
2. Muṇḍās	108686	24 Parganās and Jalpāiguri
3. Orāoñs	228161	Jalpāiguri, Diānjpur
4. Santals	796656	Burdwan, Bīrbhūm, Bāñkurā, Midnapur, Hugli Dinājpur, Jalpāiguri, Maldah
5. Tiprās	203069	Hill Chittagong & Tripurā

But in the Census Report of 1941 a detailed districtwise account of the enumeration of 20 tribal communities has been given as :

<u>Tribe</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Districts</u>
1. Bhōtiyā	21023	Jalpāiguri, Darjeeling and Sikkim
2. Chākmā	125620	Chittagong, Hilly Chittagong and Tripurā State
3. Dāmāi	10448	Jalpāiguri, Darjeeling and Sikkim
4. Gurung	25158	Calcutta, Jalpāiguri, Darjeeling and Sikkim
5. Hāḍi	7762	Mymensingh and Chittagong
6. Kāmi	24769	Jalpāiguri, Darjeeling and Sikkim
7. Khās	288	Darjeeling and Sikkim
8. Kuki	5111	Hill Chittagong, Tripurā State
9. Lepchā	25043	Darjeeling and Sikkim
10. Limbu	32020	Jalpāiguri, Darjeeling and Sikkim
11. Māngar	28161	Jalpāiguri, Darjeeling and Sikkim
12. Mēch	11798	Jalpāiguri, Darjeeling and Chittagong
13. Mṛa	14584	Jalpāiguri, Darjeeling and Hill Chittagong
14. Muṇḍā	101479	In all parts of Bengal
15. Newār	18715	Jalpāiguri, Darjeeling and Sikkim
16. Orāoñ	240483	In all parts of Bengal
17. Santal	829025	In all parts of Bengal
18. Sārki	4335	Jalpāiguri, Darjeeling and Sikkim
19. Sunuōyār	5969	Jalpāiguri, Darjeeling and Sikkim
20. Tiprā	38401	Hill Chittagong

The Census Report of 1941 has also recorded the districtwise enumeration of the tribal peoples as ² :

<u>Districts</u>	<u>Number</u>
Burdwan	151355
Bīrbhūm	74084
Bāñkurā	154246
Midnapore	253625
Hooghly	69500
Howrah	3919
24-Parganās	51085
Calcutta	1688
Nadiā	12671
Mursīdābād	26138
Jessore	4978
Khulnā	2675
Rājsāhi	67298
Dinājpur	182892
Jalpāiguri	279296
Darjeeling	141301
Raṅpur	18200
Bagurā	14387
Pābnā	6906
Maldah	66449
Dacca	4029
Mymensingh	59722
Faridpur	1363
Bariśāl	284
Tripurā	1524
Noākhāli	34
Chittagong	6348
Total :	1655997

Besides the tribal peoples in the above mentioned districts under direct British administration, in the then native/tributary states also the tribal peoples and their number have been enumerated as :

Hill Chittagong	233392
Coochbihār	2435
Tripurā	33633
Sikkim	63205

It becomes evident from the above districtwise figures that the district of Jalpāiguri contains the largest number of the tribal peoples, and Midnapur is the second largest district in this regard. Amongst the native states, the largest number of tribal people is to be found in the Hill Chittagong areas.

As a result of the partition of Bengal in 1947, parts of five districts went over to the then East Pakistan (now Bānglādeś) and others to West Bengal. The enumeration of the tribal peoples stands as 1368780 in West Bengal and 287217 in East Bengal, and the total comes to 1655997. In present Bānglādeś, out of a population of 75 million, the number of tribal peoples is said to be only one million.

There are certain disagreements in the enumeration tables furnished in the Census Reports of 1911, 1921, 1931 and 1941. Various reasons may be stated for causing such disagreements or discrepancies. In the first place, most of the tribal peoples are of nomadic habits, i.e., migrating from place to place. Secondly, the enumeration might have been also wrongly done or recorded. Thirdly, sometimes the enumeration of these tribal peoples has been made either on the basis of religion or language. In fact, many tribal peoples returned themselves as Hindus. There is of course nothing wrong in this claim because the tribal religions can hardly be distinguished from the popular Hinduism. As such, only those very peoples pursuing tribal life-patterns have to be enumerated as tribals. Fourthly, in 1931 Census Report, many tribes have been again included in the enumeration table of the scheduled castes. This is based on the very fact that the high caste Hindus mostly consider the tribal peoples as untouchables. And this stigma of untouchability has been taken as a primary criterion for the enumeration of the Hindu scheduled castes. This appears to have been a wrong approach. As long as those peoples would live after the tribal ways of life, they should be alone reckoned as tribes and not castes. Fifthly, there are many tribal peoples who in course of time by losing or giving up their original tribal life-patterns have assumed the nature and character of a caste. Such peoples, however, can not also be properly reckoned as tribes. Sixthly, under the British administration some tribes have been earmarked as 'criminals', i.e., those peoples who live on criminal pursuits, and the administration keeps a direct watch upon them. But it is very difficult to identify all these peoples with the tribals. Yet, they have been branded as tribes and enumerated as such. Lastly, there

are some nomadic or wandering groups of peoples who by no account may be affiliated to any tribal group, and yet, they have been earmarked as tribes.

It has been already pointed out that in Bengal the total number of the aboriginals or and Upajātis is 1987763 (different districts of Bengal - 1655997 ; hilly Chittagong - 233392 ; Coochbihar State - 2435 ; Tripurā State - 33633 ; Sikkim - 62306). Thus the total number comes to about 19 lakhs. Besides the Ādivāsis and the Upajātis, there are many other groups of peoples whose enumeration in the Census Reports has been disputed. Several examples of such groups of people in Bengal may be cited. In the first place, there are many groups of peoples who were originally speakers of a tribal language, but presently they speak the local Bengali dialect. Therefore, while enumerating the aboriginals or tribal peoples, the language should not be the only consideration. Secondly, those peoples who socially and culturally pursue the tribal life-patterns should alone be reckoned as tribals. There is, however, little or no difference in economic and religious matters between these peoples and the low caste Hindus. The only difference that can be discerned relates to their respective social framework or organization. Thirdly, there are many communities in Bengal, which were previously tribal in origins, but presently in respect of their language, religion and socio-economic ways of life they have become full-fledged Hindus. From anthropometric standpoints they, however, still retain their respective original ethnic characters.

In this context, it may be further noted that from indeterminable times there has been a long continued mingling of different groups of peoples belonging to diverse ethnic and cultural stocks which resulted in their partial or complete assimilation within the fold of Hinduism. Taking into consideration this very fact, three stages in the assimilation and transformation of the tribal peoples may be noted : (1) Primitive tribes whose language is still tribal, but bereft of any script, and whose cultural patterns and ways of life are tribal in nature and character; (2) Originally and organizationally tribal, but linguistically local; (3) Originally tribal, but linguistically and socio-religiously a Hindu caste.

In the matter of transformation or assimilation of the tribal people, religion of course played a vital role. But it would be absolutely wrong to discern tribal affiliation of a group of people by religion alone because of the very

fact that there is hardly any basic difference between the tribal religion and popular Hinduism. There are many tribal peoples who have retained their language and social set up, but in matters of religion they declare themselves as Hindus. In this connection, a particular reference may be made to Hinduism and primitive tribal religion. Elwin has differentiated the tribal religion from Hinduism by stating that 'it is a thing distinct apart'. While elucidating this apartness, he has also referred to the fact that there are many tribal rituals which are distinct from those of Hinduism like the sacrifice of cattle, use of blood and liquor in religious rites and rituals, worship of demi-gods³, etc. But unfortunately, Elwin has not been able to enter into the very depth of popular Hinduism which is in reality a synthesis of many beliefs, cults, rites and practices including those which are very often earmarked as characteristic traits of the primitive tribal religion. The fact remains that the tribal peoples of Bengal in many cases have little hesitation in returning themselves during Census enumerations as Hindus. Here, another important point to be noted is that Hinduism unlike Christianity and Islam is not fundamentally a religion thriving on proselytization. Christianity has no doubt made a tremendous impact on tribal peoples, and as a result, many tribal peoples have become converted Christians. This has happened not in the case of tribal peoples alone, but also many Hindu low caste peoples have also adopted Christianity in order to elevate their socio-economic position. But most significantly, Islam could produce no impact on the tribal peoples. It is true that many low caste Hindus of Bengal have become converted into Islam on a large scale, but hardly any tribal people has adopted Islam as his religion. This shows that Islam failed to make any impact whatsoever upon the primitive tribal communities.

II. Categories of Extant Tribes in Bengal :

From historical, ethnological, linguistic and sociological points of view, the tribes of Bengal today belong to diverse ethnic, linguistic and cultural groups. Generally speaking, all these tribes are said to have come and settled in Bengal from outside. The number of the aboriginal peoples indigenous to the soil of Bengal is quite negligible and indeterminate because most of them appear to have been integrated into the Brahmanical fold. The tribes now found in Bengal are indeed mostly immigrants from outside, and on the basis of their various nuclei from which they infiltrated into Bengal from remote

antiquity, all these tribal peoples may be for the sake of convenience divided into four distinct categories :

(A) The Tibeto-Mongoloid tribal peoples coming from the Northern Himalayan belt mostly settled in the districts of Darjeeling, Jalpāiguri and other tracts of Northern Bengal. These tribal peoples are mostly the Bhotiās, the Gurungs, the Lepchās, the Newārs, the Dāmāis, the Kāmis, and the Khās.

(B) The Mongoloid peoples coming from Burma, Ārākān and Chin hills settled in Hilly-Chittagong regions and the state of Tripurā. Such tribal peoples are the Tiprās, the Lushāis, the Mṛus, the Khiyāng, the Khāmi, the Chākmās, the Kukis, etc.

(C) The tribal peoples of the Mongoloid ethnic group entered through North-eastern India into Assam and from there dispersed to different parts of Bengal. Such tribal peoples are the Gārōs, the Kāchādis, the Hādis, the Dālus, the Doyāis, the Hājaṅgs, the Mēch, the Rābhās, etc.

(D) A host of tribes mostly belonging to the Austro-Asiatic language-speaking Australoid ethnic group came from their nuclei in Chhotanāgpur and Orissa or from North-eastern India and got themselves settled in different parts of Bengal. These are the Santals, the Orāoñs, the Muṇḍās, the Khands, the Hōs, the Mālpāhādiās, etc.

In the Census Report of 1941, the tribal communities of Bengal have been enumerated as numbering 20, but this enumeration has been made on the basis of languages spoken by these peoples. In reality, the number of the aboriginal tribal communities in Bengal is more than the recorded figure. In 1941 Census Report, 20 tribal groups included the Bhōtiās, the Chākmās, the Dāmāis, the Gurungs, the Hādis, the Kāmis, the Khāsh, the Kukis, the Lepchās, the Limbus, the Māṅgārs, the Mēch, the Mṛus, the Muṇḍās, the Newārs, the Orāoñs, the Santals, the Sārkis, the Sunuōyārs and the Tiprās. Linguistically speaking, this list is not even an exhaustive one. As for instance, mention may be made of the Khands and the Lushāis. The Khands constitute a tribal group with its own individual language called Khandi or Kandi or Kui. Similarly, the

Lushāi is another tribal group with its own language. Secondly, in 1941 Census Tribal Report, the Chākmās have been included in the list of the tribal groups in Bengal group. But in reality, the Chākmā language is simply a dialectical variation of the Bengali language. Thirdly, the Hāḍis have been included in the aforesaid list, but not the Gārōs, the Hājāṅg and the Kāchāḍis. It is true that the Hāḍi, the Hājāṅg, the Gārō and ^{the} Kāchāḍi dialects belong to the Bodo linguistic family, but otherwise they all constitute distinct tribal groups.

Besides, in the Census Report of 1941, a list of 176 tribal groups spread over different parts of India has been furnished. Many of these tribal communities are also to be found in Bengal ; but in the list of tribes in Bengal as given in the Census Report does not include them. Such tribes are the Bediyā, the Vāheliyā, the Bhuñyā or the Bhuinhār, the Viñjhiyā, the Pān, the Pāsi, the Dōsād, the Rāvā, the Naṭa, the Ghāsi, the Kāchāḍi, the Nāgesiyā, the Bhūmij, the Kōrā, the Khāru, the Mālpāhāḍiā, the Gāro, the Hājāṅg, the Khand, the Lushāi, the Hō, the Māholi and the Turī.

So far as the enumeration of the tribal communities in the Census Report of 1931 is concerned, it may be noted that the aforesaid tribal groups in Bengal have been recorded. Besides, in 1931 Census Report there are a few other tribes of Bengal, who have not been mentioned in the Census Report of 1941. These tribes are the Dalu, the Beruā, the Vinda, the Dōyāi, the Jimdār, the Khāmbu, the Khāmi, the Khiyāṅg, the Kurmi, the Kaōyar (Kāoyār), Māl or Mālār, the Kārēngā, the Murmi, the Rāy and the Tōtō.

Even all these lists of tribal groups mentioned above are not exhaustive as many other extant tribes have not been included. As for instance, the Śavaras have not been referred to either in the Census Reports of 1931 or of 1941 as a tribal group. The primary reason of their non-inclusion was perhaps the very fact that the Śavaras of Bengal have been largely assimilated within the fold of Hinduism, and as a caste group it does actually exist in the districts of Bāñkurā and Midnapur. Besides the Śavaras, the Bhūmijas, the Bhuiyās and the Kurmis have been also largely Hinduised. Of the tribal communities which have been Hinduised and now constitute Hindu castes, mention may be made of the Bhuiyās, the Bhūmijas, the Kurmis, the Śavaras, the Kōch, the Pāliyas, the Rājvaṁśis, etc. All these tribal groups have become today integral parts of the Hindu society.

Besides the above mentioned tribal communities, there exist in Bengal several other tribal groups of peoples who have been designated as the 'criminal tribes'. The members of these tribal groups are mostly nomads. They live primarily on hunting and food-gathering economy and also making domestic arts and crafts out of bamboos, canes, etc. Some of them are again without any substantial means of livelihood, and these very peoples live primarily on all sorts of criminal activities. Like other parts of India, in Bengal as well there are several such criminal tribes as the Nata, the Vedyā, the Dosād, the Ghāsi, the Pāsi, the Vaheliyā, the Lodhā, etc. All these names are to be found in the Census Report of 1941. Besides, many other very low Hindu caste peoples have been also included within the criminal tribal group, as for instance, the Dōm, the Bāgdi, the Muchi, the Chāmār, etc. But these low caste peoples are not criminals in all places of India. They have been included within the criminal tribal group only in places where they live on criminal activities. Even the list of these criminal peoples includes both the Hindus and Muslims. As for instance, the Tutiya Muslims in the district of Bāñkurā have been branded as criminals.

It would be thus evident that in Bengal there are many tribes belonging to different ethnic and cultural groups. All these tribes of Bengal have been already divided into four distinct categories. An ethnological study of these tribal peoples belonging to different groups would reveal the presence of two distinct basic ethnic elements, namely, the Tibeto-Mongoloid and Australoid. Besides these two primary ethnic elements, there are also some other elements, the most important of which is of course the Mediterranean.

III. Categorywise Portrayal of Each Tribal Group :

For a proper understanding of the nature and character of these different tribal groups and also of their respective contributions in the composition of the Bengali people and culture, it would be necessary to make a review of each tribal portrait on the basis of their original nuclei from where they migrated into the plains of Bengal including their spatial distribution. While making such a brief review of each individual tribe, a particular reference is also to be made to their vocations and other cultural patterns along with their physical characteristics, if available.

A. Hill Tribes from Northern Belt :

The hill-tribes pouring into Bengal from the North Himalayan belt include many tribes. Some of them may be reviewed here : the Bhōtiās, the

Dāmāis, the Kāmis, the Khāsh, the Khāoyās, the Jimdārs, the Khāmbus, the Limbus, the Rāys, the Newārs, the Gurūngs, the Sārkis, the Sunuoyārs, the Thārus, the Maṅgars, the Lepchās and the Murmis. (Map. 9)

(i) The Bhōṭiyās :

The Bhōṭiyās (Bhuṭiās) are to be found widely spread over Nepal, Sikkim, Tibet and Bhutan. They are, however, mostly from Bhutan. The Bhōṭiyā cultural patterns in all these countries are not again analogous. On the other hand, there are some basic differences. In Bengal, there are Bhōṭiyās belonging to all these four countries, but mostly to Nepal. In Bengal, these Bhōṭiyās are mostly to be found concentrated in the districts of Darjeeling and Jalpāiguri and a very few in other districts, and their largest accumulation is, however, in Sikkim. Most of the Bhōṭiyās are Buddhists. Though many of the Bhuṭiās are Buddhists, the number of the Hindu Bhuṭiās is also considerable. It follows that in Bengal the Bhōṭiyā peoples came into direct contact with the Hindus. They were not, however, included in the scheduled list of 1941⁴. Their total number in West Bengal in 1951 was 588156 (male) + 2216 (female). Excepting the Presidency Division wherein the number of the Bhuṭiās is the largest (2450 + 2216), the next large concentration is to be found in Darjeeling district Bhōṭiyās (2084 + 1934)⁵. It becomes evident from the Census figures that their female population is comparatively much less. The variation of their population figures appears from Census Reports : in 1911 their total number was : 16917 (Buddhist) + 2211 (Hindus); in 1931 : 14749 (Buddhist) + 1422 (Hindus); in 1941 : 7808 ; in 1951 : 4810. It follows that their number decreased in Bengal. A section of the Nepalese Bhuṭiās called Śārpās accompany the hill-climbers as carriers of their luggage.

(ii) The Dāmāis :

The Dāmāi or Dāmi is also a Nepalese caste whose occupation is sewing or that of a tailor. A sprinkling of this tribal caste people is to be found in different parts of Bengal as well. They were excluded from the scheduled list in 1931, but in 1936 by a Government order they were included in the list⁶. Originally, they belonged to a hilly tribal group.

(iii) The Kāmis :

The Kāmis form another community in Nepal. Their main occupation is that of a blacksmith. Some of these peoples also engage themselves in working out precious metals. It is claimed that they entered into Nepal from the plains

of India, and this is attested to by a study of their physical characters which bear a little resemblance with the Indo-Tibetan races or rather with the Mongoloid stock⁷. It appears that they migrated from the plains of India and intermixed with the indigenous peoples of Nepal. A significant fact of great sociological interest is that the Kāmis admit into their caste members of any caste higher than their own. This so happens when a person of a higher Kāmis social group keeps a Kāmi girl as a mistress. But in respect of many other matters, they are guided by the tribal customs of their own. The Kāmis in general claim to be orthodox Hindus, and they worship a number of deities. Significantly, they have no Brahmin priest, and any one of their community is qualified to officiate as a priest. They have, however, abstained from eating beef and have adopted several Hindu usages. Yet, their social position is very low in comparison to other caste peoples of Tibetan origins. Presently, they however, claim themselves as Viśva-Brāhmaṇas tracing their descent from Viśvāmitra, and thereby they are trying to enhance their social position and prestige.

Their number in Bengal is very insignificant. It is only in the district of Dārjeeling that they are found mostly concentrated, and a few persons can only be traced in different parts of Bihar. This implies that they came down from Nepal. In this connection, a particular reference may be made to the Kāmār caste of Bengal whose occupation is also that of a blacksmith. The Kāmārs and the Kāmis appear to be identical, and even today the former occupies a low position and their entry into the Hindu temple is denied. It is not unlikely that both the Kāmārs of Bengal and the Kāmis of Nepal originated from a common tribal source. The number of the Kāmārs in Bengal is gradually dwindling, and it is quite likely that they would become extinct or very soon completely absorbed within the Hindu society⁸.

(iv) The Khās and the Khāōyās :

The Khās and the Khāōyās are two communities of Nepal, and the latter is mostly subjected to slavery. It is only in 1924 that they were emancipated by an imperial order of Nepal. They are devotees of the Lord Śiva. The former community appears to be allied to that of the latter, and it now claims to be called Chhatris. The Khās are said to be the offsprings of mixed marriage between the Rājput/Brahmin immigrants and the Mongolian women⁹. The Khās was originally the name of a small

The Khās
and the
Khāōyās

clan of creedless barbarians. It has now become the proud title of the Kshatriyas of Nepal and the Khās call themselves Chhatris (Kshatriyas) and wear sacred thread¹⁰. All of them claim to be Hindus. But the fact remains that they are Mongoloid in origins.

(v) The Jimdārs, the Khāmbus, the Limbus and the Rāys :

These are the various names of one tribal community of Nepal.

(a) The Jimdār, a title, is synonymous with the Khāmbu and the Rāy (Rai). A Khāmbu is called Jimdār which appears to be a corruption of Jamdār or Zamindar meaning thereby that they are the land-owning and cultivating peoples, but in reality they are more particularly known as one of the fighting tribes of Nepal. It is said that their original home was in the Kirāntdesā, i.e., in the land of the Kirātas or the mountainous country lying between the Jimdār Dudh-Kośi and the Karki. There is a tradition that they came to Nepal from Benares. This can not be, however, sustained by any other evidence. Their mythical ancestor is claimed to be Parubaṅg who is worshipped as a household deity.

(b) The Khāmbus claim to be Hindus, but they have no Brāhmaṇa to act as a priest. Men of their own community called Home serve as priests. As to their social position, they are equated with other peoples of the Kirānti Khāmbus group and are recognised as equals by the Limbus and others¹¹. But in comparison to others, the Khāmbus are the shortest in stature¹². They are also regarded as one of the divisions of the Lepchās.

(c) Another cognate section is called the Limbu (Limbō) or Daś - Limbu, i.e., ten sub-tribes into which they are subdivided. They are also called variously, as for instance, the Nepalese call them Tsong who are said to have immigrated from Tsang in Tibet, and the Lepchās call them Chang which is again a corruption of Tsong. Other peoples call them Subah or Suffah, i.e., a chief. The Limbus form a large portion of the inhabitants lying between the Dudh-Kośi and the Karki and in small numbers in other parts and Sikkim. One of their early settlements was perhaps in the Tāmba Khola valley. There are also traditions that they came from Lhāsa. Regarding their physical features, it may be noted that they are characterised by flat face, slightly oblique eyes, yellow complexion and less facial hair. These characters certainly speak of

their Tibetan origin, but they got mixed up with the Lepchās. Campbell compares the two tribes by stating : "The Limbu is a very little taller in stature than the Lepchā, somewhat less fledgy and more wiry in the limbs, as fair in complexion as completely beardless. He is scarcely ever as ruddy as the Lepchās sometimes are ; his eyes are, if anything small and placed more to the front than the Lepchās, and his nose, although somewhat smaller, is rather higher in the bridge than that of the Lepchās. He wears his hair long, but does not plait it into a tail ; has no fancy for bead necklaces ; wears a kurki instead of the bān (long straight knife) and wide trouser and a jacket or chāpkān in preference to the robe and long jacket of the Lepchās"¹³. Anthropometric measurements of the Limbus made by Risley are : cephalic index : 84.3 ; nasal index : 74.1.¹⁴ Thus they are Brachycephalic and Mesorrhine peoples. Their all other physical characters are strikingly Mongoloid. They have been also included within the Kirānti group.

The Limbus have been the chieftains of the eastern part of Nepal at the time of the invasion of the Gurkhās. They are divided into a number of endogamous sub-tribes, each of which has again several exogamous septs which are totemistic or eponymous or territorial. A peculiarity with the Limbu tribe is that other cognate tribes like the Murmi, the Lepchā and the Bhuṭiyā may be also admitted into their fold by a decision of their tribal council. Their principal occupations are agriculture, grazing and trading. They mostly claim to be Hindus if they live in their neighbours and worship Mahādeva and Gaurī, but those who live as neighbours of the Buddhists claim to profess Buddhism. It would be however, quite evident that they worship a large number of deities and offer their prayer to them in their respective temples. By religion the Limbus are said to be primarily animistic. They believe in the existence of soul or spirit, and it is from this very belief has emerged a large number of deities. They are also strong believers in magic and shamanism. The Limbus are controlled, guided and directed by their tribal council which is the supreme body amongst them. In respect of social position, the Limbus belong to the upper division of the Kirānti group of peoples. They eat beef, pork and flesh of other animals. They are outside the Hindu caste system and have not yet been absorbed within the Hindu fold.

vi) The Newārs and the Guruṅgs :

The Newārs are also mostly peoples of Nepal, and they claim to be Hindus. They are the most prominent peoples of Nepal and are said to have migrated therein from the plains of India. They were a mixed people of Mongoloid origins.¹⁵ In Nepal, they got mixed up with other peoples. Formerly, they were the rulers of Nepal, but subsequently, their rule was replaced by the Gurkhās who are said to be affiliated to the Rājputs of India. Now-a-days the Newārs claim to be Hindus. There are several divisions and sub-divisions amongst them occupying high and low social positions. The Guruṅgs are one of the best of the fighting tribes of Nepal. They are also divided into a number of endogamous sub-castes, each of which again consists of several exogamous septs. All the members of this caste were formerly Buddhists, but now they claim to be Hindus, and the Pāṇḍava-Bhīma is their most favourite deity. There are also traces of many animistic beliefs and practices among the Guruṅgs. In their worship and other rites the Brāhmaṇas sometimes officiate as priests. In the district of Darjeeling and its neighbouring areas, the Guruṅgs are to be found in large numbers.¹⁶

vii) The Sārkis, Sunuōyārs, Thārus and Mangars :

These are all different tribal communities of Nepal. (a) The Sārkis are today the cobbler-caste of Nepal occupying a very low social position. (b) The Sunuōyār is another cultivating tribe of Nepal allied with the Guruṅgs, the Khās and other peoples. It is also an endogamous group with a number of totemistic septs. Most of these peoples even today practise burial, but the well-to-do persons have started the practice of cremation and the performance of funeral rites after the Hindu fashion. They claim to be Hindus and worship Śiva and Kālī with sacrifices of goats and other animals. Bhīmsen Sārki and Sunuōyār is also worshipped with all kinds of sacrifice. They worship cow under the name of Lakshmi on the new moon of the month of Kārtika. The Upādhyāya Brahmins serve them as their priests. In spite of their Hinduization, the Sunuōyārs still retain and profess many animistic beliefs and practices, and as such, Risley describes them as under-developed Hindus. Their tribal affinity is clearly borne out by the very fact that even today they admit that their original occupation was hunting. Presently, they, however, mostly live on agriculture and pastoral pursuits.¹⁷

(c) The next important tribe of Nepal is of course Thāru. The Thāru settlements are to be found all along the Himalayan Terai. The name Thāru is said to be derived from Tahre, i.e., halted after their flight into the forest. Thārus The term is also derived by some from Tar-Hua, i.e., wet, which perhaps alludes to the swampy nature of their tract ; others again have derived the word from Āthwāru, i.e., an eighty day serf. Again, the word is derived from Thar denoting forest, and Thāru thereby means a man of the forest. But the name itself is non-Sanskritic in origins and appears to be an aboriginal vocable. Accordingly, it may be contended that the Thārus belong to a non-Brahmanized tribal community.¹⁸ A claim of the Rājput Origins origin for the Thārus has been, however, put forward stating that they are those very Rājputs who have taken to agriculture after the conquest of the Muslims. But this claim appears to be absolutely fictitious as has been cogently pointed out by Nesfield. On the other hand, there is every reason to believe that that they were originally an aboriginal tribe whose ancestor might have once ruled over the valley of the Ganges. They were, however, subsequently driven into the Himalayan forests by the onrush of the so-called Aryan peoples.

In the mountainous region they got mixed up with the Nepalese, and thereby at present they bear certain Mongoloid features, such as, high cheek bones and slanting eyes. But in all other respects, their physical features resemble other primitive tribes of the plains. The Thārus are also characterised Physical features by long wavy hair, dark or black skin-colour, much hair on face and body and medium stature. This description of the physical features of the Thārus as given by Nesfield does not differ substantially from those of other tribal peoples of the region. The original Thāru language is now lost, and as such, it is very difficult to affiliate it with certainty with any particular linguistic group. In general, they have been classed as Dravidian or Kolarian.

There are again many divisions and sub-divisions amongst the Thārus. They are primarily nomadic peoples wandering over the forest areas in search of their livelihood, and accordingly, their settlements are also widely scattered. Many divisions and sub-divisions arose also out of their scattered habitats.

The religion of the Thārus may be said to be a mingling of animism and nature-worship like other aboriginal tribes. They worship their founder-ancestor, namely, Rikheswar. Besides, they also worship many other deities like Mahādeva and Kālī, an adaptation from the Hindus. They also believe in magic and performances of the medicinemen. It would appear that the impact of modern Hinduism is ~~fast~~ driving out the primitive Thāru deities and other religious practices into oblivion. The Thārus, though migratory in their habits, live primarily on cultivation. Previously, their practice was not to cultivate one crop on the same plot of land continuously for more than two years. That is why they had to shift from place to place. Besides agriculture, the Thārus are also engaged in hunting, fishing, etc. The Thārus have also earned reputation as skilled elephant-drivers and experts in catching wild animals from forests and also in domesticating them.

The Thārus are definitely outside the pale of the Brahmanical caste hierarchy and are still considered as untouchables. The stigma of untouchability or their degraded social position appears to have been largely due to their nomadic tribal habits and little contact with the settled Hindus. But now-a-days, they are being gradually Hinduized. Their manners and customs are being modelled after the Hindu fashion. Their religious observances tend towards Saivism. In matters of food-articles, it may be noted that they eat pigs, fowls and fish. Even field-rats are eaten. These are all forbidden articles of food to the Hindus. But presently, they have given up all these forbidden articles of food as well. There is little doubt that in spite of their isolation, the Thārus have adopted many traits of Brahmanical culture, and their absorption within the Brahmanical social order will be soon complete.

(d) Besides the Thārus, the Mangar is another fighting tribe of Nepal. They believe that their original habitat was in the valley of the Dhoreh in Western Nepal, and subsequently, they infiltrated into eastern part of Nepal. It is also an endogamous tribal group consisting of several exogamous Mangars septs. Their main occupations relate to agriculture, trade and soldiering. They abstain from beef-eating, but pork and domestic fowl are their common animal diet. In social status or position they are equal to the Gurung, the Khās and others. The religion of the Mangars has been

described by Risley as lax Hinduism tampered by survivals of an earlier animistic cult. They believe in the worship of many Hindu gods and goddesses, and most surprisingly, Satyanārāyaṇa has become their favourite deity, and the Upādhyāya-Brahmins officiate as priests on their behalf. The Mangars are characterised by lower Naso-malar index than that of the Tibetans, and their yellowish complexion, eyelids, stature and other physical features certainly speak of the preponderance of the Mongoloid element.¹⁹ From the point of view of physical characteristics, the Mangars are to be classed as Mongoloid despite their intermixtures with many other peoples.

viii) The Lepchās :

The most important tribal group of the Himalayan belt is, however, the Lepchā found widely distributed over Sikkim, Bhutan, Nepal and Darjeeling district of Bengal. They are divided into two main branches, namely, Rong Lepchās and Khāmbā. The former claims to be the original inhabitants of Sikkim, and the latter is believed to have migrated from the Khām province of China. But both the branches have now become amalgamated. It appears, however, that these two branches actually represent two successive waves of the migration of the Mongoloid peoples into Sikkim.

The Lepchās of Nepal in general observe no differentiation whatsoever. They have been conformed themselves to the Hindu taboo which prohibits the killing of the cow. It is because of their great power of adjustment and assimilation of other cultures that the Lepchās always prefer to migrate to Darjeeling and other neighbouring regions in search of livelihood. They eat all kinds of animal food including that of the elephant, rhinoceros, monkey, etc. Their dress is simple and graceful, and they always carry with them a bān which is a straight dagger with a wooden handle. But the Lepchā women are less neatly dressed than men. The Lepchās are very poor agriculturists, and in a very careless manner they produce their food-grains. Their habits are erratic and nomadic in nature as they do not stay at a particular place for more than three years. In other words, they have no permanent village settlements. Simply by clearing the forest-areas they build their houses entirely with bamboos on a platform raised at a height of 5 feet from the ground. The Lepchās are governed entirely

by their tribal customs administered by their own Pañchāyats.

Ethnically, the Lepchās are characterised by short stature (5 feet in height and women are still shorter), muscular and fleshy body, broad face, flat and depressed nose, fair skin-colour, absence of facial hair, long hanging hair, small and oblique eyes and epicanthic fold. All these features certainly speak of their Mongoloid origin²⁰. Besides, their stature, C. I. and N. I. are 158.4, 80.5 and 78.2 according to Waddell^{20a}. But according to Risley these indices are (average) : 79.9 and 67.2^{20b}. Thus they are mesocephalic and mesorrhine peoples. The physical features and dress or costumes of the Lepchā men and women are such that it is hardly possible to distinguish the males from females.

The Lepchās are mostly Buddhists, but their traditional beliefs and practices are mainly of animistic origins. The Tibetan Lāmās officiate as priests in all their Buddhist rites and practices. The Lepchās themselves never become Lāmās, but many of them are experts exorcists or magicians exercising considerable power in avoiding evils and influencing gods. On the whole, the Lepchās are very fascinating peoples. They are honest, sincere and never quarrel amongst themselves. Sherwill calls them "free, happy laughing and playful, no caste ; Lepchās, the children of the mountain, modest, social and joyous in disposition"²¹. They have great belief in communal life and activities. In this respects, the Lepchās are different from other cognate tribes.

As to the spatial distribution of the Lepchās in Bengal, it may be noted that they are to be found concentrated in Northern Bengal, mostly in the district of Darjeeling. In the Presidency Division as well their number is considerable (6892 males + 6503 females as per 1951 Census Report). In all other districts they are very sparsely distributed²². If we take into consideration their total number in Bengal, it will be found that the numerical strength of Lepchās in Bengal increased considerably from 3952 in 1872 to 12468 in 1941 and 1951 in West Bengal alone their number has risen to 13430²³. In this connection, it may be noted that in 1941 the Lepchās were not recognised as scheduled.

ix) Murmis :

Next to the Lepchās another Himalayan tribe infiltrating into Bengal is the Murmi. The Murmis claim to be the oldest settlers in Nepal. Little is, however, known about their origins. Nor they have any tradition of their own regarding the same. They are a nomadic people, and they appear to be a branch of the Bhuṭiyās. The Murmis have become now transformed into a Hindu caste. They all belong to an endogamous unit being divided into several exogamous divisions bearing Tibetan names. In the matter of inheritance, they follow all tribal customs, and in general, patriliney is commonly observed. It is very difficult to define exactly the nature and character of their religion. An analysis of their religion would reveal its substratum as a mixture of primitive elements borrowed from both Hinduism and Buddhism. It is, however, to be noted that though the Lāmās still serve them as their priests, the Buddhist usages are declining and Hinduism is gaining ground. They believe in many gods and goddesses who are duly worshipped by the Lāmās and not by the Brāhmaṇas. The daily religious activities of the Murmis is, however, looked after by the Murmis themselves. The Murmis are in general agriculturists. But now they have taken recourse to fighting occupation, and in Nepal, they are actually reckoned as one of the fighting castes. They have little scruples in respect of food articles, and their social status in the Himalayan region is quite respectable.²⁴

Their physical features are in no way distinct from those of other cognate tribes of the Himalayan belt. Their stature is tall (1669) and their average C.I. and N.I. are : 79.5 and 75.2.²⁵ In other words, they are mesocephalic and mesorrhine. In respect of other characters as well their Mongoloid affiliation is quite clear. They have, however, gradually transformed themselves into a Hindu caste group. But they have not yet been able to adopt Brahmanism in its entirety because the Buddhist Lāmās are still continuing to officiate as priests. Indeed their religious and social behaviour patterns show a mingling of the Buddhist and Brahmanical ideas and practices, and in fact, it may be said that the Murmis are as yet on a transitional stage, and they will be very soon transformed into a full-fledged Brahmanical caste.

x) Observation :

The above mentioned tribal communities are ethnically and culturally Tibeto-Mongoloid in origins, and they are to be largely found spread over the Himalayan kingdoms of Bhutan, Sikkim, Nepal and the neighbouring regions. A review of these communities in bare outline is relevant to the present study of the composition of the Bengali people because all these communities are found distributed in different parts of North Bengal and more particularly concentrated in the districts of Darjeeling and Jalpāiguri.²⁶ In 1931 the total number of the Bhuṭiyās in West Bengal included 13, 246 Buddhists, 81 animist and 1422 Hindus. But in 1911 Census Report their total number was : 14541 Buddhists, 165 animists and 2211 Hindus. It becomes thus evident from these figures that the number of the Bhuṭiyās in West Bengal, more particularly in the districts of Jalpāiguri and Darjeeling have declined considerably. If the language spoken by them is considered, it would appear that the total number of the Bhuṭiyā-speaking people in 1951 included 4483 males and 2919 females. As to the Lepchās, their total number in Bengal as recorded in 1931 Census Report is 12719 Buddhists and 1950 Christians and only 214 Hindus.²⁷ In 1901 and 1911 Census Reports, all the Lepchās have been recorded as Buddhists. The enumeration made in 1931 reveals, however, a large number of Christian converts.

The main purpose of presenting a brief appraisal of the above noted communities of Tibeto-Mongoloid origins is to focus on the point as to how the Mongoloid ethnic element entered into the composition of the Bengali people and also to show as to how some of these peoples are being gradually transformed into Hindu castes. As for instance, the Murmis have actually formed into a Hindu caste, though they have retained many of their original Buddhist beliefs and practices. Besides, though all these peoples at present are mostly Buddhist in faith, before their conversion into Buddhism, they all belonged to the primitive tribal communities living in the hills. This becomes evident from their socio-economic and religious behaviour patterns which contain many elements of tribal affiliations. Another interesting point which is revealed by this study of the Himalayan tribes is that most of these peoples might have originally belonged to tribal communities widely distributed all over the belt of the Himalayas and vividly described in the early Indian literary texts as the Kirātas about whom a separate

treatment has been made. Most of these tribal communities described above are actually said to be affiliated to the Kirāntis who are undoubtedly the modern descendants of the ancient Kirātas or rather the Mongoloids who played a vital role in the ethnic and cultural amalgam of the people of Bengal.

B. Tribes Migrating from Assam :

Besides all these peoples of Tibeto-Mongoloid origins, many other peoples belonging mostly to the Mongoloid ethnic group also infiltrated into the plains of Bengal from Assam wherein they largely came through the North-eastern hilly regions and made settlements. These peoples are the Dalus, the Dōyāis, the Hādis, the Gāros, the Hājaṅgs, the Mēches, the Rābhās and the Kāchādis. Of these tribal communities, the Dalus, the Dōyāis, the Hādis and the Hājaṅgs are to be affiliated to the Gārō community, but at present, they have been all transformed into individual tribal groups.

a) The Dalus :

The Dalus originally belonged to the Gārō community. Their cultural patterns even today resemble considerably those of the Gārōs. In the list of the scheduled castes prepared in 1931, the Dalus have been included but they have been excluded from the list made in 1951.²⁸

b) The Dōyāis :

The Dōyāis (Dōāis), a cognate tribal community, is to be found widely distributed in the districts of Raṅpur, Coochbihār, Bagurā and Mymensing. In West Bengal, their total number was only 887 in 1931, but in 1951 their number increased to 1936.²⁹ But they are more numerous in Eastern Bengal, specially along the banks of the river Lakhya in Dacca. It would also appear from the Census enumeration Tables that the Dōāis are primarily migratory peoples, and most probably, they are in the habit of moving from one place to another in search of their livelihood, and during their temporary settlements they appear to have mingled with other low caste Hindus. These tribal peoples are primarily cultivators belonging to a low social position. As the Dōāis primarily live near the forest areas, they are also engaged

in collecting firewood for selling the same in the local markets and making mats. The literates amongst them are engaged as rent-collectors by the landlords, and the literates are employed as watchmen and messengers.

Origins and physical features Regarding their origins, it may be noted that the Dōāis are allied to the Hājaṅg tribe, and the division of the Kōch-Mandai also bears the name Doi. Buchanan has, however, described them as a depraved Kōch tribe and an impure section of the Rājvarṁśis. The physical characters of the Dōāis speak of their Mongoloid affinities. The Dōāis of Dacca have been described by Wise as characterised by short stature and Indo-Chinese features. Other Dōāis have been described as tall and muscular with large black eyes, aquiline nose and a profusion of hair on the face and light brown complexion. Their other physical features indicate that they belong to the Mongoloid ethnic stock.³⁰

The Dōāis have lost their original language, manners and customs, and they have been fully Hinduised being transformed into a caste with the Patit-Brahmins (degraded) serving them as their priests. Their weddings and funerals are similar to those of other low caste Hindus. They have become mostly converts to Vaishnavism, and the Gōsāins (Vaishṇava saints) or the Vairāgīs (Vaishṇava stoics) are their Gurus or preceptors. But in some places, they have not yet succeeded to engage even a Patit-Brahmin as their priest. As for instance, the Dōāis of Raṅgpur engage their own people as priests in religious performances. In this district, the Dōāis are principally employed as palanquin-carriers.

c) The Hādis :

The Hādis (Hāddika) are another group of tribal peoples of Mongoloid origin. They are to be found mostly concentrated in the Burdwan division. In general, they are numerous in Central and Western Bengal and sparingly distributed over other districts.³¹ The total number of the Hādis in Bengal shows a declining curve from 1872 Census to 1941 Census (169,373 and 84352). This decline in numerical strength of the Hādis might have been due to various reasons, one of which was perhaps their amalgam with other caste orders. But their number increased during 1951 Census enumeration

in West Bengal (96, 189) in comparison to their number in Bengal in 1941.³²

The term Hāḍi (Hāri) is a synonym for Korā and also for Bhuinmāli who are mostly to be found in East Bengal. The Hāris have been recognised as "the remnant of a Hinduised aboriginal tribe which was driven into Bengal by the Aryans or the persecuting Muhammedans".³³ This is proved by their physical features as well. The Hāḍis are divided into a number of Sub-castes, each pursuing a separate vocation. At present, they are engaged in various occupations, all of which are menial in nature and character. They have no scruples as to their diet. The Hāri is again a sub-caste of the Phāsis in Chhotanāgpur. In Bihar, the Hāri is synonymous with a sub-section of the Dōms, and these peoples are said to be immigrants from Bengal. Here a reference may be made to the Haṇḍi-kuruba of South India.³⁴ The term Haṇḍi might have been transformed into Hāri in Bengal. In that case, the Hāris might have come to Bengal from South India. This is, however, contrary to the view of their migration from Assam and also of their Mongoloid affiliation.

These peoples have been transformed into a Hindu caste, and they have also started employing the Brāhmaṇas as their priests. Not only that, the Hāḍis are also observing many taboos on child-marriage, widow-marriage, etc., after the Hindu fashion. They have been transformed into Hāḍis a menial and scavenger caste of Bengal, and their social position is lowest, i.e., an untouchable caste. Recently, they are placing all sorts of claims to heighten their social position. Most fictitiously, they claim their affiliation with the Haihayah-Kshatriya community. It is not, however, understandable by any stress of imagination as to how the Hāḍis of Mymensing could be affiliated to the Haihayas of South India. They appear to have been actually migrated from Assam and that they originally belonged to the Boro (Bodo) linguistic group. Ethnically, the physical features of the Hāḍis appear to have Mongoloid affiliation, but their number is quite insignificant and most of them might have been absorbed within the various Hindu caste orders.

d) The Hājaṅg :

Another important tribal group in the district of Mymensing is the Hājaṅg, a branch of the Gārō community. The Hājaṅgs have no doubt been largely influenced by Hinduism, but not to the extent of the Hādis. Even today, amongst the Hājaṅgs their traditional religious beliefs and practices still persist. Their totems are, however, being gradually replaced by the Hindu deities. Their physical characters are not fundamentally different from those of the Gārōs. Because of their direct contact with the Hindus, they are now on a transitional stage of being transformed into a Hindu caste living on agriculture and wage-earning. In course of their long stay in the region, they have also mingled with other low caste Hindus.

e) The Gārōs :

The most important tribal community of this group is, however, the Gārōs who are also primarily concentrated in the district of Mymensing, and only a few of them may be found in the district of Jalpāiguri. In the local dialect they are called Mandāi. The Gārōs like the Khāsis are matriarchal people, and linguistically they are speakers of the Austro-Asiatic language of the North-eastern variety. The physical features of the Gārōs are closely akin to the Mongoloid ethnic stock. They are a robust people with C.I. 76., N.I. 95.1 and stature 1.588 m (62¹/₂" inches³⁵). Thus they are dolichocephalic and platyrrhine peoples. The Gārōs have fully succeeded in retaining their original tribal characters, and very little influence of Hinduism can be noticed amongst them. They have definitely migrated from the Gārō hill areas to the plains of Mymensing wherein they certainly have intermingled with other peoples.

f) The Kāchāḍi (Kāchāri) :

Another tribal community of Mymensing and Hill Tripurā is the Kāchāri. Linguistically, the Kāchāri language belongs to the Bodo group. Most of the authorities believe that the Mech and the Kāchāris are the same peoples or at least they had a common origin. In respect of physical features as well the Kāchāris are not different from the Mēch, and their affiliation to the Mongoloid ethnic stock can be well discerned.^{35a} Haddon

had also referred to the presence of an ancient dolichocephalic platyrrhine type amongst the Kāchāris³⁶. The main difference between the Kāchāri and the Mēch lies in the very fact that the former has become fully Hinduised, and they have, practically speaking, formed into a Hindu caste. In many other respects, they are similar to the Mēch people.

(g) The Mēch :

Allied with the Kāchāris are the Mēch peoples who are mostly to be found concentrated in the district of Raṅpur and in other parts of the districts of Jalpāiguri, Darjeeling and Coochbihār. In the Goālpārā area of Assam, a large tract is called Mēchpārā, the owner of which calls himself Rājvaṁśī and denies all connections with the Mēch people in general. It has been already pointed out that the Mēch people have been supposed to be the original inhabitants of Darjeeling Terai, for which there is, however, little evidence or justification. Others have identified them with the Dhimal of Nepal, and it is suggested that ^{Mēch} they came from Nepal to Assam. Still others have accepted Assam as the proper home of the Mēch people, and that they are connected with the Gārōs. But all these observations have little credence or historical value. The fact is that the Mēch people largely mingled with the peoples of the plains, and their physical features and cultural traits accordingly have undergone considerable changes.

In respect of their physical features, they are distinguished by fair skin colour, large bones and limbs and other characters of the Mongoloid ethnic stock. They are certainly fairer than other cognate tribes, and the Mongoloid characters are quite marked. They are also said to resemble the Mags and the Burmese³⁷.

In 1911 the total number of the Mēch people in Bengal was recorded as 20730, but in 1931, their number decreased to 9984. This decrease in the population figure of the Mēch people is very significant. It appears that most of the Mēch people might have left the plains of Bengal and taken refuge in Assam and in the countries of the Himalayan belt. It has been also suggested that they extended over the Nepalese Terai and also over Sikkim and Bhutan.

The Mēch peoples are mostly nomadic in their habits as they adhere to shifting cultivation. They have no doubt been able to retain their Mongoloid features and tribal cultural characteristics, but in certain other respects, they have also come under the direct impact of Hinduism, more particularly of the religious beliefs and practices of popular Brahmanism.

(h) The Rābhā :

Another tribe belonging to the same category is called Rābhā. The Rābhās are most numerous in Northern Bengal, more particularly in the district of Jalpāiguri. The total number of the Rābhās in West Bengal according to 1951 Census is 3304 + 18909 and their districtwise distribution stands as : Burdwan 1265 + 175 ; Howrah : 1103 + 2 ; Presidency division : 2039 + 1634; Jalpāiguri : 1582 + 1287; Coochbihār : 354 + 270. In the Census Report of 1941, the total number of the Rābhās has been recorded as 2955 and in 1931 as 3015 but in 1951 the number increased to 5113³⁸. From the districtwise distribution of the Rābhās it becomes also evident that the number of the female population amongst them is significantly less than that of the males. The Rābhās belonging to the Bodo family have migrated to different parts of Bengal in search of their livelihood, and in course of time, they became mixed with many other Hindu low caste peoples.

(i) General Observation :

All the above mentioned tribes came from the Brahmaputra valley and distributed over different parts of Bengal, more particularly over Northern and Eastern Bengal. They all originally belonged to the Bodo linguistic family and Austro-Asiatic family of languages. All the tribes excepting the Gārōs belonged to the Bodo language family. In respect of physical characters of all these peoples, it may be noted that their distinct affiliation with the Mongoloid ethnic stock is quite discernable. The infiltration of these peoples from North-east was largely responsible for the contribution of the Mongoloid elements in the ethnic and cultural composition of the Bengali people. It would be evident from the numerical strength of these people in different parts of Bengal that their number is comparatively insignificant. The implication appears to be that most of them might have been assimilated within the Hindu fold. This is supported by the very fact that some of these peoples have actually been fully transformed into Hindu caste groups, such as, the Hādis , Kāchāris, etc., and some are on the way of being formed into castes. Again, these peoples once absorbed within the Hindu fold could easily

minge with other low caste Hindus and thereby contribute their respective physical features. It is not also quite unlikely that all these peoples were once affiliated to the ancient tribal community named Kirāta as described in the ancient literary texts and inscriptions about whom a separate treatment has been made in the following pages. It has been found out therein that the Kirātas of ancient times were indeed the Mongoloid peoples, and some of the branches of the large Kirāta community might have migrated into the plains of Bengal, and thereby contributed their ethnic and cultural traits in Bengal.

C. Tribes Infiltrating from Burma :

A large number of tribes also infiltrated into South-eastern and Southern Bengal, more particularly in the districts of Noākhāli, Chittagong, Tripurā and Bariśāl. The most important of these tribal groups dispersed from Burma bypassing the hilly tracts through the North-eastern region and also through the Arakanese mountainous regions. These tribes are : the Kukis, the Tiprās, the Lushāis, the Chākmās, the Mru, the Khiyān, the Khāmi and the Mags. (Map. 10)

(i) The Kukis :

The Kukis are primarily a tribe of Assam and North-eastern India. In Bengal they are found concentrated in Tripurā and South-eastern Bengal. In the Census Report of 1931, out of the total number of the Kukis in Bengal, 608 Kukis are Christians and 2117 are followers of the tribal religion and the rest claimed to be Hindus. Their physical features are distinctly Mongoloid. The stature, C.I. and N.I. of the Kukis are : 1.587 m, 76 and 58-91 respectively³⁹. Thus the Kukis are dolichocephalic peoples. But their nasal index cover all the 3 types of nose.

(ii) The Tiprās :

Besides the Kukis, the most important tribal group living in Tripurā and its neighbourhood is of course the Tiprā. It has been presumed that the name Tiprā is not a genuine tribal name, but a wandering tribe called as such by the outsider because of their largest concentration in the Hill Tippera region. It may be noted that the original tribal name was perhaps Tiprā, and the area wherein they mostly lived came to be called after them. It has been suggested that they might have come from the Manipur region. They were primarily food-gathering people supported by Jhum-cultivation. Muller and other German anthropologists have described the Tiprās and other cognate tribes as Lohitic

which denotes connection with the Lauhitya, i.e., the Brahmaputra.⁴⁰ Their stature, C.I. and N.I. as recorded by Risley are : 1611, 80.5 and 84.7.⁴¹ Thus the Tiprās are mesocephalic and mesorrhinic. This has been due to a large scale admixture. Ethnically, they are to be affiliated to the Burmese as the Himalayan races are to the Tibetans.

Besides Tripurā and its hill tracts, the Tiprās are found distributed in different parts of North and East Bengal, namely, Coochbihār, Dacca, Faridpur, Bariśāl, Chittagong and Noākhāli. In all these places they have mingled with many low and high caste Hindus. In Tripurā, the Tiprās are the dominant and the most advanced people amongst the tribal communities, and accordingly their integration intermixture with the Hindus of different categories have been going on for a long time past. As a result of this intermixture, the Mongoloid elements are said to have been largely contributed by the Tiprās in many parts of South-eastern Bengal. Even many of the Tiprās now-a-days claim themselves to be Hindus, and they may be said to have been fully impregnated with Hinduism.

(iii) The Lushāi :

Another cognate tribe coming from Burma and Assam is called Lushāi. The Lushāis are to be found mostly in Assam and in the neighbouring hilly regions. Many of the Lushāis have entered into Tripurā and its neighbouring areas. It may be noted that the majority of the Lushāis have become converts to Christianity, and only a very few are pursuing the traditional ways of life and still fewer claim themselves to be Hindus. From ethnic point of view the Lushāis are also to be affiliated to the Mongoloid racial stock having greater affinities with the Burmese.

(iv) The Thiyangs :

Other tribal peoples entered also into the plains of Bengal through the Arakan hilly ranges. One of them is called Thiyang. They are mostly concentrated in the hilly Chittagong. They are all Buddhists, but they have started having their ways of life after the Hindus. Ethnically speaking, their physical features indicate their affiliation with the Burmese Mongoloid.

(v) The Khāmis :

Another cognate small tribe is called Khāmi. The number of the Khāmis is quite negligible. In 1931 Census Report, the Khāmis have been enumerated as numbering 1616 only.

(vi) The Chākmās :

The most important tribal group widely spread over the Eastern region and hilly areas of Chittagong are the Chākmās who are the most advanced and progressive peoples of the region. There are various traditions regarding the origins and original homeland of the Chākmās. According to one tradition, the Chākmās came from Malay Peninsula. Another tradition ~~traces~~ traces their ancestry from the Kshatriyas of Champānagara in Bihar, who invaded the hill tracts by the end of the 14th century and became settled therein and intermarried with the local people. According to another tradition, they are said to be the descendants of the survivors of the Mughal army sent for attacking the king of Ārākān. It is said that the invading soldiers being defeated became slaves of the king of Ārākān who provided them with lands and wives in the hilly tracts. In support of this traditions, Lewin has referred to the fact that the Chākmā-Rājās in the 18th and 19th centuries actually bore the title of Khān. But these views can hardly be accepted because this title might have been adopted from the Muslims⁴². The Chākmās are primarily peoples of Arakanese origins. They came also from the Ārākān region and got settled mostly in the neighbouring hilly tracts. But their physical features have been considerably modified as a result of frequent intermarriages with the Bengalees.

Origins Originally, they were distinctly of Mongoloid stock. Their average cephalic index as recorded is 84.3, and nasal index is 84.5^{42a}. Thus the Chākmās are markedly Bracycephalic and mesorrhine which indicate their affiliation with the Mongoloid stock. Their stature is 159.5 cm.

The Chākmās are divided into a number of Gajas or clans. Each clan again has one chief or Dewan. During the British administration, a territory under the occupation of one Gaja used to constitute one Maujā (village area). Most of the Chākmās lived by Jhum-cultivation, and they have great attachment to their village-settlement. In respect of their ways of life and culture, it may be said that the Chākmās have become mostly a Bengalized tribe. Their language is indeed a Bengali dialect, but originally their language was different. Even today a section of the Chākmās speak the language of the Maugh (Mag). Even their script is an old variety of Bengali. Grierson is, however, of opinion that the Chākmā script is to be affiliated to the Mon-khmer group.

In respect of certain physical features, it has been already stated that the Chākmās resemble the Mongoloid peoples. But in general features, they are indistinguishable from the Bengalees, and it has been pointed out by some that they have little trace of their original Mongoloid characters. Like the Bengalees, they wear dhuti (a long piece of cloth worn round the loins by males) and their food and behaviour patterns are all after the Bengali fashion. But in religion, the Chākmās, profess Buddhism. In recent years, their religious life-patterns have been, however, considerably coloured by contact with Hinduism of Eastern Bengal. They now observe the Hindu festivals, consult Hindu astrologers and engage Brāhmaṇas to supervise their daily worship of the goddess Kālī. Even certain sections among the Chākmās worship Lakshmī as the goddess of harvest in a small bamboo-made hut. She is also represented by a block of stone and worshipped by offerings of pigs and fowls. Along with this influences of Hinduism, vestiges of primitive animism which was their original religion before their conversion to Buddhism still survive in some places. Again, in recent years Vaishnavism has produced a great impact on the Chākmās. The Vairāgī-Vaishnavas frequent the Chākmā hill tracts, and they have succeeded in making some Chākmā disciples. Those professing Vaishnavism wear necklaces of the Tulsi-beads (beads made from basil plant) and abstain from animal food. But the number of the Vaishnava Chākmās is not quite significant.

(vii) The Mṛu :

Along with the Chākmās a reference may be made to the Mṛu tribe coming from the Ārākān region. These peoples got themselves settled primarily in the hilly Chittagong areas. Amongst the Tiprās there is a section called Mṛung which has, however, no relationship with the Mṛu tribal people. Most surprisingly, their physical features have changed to such an extent that no typical Mongoloid physical traits amongst them are noticeable at present. They are very simple people and their home industry is primarily weaving. It appears that these peoples became considerably mixed with other tribal peoples and the Hindus. The Khiyāns and the Khāmis are the two other Mongoloid tribal groups living in the hilly tracts of South-east Bengal.

(viii) The Maghs :

Lastly, a reference must be made to the Maghs who are also an allied people coming perhaps from the Ārākān region. Regarding the derivation of the name Magh and their original habitat in the South-eastern parts of Bengal,

different writers have expressed various opinions. According to some, the word Magh is a common name applied to the natives of Ārākān, particularly to those bordering on Bengal or residing near the sea. Some again hold the view that the term Magh is to be derived from the word Maga, the name of the ruling family of Magadha, i.e., Bihar. It has been further claimed that the kings of Ārākān mostly belonged to this family. There are other legends narrating as to how the kings from Benares ruled over this country.⁴³ Dalton regards the Arakanese as an outlying branch of the Burmese, and that the name Magh is a foreign epithet known to the Arakanese. He, however, contends that the term Magh is a tribal name which is a general designation of the people who inhabit a particular tract of the country.⁴⁴

The Maghs are to be found well distributed over all parts of South-eastern Bengal nearing the sea in the districts of Khulnā, Bariśāl, Chittagong and Noākhāli. Some of the Maghs also got themselves settled in the state of Tripurā, and they had perhaps migrated there from the neighbouring districts of Chittagong and Noākhāli. They are primarily cultivators. Originally, they used to live on Jhum-cultivation. But they have gradually taken to plough-cultivation. In all districts bordering the sea wherein the Maghs live in large numbers, agriculture has been their main occupation. In this connection, it may be noted that the Maghs were originally pirates. Even in the medieval period, the Maghs carried on a large scale piracy in the waters of the Bay of Bengal, and they also carried their lootings and destructions in the river Ganges. But gradually they became settled agriculturists.

Ethnically speaking, the Maghs possess all the Mongoloid characteristic features. Their average stature, cephalic index and nasal index are 1599, 81.5 and 82.9 respectively.⁴⁵ They are mesocephalic and mesorrhine. These characters might have been due to admixtures. The Maghs are mostly characterised by those very features which would at once affiliate them with Mongoloid racial stock. But some of them have lost all external indications of their Physical features Mongoloid descent because of their intermixtures with many other tribal and non-tribal peoples. In this connection, it may be noted that some of the Maghs who have taken over the profession of cooking in Calcutta are characterised by glossy black complexion, wavy hair and abundant beard and moustache which are the characteristic features of the lower caste Hindus of East Bengal.⁴⁶

In respect of religion, the Maghs profess Buddhism of the Southern School. But amongst them animistic ideas and practices are still very strong. Tantricism has also made a headway amongst them resulting in the worship of Śiva and Durgā. Though the Buddhist priests are employed for their religious rites, they show no disrespect to the Brāhmaṇa priests who are very often consulted for determining the auspicious days. These Arakanese Maghs are undoubtedly outside the fold of Brahmanical caste hierarchy.

In the matter of diet, they eat meat of all kinds of animals, and in fact, they have no prejudice regarding eating and drinking as extant amongst the Hindu castes. The Maghs are veteran smokers. They smoke cigar, pipe and hookā (a typical tobacco-pipe). They would not hesitate to smoke from the same hookā used by the Mālas, Jugīs, etc.⁴⁷

These Maghs are to be found well distributed in different districts of Bengal, and they are now making considerable progress and development in respect of their behaviour patterns and ways of life under the influence of their Hindu neighbours. It may be noted that Islam could, however, make no marked impact on the Maghs, and in fact, there are very few Muslim Maghs.

(ix) General Observation :

The above treated tribal communities came and settled in Bengal from three different directions as outlined, namely, Northern Himalayan belt and Tibet, Assam and Brahmaputra valley and from Burma through the Ārākān ranges. It has been stated that these three groups of peoples are also concentrated in three particular regions of Bengal, i.e., the first one covering mostly Northern Bengal, the second one, parts of North and East Bengal and the third one, South-east Bengal and the hilly tracts of Chittagong and the neighbouring areas. Another interesting point that emerges from an analytical study of these three tribal groups is that ethnically they all belong to the Mongoloid racial stock. Here also, these three groups may be affiliated to three branches of the Mongoloid stock, namely, the Northern group to the Tibeto - Mongoloid branch, Northern and Eastern group to the Indo-Chinese or Burmese branch and the South-eastern one to the Burmese type. But in essence their physical characters are not very much different from one another. It becomes also evident that in many cases the Mongoloid ethnic features of these peoples have undergone considerable changes due to a large scale intermixtures with many other groups of people, tribal and non-tribal including those belonging

to various Hindu caste groups. As such, some of these peoples show at present little trace of their original Mongoloid characters.

D. Extant Primitive Tribal Communities coming from Chhotanāgpur and Orissa:

The number of the extant primitive tribal communities in different parts of Bengal is by no means insignificant, and almost all of them are to be affiliated to one or other of the tribal groups of Chhotanāgpur which is even today the El Daredo of the living primitive peoples of India. It is needless to make any detailed treatment of these tribal communities of Bengal in the present chapter because the anthropological studies of most of these tribal communities have been already made. Even the Census Reports contain sufficient treatments on these tribal communities. Accordingly, in the present chapter only a cursory delineation of some of these important tribal communities may be made with the purpose of indicating their ethnic and cultural affiliations and contributions which are quite relevant to the proposition set forth in the present thesis. All these tribal communities have been again treated under four distinct categories : (a) primitive tribes retaining their original physical characters, language and culture ; (b) Criminal tribes living on criminal activities; (c) tribes transformed into various Hindu caste orders retaining their original tribal names and cultural characteristics ; (d) castes of tribal origins. An analytical study of some of these aboriginal communities coming mostly from Chhotanāgpur and Orissa may be made here for a proper understanding of the contributions made by them in the composition of the Bengali people and culture. These aboriginal communities are : the Santals, the Munḍās, the Hōs, the Khāriās, the Khār-wārs, the Bīrhors, the Bhūmijas, (Chuārs), the Orāoñs, the Mālpāhāriās (Mals, Mālers, Māles, etc.), the Bediyās and a few others who are extant even today in different parts of Bengal. (Map. II)

1. The SANTALS :

Of all extant primitive tribes of Bengal, the most widely spread and numerically largest one is of course the Santal who constitute a branch of the Austro-Asiatic speaking peoples of India, and the Santals are the most widely and intimately known non-Aryan peoples of Bengal. The term Santal is spelt and pronounced in different ways as Sāontāl, Sonthāl and Sāontār. According to Skrefsrud, the name Sāontār was adopted by this tribal people after their sojourn in the country around Sāont in the district of Midnapur .

Sāont has been again supposed to be the present region of Śīldā in the same district. It has been further suggested that the word Santal has been derived from the village named Sāont. In reality, there is a small tribe even today called Sāon living in Sargujā and Keonjhar.⁴⁸ They are also said to have been called Khār-wār which is derived from the root Khar, a variant of Hor, i.e., man by which the Santals call themselves. Again the Santals call themselves also Māñhi (village headman), a very common surname amongst them.

According to a long continued tradition, the Santals originated from a wild goose (hāsdak) which laid two eggs, from which sprang Pilchu Haram and Pilchu Burhi who are the recognised ancestral parents of these peoples. There are also various legends regarding their original abode and dispersal to various directions.⁴⁹ Several theories have been also propounded to trace the original homeland and migration of the Santals into India. It has been suggested that they might have entered into India through North-west while others think that they infiltrated into the plains of India through North-eastern passes. It is, however, to be noted that the Santals form a branch of the large band of the Austric peoples in India, and their language Santali is only one branch of the Austro-Asiatic languages of India. The question of the migration of the Austric peoples into India from their original homeland has been as yet a matter of dispute, and nothing positive can be said till now. But it will be seen in the subsequent Chapter that in all probability they might have infiltrated into India through the North-eastern frontier.

There is, however, little doubt that the nucleus of the Santals and other cognate peoples has been through centuries the region now called the Santal-Parganās or Santalia in Chhotanāgpur. It is not unlikely that it is from this nucleus that the Santals dispersed in various directions including different parts of Bengal in search of their livelihood. In reality, the Santals living in far off places in Bengal and Assam for generations together always point to Chhotanāgpur as their original homeland. In West Bengal, the Santals might have colonised the district of Bīrbhūm at a very remote period and subsequently other parts of the State. These movements of the Santals are still preserved in their legendary tales which relate as to how they being pressed by the more advanced peoples

moved towards East and into Bengal.

It is again to be noted that in West Bengal which is contiguous to Chhotanāgpur, the Santals have the largest concentration. A review of the Census Reports from 1872 onwards shows a substantial increase in their number in West Bengal (from 138862 to 845395 in 1951).⁵⁰ In 1941 the total number of the Santals in West Bengal was 662651, but in 1931 it was 753663 + 401932 claimed as Hindus). Thus in 1941 the total number of the Santals decreased considerably within a short period of ten years. Further, from a study of the districtwise distribution of the Santals in West Bengal, it becomes evident that their largest concentration is in the district of Midnapur (202882) and thence in the district of Bāñkurā (137659 in 1951). Other Santals are distributed over the remaining districts of West Bengal.

The total number and wide spread distribution of the Santals certainly speak of their greater scope and opportunity to mingle with other peoples. In fact, this appears to have happened. A large section of the Santals has become Hinduised, and they have been actually returned in the Census Reports as Hindus. It is also worthwhile to mention that many of the Hindu castes belonging to the lowest social order were composed of the peoples of this community.

Dalton describes the Santals as characterised by blubbery and round face, prominent cheekbones, full and straight eyes, broad and depressed nose, large mouth, full lips, straight, coarse and black hair and large mouth. According to Mann, their countenance approaches Negro type.⁵¹ Hunter, however, describes them as about the same height as the ordinary Hindu.⁵² But according to Dalton they are below that standard. The Santals in Bengal are characterised by dark-brown to charcoal-black skin-colour, round face, black, coarse and curly hair, prominent cheek bones, thick and projecting lips, average stature, dolichocephalic head and platyrrhine nose. Physical features The average cephalic and nasal indices of the Santals are : C.I. 76.1 ; N.I. 88.8 ; stature, 1614⁵³ Leptorrhine character is almost absent and so also is tall stature. The majority of the Santals are short to medium in stature and dolichocephalic and platyrrhine.⁵⁴ In the opinion of Risley, the Santal may be regarded as typical example of the pure Dravidian stock, and he does not agree with the view of their Mongolian descent.⁵⁵ But the physical

features which are most common amongst the Santals are indeed characteristics of the Australoid ethnic stock. In that sense, the Santals may be treated as the Australoid aborigines of Bengal. But in course of time, their physical characters have undergone considerable changes in different parts of Bengal, and as such, the Santals now possess other physical characters which speak of their heterogeneity. In such a case, the inevitable conclusion is that the Santals have also mingled largely with other cognate tribes and many Hindu caste peoples resulting in changing even some of their basic physical characters.

Culturally speaking, the Santals form an endogamous community consisting of a number of exogamous units. Both endogamous and exogamous rules including various taboos are strictly observed by them in all matters of their marital unions and other socio-religious concerns. Levirate and divorce are quite common, and the family is patriarchal, and inheritance is naturally patrilineal. The Santals are believers in many gods and goddesses and observe many seasonal festivals which are more particularly related to the seasonal gifts of nature and also to their agricultural productions. Their supreme deity is called Thākur (Sun), but the most popular one amongst them is Marang-Buru⁵⁶. The name Thākur is a Hindu name, and this might have been a later adoption. Besides, different Bongās are also worshipped. Their chief festival is Sohrāi⁵⁷. The Santals believe in the continuous existence of life after death and also in rebirth and transformation of soul. The Santals are undoubtedly the most honoured, progressive and numerically largest primitive ethnic group of Bengal. They have intermixed largely with many low caste Hindus and as such, their contributions in the composition of the Bengali people and culture are indeed well-marked. The Santals have also become parts and parcels of the Hindu community and often recognised as untouchable castes. This is how the aboriginal Santals have been integrated into the Bengali Hindu Society.

II. The MUNḌĀS :

Next to the Santals, the largest aboriginal tribal group in Bengal is of course the Munḍā community. The term Munḍā occurs under various forms as Mura, Horo-hon, etc., and appears to be of Sanskrit origin denoting head, i.e., the headman of a village. In other words, it is said to be a functional designation used by the members of the tribe. According to their legends, they had no king and each village had its own chief called Munḍā⁵⁸. Besides,

the term Kol is also applied to both the Muṇḍās and the Orāoñs. Jellinghaus thinks that the term Kol means pig-killer. The other opinion is that it is a variant of the term Horo which means man (r has been changed into l – Deriva- this is very common and also h into k). Accordingly, the Khariās tions and call the Muṇḍās, Korās, i.e., Kol⁵⁹. In fact, the term Muṇḍā was meanings used by Max Muller to denote a family of languages having strong Dravidian influence. It has been affirmed by Sylvain Levi that the Muṇḍā is related to the Mon-Khmer family and the dialects of the tribes of the Malay Peninsula. Risley, however, has given altogether a different explanation of the term Muṇḍā. He says : 'The name Muṇḍā is of Sanskrit origin. It means headman of a village, and is a titular or functional designation used by the members of the tribe, as well as by outsiders, as a distinctive name much in the same way as the Santals call themselves Mānjhi, the Bhūmij, the Sardār⁶⁰... Levi does not accept this contention of the Sanskrit origin of the word Muṇḍā. The term Muṇḍā no doubt occurs in Sanskrit literature wherein it means 'one whose head is completely shaved'. In the ethnic sense, the term does rarely occur in early texts⁶¹.

There are, however, a few references in the early texts to the term Muṇḍā. In the Mahābhārata the order of the battle adopted by Bhīṣma has been described as : 'On the left wing are the Muṇḍās with the Kārusha, the Vikuñja and the Kaundivṛisha'. The last two peoples are unknown^{61a}. But the Kārushas are well-known peoples living on the South of Kāśī and Vatsa (Bāgelkhand and Bundelkhand) and towards the South-east bordered the territory occupied by the Muṇḍās⁶². In other passages of the Mahābhārata, the word Muṇḍā is referred to with a different connotation and significance altogether^{62a}. The term has been used to denote the people of North-western India having 'shaved heads' or rather the Kambojas with shaved heads. The shaving of the whole Early head has been always despised -- Yavanamuṇḍa, Kāmbojamuṇḍa. references Besides, the name Muṇḍā in the ethnic sense occurs in the Purāṇas. Thus in the Vāyu-purāṇa, the Muṇḍā occurs in the list of peoples of Eastern India between Prāgyōtisha and Videha before Tāmalīptaka (Tamluk), Malla and Magadha. The Mārkaṇḍeya-purāṇa similarly refers to the Muṇḍā which has been erroneously put as Madra because the Madras are peoples in the Pāñjāb. This kind of erroneous references to the Muṇḍā as Maṇḍika are to be also found in the Mahābhārata wherein it is stated that Karna during his eastern campaign

conquered the Maṇḍikas along with the Aṅgas, the Vaṅgas and the Kaliṅgas⁶³. Here Maṇḍikas distinctly refer to the Muṇḍās.

As to their origins there are several legends current amongst them, one of which relates that their supreme deity Sing-Boṅgā created a boy and girl, and from them were born 12 of either sex. From the first pair originated the Kols (Hōs) and Bhūmij ; from the second, Brāhmaṇas and Chhatris, from others, Śūdras ; besides, one pair took shell-fish and became Bhūiyās ; two pairs took pigs and became Santals^{63a}. It appears that the Muṇḍās have tried to trace the origins of some of their cognate tribal communities in this way.

Origins Linguistically, the Muṇḍās are allied to the Santals, Khariās and other tribes of Chhotanāgpur whose languages are to be affiliated to the Austro-Asiatic family. Schmidt has compared the Muṇḍā languages with the Mon-khmer languages and noted that the "system of suffixes is identical in both"⁶⁴. Like other cognate tribes, the nucleus of the Muṇḍās is also the Chhotanāgpur plateau, and apparently, they might have spread out from this region to different parts in Bengal and other adjacent areas.

The spatial distribution of the Muṇḍās in Bengal extends over all districts and their largest concentration is found in the districts of Jalpāiguri and next to it in the district of 24-Parganās. A perusal of the Census Reports from 1901 to 1941 reveals variations in their number in all districts. Distribution in Bengal In 1951 their total number in West Bengal increased to 82,923 persons, i.e., a sharp increase from all the preceding Census enumerations. Besides, from 1901 to 1931 the Muṇḍās in Bengal have been enumerated under two religious categories, namely, animists and Hindus. Most significantly, more than half of the total number of the Muṇḍās has been returned as Hindus in the Census Report of 1931⁶⁵. It follows that the Muṇḍās have been also largely integrated/assimilated within the Hindu community.

Like other tribes, the endogamous Muṇḍās are also divided into a number^{of} exogamous septs (kilis) and permit levirate, divorce and widow marriage. They are subdivided into a number of subtribes. Adult marriage is in vogue. Divorce and widow re-marriage are allowed. The Muṇḍās are also worshippers of many unpersonified gods and goddesses, and their supreme deity is Sing-boṅgā. The offering of worship including sacrifice of animals figures prominently in the Muṇḍā religious affairs. Like the Santals, the Muṇḍās also observe seasonal

festivals, the most important of which is ofcourse the Sarhul. The Muṇḍās are primarily patrilineal people in respect of descent and inheritance. They have a distinct village organisation with a head or chieftain.

The Muṇḍās like the Santals and other cognate tribes are characterised by almost identical physical characters, and there is hardly any doubt that they belong to the same ethnic group as the Santals. Risley calls them Dravidian^{65a}. The average cephalic and nasal indices of the Muṇḍās are : C.I. - 74.5 and N.I. - 89.9⁶⁶. In other words, they belong to the dolicho-platy Physical type which is to be affiliated to the Australoid ethnic stock. It features has been assumed that there is a common physical relationship among the Muṇḍās, the Khāsis and other Mon-Khmer speakers of South-east Asia⁶⁷. It has been also shown on the basis of Blood group study that the Muṇḍās show affinity with the peoples of East Indian Archipelago⁶⁸. Accordingly, a Pareoean element amongst the Muṇḍās may be suspected. The presence of straight hair amongst them partially supports this theory⁶⁹.

The Muṇḍās of Bengal are changing very fast. They have mingled considerably with other low caste Hindus, and their cultural patterns have been or are being transformed after the Hindu fashion. It is true that the Muṇḍās have not yet been fully merged within the Hindu community in the form of a distinct caste. They have most zealously retained their tribal name and language, though most of them have become bilingual, i.e., speaking both Bengali and their own Muṇḍā language. Culturally, however, they have changed integration considerably. Yet, they have not yet given up all traits of their culture. Even today many primitive elements are markedly extant amongst them. There are other Muṇḍās who have, however, integrated themselves with many low caste Hindus giving up their tribal name, language and customs. It is through this mingling that the Muṇḍās have been able to contribute largely their own physical peculiarities and very rich cultural components in the general makeup of the Bengali people and culture. Even those very Muṇḍās who are as yet maintaining their very loose and separate identity are on the way of being transformed into a Hindu caste in the near future despite the modern trends of preserving the integrity of the tribal communities.

III. The KOLS (HOS) :

Another cognate tribe of the Chhotanāgpur plateau is called Ho or Lārkā-Kolh. The name Ho is said to have been derived from Horo, i.e., man. This term is also used by the Muṇḍās and the Santals as their national designation. On the other hand, the Hindus use the term Kol as a generic name to denote the Muṇḍās, Orāoñs, Bhūmijas, Khariās, etc. Jellinghaus takes the term in the sense of pig-killer. But Risley takes it as a variant of Hor/ Horo (man). In regard to the Hos, the tribal name appears to be the original one, and the Muṇḍās and the Santals perhaps sprung from them. Though all

Kol : these people belong to the same linguistic family and ethnic stock,
Origins they have become distinct endogamous tribal communities with their own respective cultural characteristics. Dalton's presumption that there is a similarity between the names Ho and Haya bears little credibility^{69a}.

Regarding their original homeland and migration, it may be said that the Hos belong to the same family as the Muṇḍās, and some of them might have come to Bengal from Chhotanāgpur. They probably left Chhotanāgpur before some of their members formed another tribal group and adopted a Sanskrit word Muṇḍā. The Hos gradually became very much exclusive in the

Dispersals sense that they would not allow even their cognate peoples to settle near their habitat. But now-a-days of course in Bengal they are residing side by side with the Goālās, Kurmis and other low caste Hindus. The only aliens whom they tolerate are the Tāñtis, Goālās, the potters, the blacksmiths, etc., perhaps for their own convenience⁷⁰.

The Hos are basically food-gathering peoples and very experts in using bows and arrows. Now-a-days of course they have adopted agriculture. They have even learnt plough-cultivation with cows and oxen. It is very much

Culture significant to note that all their socio-religious ceremonies and festivals are inseparably connected with agricultural pursuits. But the primitive religious concepts and practices like animism, totemism, Shamanism and magic are commonly adhered to.

In respect of physical features, it has been pointed out that the Hos are physically finer peoples than the Bhūmijas, Santals and others. The Hos are characterised by short stature, strong built, high nose, oval face, dark to brown skin-colour, dark eyes, straight and wavy black hair and large

hands and feet. Risley has also pointed out that there has been considerable admixture of Aryan blood⁷¹. The Hos are not essentially different from the Muṇḍās in their physical characters as well. Risley could also trace strongly marked Mongoloid features amongst them. There is, however, little doubt that the Hos have undergone considerable changes in their physical features due to admixture with many low caste Hīndus. Besides, in the preceding pages particular attention has been drawn to the presence of different groups of the Mongoloid peoples under various names in many parts of Bengal. It is quite likely that the Hos of Bengal also got mingled with many of these Mongoloid peoples, and as such, the prominence of Mongoloid features as referred to by Risley may be presumed. The Hos have been no doubt separated from other cognate tribes as a distinct group, but physically and linguistically they are all allied peoples. As to their language, it may be noted that the Hos speak a language of the Austro-Asiatic linguistic family, and in fact, almost all the cognate tribes speak the same language.

It has been, however, observed by Risley that the Hos are physically and morally superior to the Santals, Bhūmijās and Muṇḍās, and that they possess a susceptibility of improvement not found in other tribes⁷². Risley has also referred to some of their very primitive traits like mildness, truthfulness, feeling of self-respect, sensitiveness under rebuke, less suspicious, less revengeful, less blood-thirsty, etc. In all respects, they are more amenable to others. It does not, however, imply that all the Hos are honest, sincere and non-criminals. On the other hand, murderers and disrupters are also common amongst the Hos. They also observe many Hindu festivals and have given up beef-eating. As a result of their contact with the Hīndus, they have lost many of their primitive values of life. It may be noted that like the Muṇḍās and the Santals, the Hos have also played a very important role in the racial and cultural composition of the Bengali people.

IV. The KHARIĀS (KHAIRĀ) :

Next to the Muṇḍās, another cognate aboriginal tribe migrating from Chhotanāgpur to different parts of West Bengal is the Khariā. The term Khariā or Khar means a 'blade of grass'. It appears that the whole tribe might have derived its name from its totem grass. Again, the names Khairā and Kharwār appear to be synonymous with the term Khariā, all these being derived from

the term Khar. It thus follows that all the aforesaid tribal names are indeed Khairā dialectical variants of one, i.e., Khariā/Kharwār. In Bengal, the tribal (Khariā) name Khariā/Kharwār appear to have been transformed into Khairā. Further, according to Risley the Khairā is the same as the Korā, a sub-caste of the Bāgdis of West Bengal⁷³. Again, the Khariā was perhaps originally a sub-tribe of the Muṇḍās. This would be evident from the very fact that even today there is a group of Khariās called Khariā-Muṇḍā. Besides, this sub-tribe might be interlinked with the Orāoñs as well because there is also another group called Khariā-Orāoñ⁷⁴. If it is a sub-tribe of the Muṇḍās, the tribe in course of time became transformed into a separate endogamous tribal group.

For the origin of the Khariās there are some traditional legends current amongst them. It is said that the ancestor of the Khariās was born of a fowl's egg. Of the two groups of the Khariās, the Purāns came out of the white portion of the egg and the Khariā from its shell⁷⁵. But the veracity of this legend can not be established. In this connection, a particular reference Origins may be made to the Kharwār. It has been supposed by Mann and Hunter that the Kharwār is an old name of the Santals. But Buchanan has, however, referred to a tradition which includes the Kols, the Cheras and the Khariās together. It has been further contended that the Kharwārs are not at all different from the Santals⁷⁶. The Khariās are also to be related to the Kharwārs. In that case, even the Khariās can not be differentiated from the Santals.

The Khariās of Chhotanāgpur are to be divided into two major groups: the hill Khariās, i.e., those who are living in the hills and pursuing the most primitive methods of food-gathering and the plains Khariās, i.e., those who Groups have become settled in the plains by adopting cultivation and culturally more advanced. The hill Khariās are gradually dying out, and many of them are also coming down and settling themselves in the plains by pursuing agriculture.

It was from the Chhotanāgpur and Orissa region that the Khariās moved further eastward in search of their livelihood and settled in different districts of Bengal. They are more numerous in Central and Western Bengal. The total number of the Khariās in West Bengal in 1951 was 21,128 (males) + 22,859 (females), i.e., 43,987. Their districtwise population figures are available from 1891. In that year, the Khariā population figures of three districts only

VII. The BHŪMIJ :

Another very important tribal community which originally migrated from Chhotanāgpur and largely spread over different parts of Bengal is the Bhūmij. The Bhūmijas are akin to the Muṇḍās or the Kolarians. Really speaking, Bhūmijas the Bhūmij appears to closely resemble the Muṇḍās in respect of and their language, ethnic features and cultural characteristics. Risley has outlined all details about the affiliation of the Bhūmijas to the Muṇḍās and their movements towards East and mingling with the Hindus, and also as to how they lost their kinship with the parent tribe⁸². Risley further contends that this view is fully supported by all available facts.

The Bhūmijas of Mānbhūm are pure Muṇḍās. The region of Mānbhūm contains a large number of ancient graveyards, and as such, it may be considered as the earliest settlement of the Muṇḍās. The people of the region speak Muṇḍā language, and they actually call themselves Muṇḍās. Their socio-religious practices Bhūmij of are also like the Muṇḍās. But in the region on the eastern side of Mānbhūm the Ayodhyā-hills, both the Muṇḍāri language and titles have been dropped and its inhabitants call themselves Bhūmijas or Sardārs and speak Bengali language. It has been, however, pointed out by Risley that the physical characters of these peoples continue to be the same, though they have adopted many Hindu customs and are fast becoming Hindus. There can be no doubt Bhūmijas that they are the descendants of the Muṇḍās who first settled in of East this region and were given the name of Bhūmij (autochthon) by the of the Hindu immigrants who found them in the possession of the soil⁸³. Ayodhyā-hills This is how the name Bhūmija came into vogue. But the Dhalbhūm Bhūmijas consider themselves as autochthones and do not admit that they are in any way connected with the Muṇḍās, Hos or Santals of Chhotanāgpur.

It would appear that in course of the migration of the Bhūmijas towards East and their settlements in Bengal and her periphery regions towards West, they refused to admit any connection with their parent tribal community because of their prosperity and elevated position resulting from the contact Movements with the Hindus. The distribution of the Bhūmijas shows that they of the are to be largely found in Dhalbhūm, Barābhūm, Pātkum and other Bhūmijas to Bengal adjoining regions of Bengal. They are, in fact, concentrated mostly in the country between the Kñāsāi and the Suvarṇarekhā. Previously, they

were concentrated in the region of the Kaśśai, but being pressed by the advancing Aryans, they might have settled themselves more particularly in the regions along the river Suvarṇarekhā. It is from there that the Bhūmijas moved eastwards and dispersed in different directions and became settled in most of the contiguous districts of Bengal.

The total number of the Bhūmij population in West Bengal in 1951 was 86, 439, while their total number in Bengal in 1872 was only 38,064. It would follow from the Census tables from 1872 to 1951 that there was a tremendous growth of Bhūmij population in different districts of Bengal. In West Bengal, their total number in 1941 was 79,213 and in 1951, it rose to 86,439. The districtwise distribution of the Bhūmij population would show in Bengal their largest concentration in the district of Midnapur (47,669). Next to Midnapur, figure the districts of Bāñkurā (15,583) and 24-Parganās (14,995)⁸⁴. In other districts, the number of the Bhūmijas is not very significant. The Census enumeration tables reveal that they are distributed over all districts of West Bengal.

It has been already stated that the Bhūmijas are not essentially different from the Muṇḍās, but rather a branch of the latter. The name itself is no doubt significant in the sense that the term denotes that they are the sons of the soil, i.e., Bhūmijas. Literally the word Bhūmija (Bhūmi = earth/land) means that which is produced from the earth. Here, the term denotes the man of the soil, i.e., original inhabitants or the children of the soil. In fact, the Bhūmijas themselves claim to be the autochthones of the regions of Dalbhūm, Mānbhūm and other adjacent areas. The caste or class to which the Bhūmijas claim to belong is simply stated to be Sardār. There is, however, no evidence whatsoever that the Bhūmijas were the original inhabitants of the land. On the other hand, it has been already pointed out that they were actually dispersed towards the eastern region by the pressure of the infiltrating Aryans, and it is in this region that they started to call themselves Bhūmijas or they were called as such by others. The name Bhūmij was perhaps given by those Aryans who found them settled there before their coming.

It is not known when this branch of the Muṇḍās got themselves settled in the eastern region. They appear to have been in occupation of the region at least before the establishment of the Jaina and the Hindu temples, the

ruins of which are to be found widely spread over the region. It would not be also unjustifiable to associate these Bhūmijas with the Vajrabhūmis, i.e., the terrible indigenes who in the early Jaina text, the Āchārāṅgasūtra, have been described as abusing, beating, shooting arrows at and baiting with dogs the great Jaina saint Mahāvīra who travelled in the pathless Rāḍhā country⁸⁵. If it be so, the people who confronted the Jaina saint were perhaps the Bhūmijas who were firmly settled in the region long before the 6th century B.C. No legend regarding their origin can be, however, traced. Long ago, Ball could discover some relics of an ancient establishment in the Bhūmij area of Dalbhūm. The local Bhūmijas claimed that these were the remains of the palace of their Rājā who had two tongues.

The original occupations of the Bhūmijas of Mānbhūm are believed to have comprised military service and agriculture. There is, however, little doubt that some of the Bhūmijas were great fighters and marauders. This becomes evident from the very fact that the Chuārs or plunderers who overran the district of Midnapur frequently in the 19th century were largely recruited from this tribal community. It has been pointed out by Risley that this does not, however, mean that all the Bhūmijas are/were endowed with military skill/instinct or discipline. On the other hand, they are bereft of these qualities⁸⁶. Their main occupation accordingly has been always agriculture excepting some of them being engaged in iron smelting. That they are/were very much attached to the soil becomes evident from the very fact that many of them became great land-holders of Zamindars. In reality, the Zamindars of Barābhūm, Mānbhūm and Pātkum who became elevated to the position of the Rājās belonged originally to the Bhūmij tribal community, though they now claim to be Rājputs. Next to these Rājās or Zamindars, there were/are the Sardārs or big land-holders. They also now claim affiliations with the Rājputs. The bulk of the Bhūmij people are, however, cultivators and labourers. Some of them have taken to petty trade as well and others have migrated to Assam to serve as workers in the tea gardens. Many of the Bhūmijas are quite well-off and they live in well-built houses. They no doubt eat all sorts of unclean food, but now-a-days they have given up beef-eating.

The endogamous Bhūmijas have a large number of sub-tribes named after their original settlements, excepting the iron-smelting Sheio in Mānbhūm. The sub-tribes are all territorial in nature and character. In the district of

Midnapur, excepting the functional group of the Shelo, there are five such territorial sub-tribes. These sub-tribes were not originally endogamous, but they are now becoming so. The rule of exogamy is strictly observed by them. In fact, the Bhūmijas are divided into several totemistic exogamous septs. Both adult marriage and bride-price are common. The Bhūmijas recognise polygyny, but they can hardly afford to have more than one wife. Divorce and widow-remarriage are prevalent. Their marriage ceremony is a mixture of the Hindu and tribal customs. In matters of inheritance, they are patrilineal, and now-a-days the Hindu laws of inheritance are largely followed.

The religious beliefs and practices of the Bhūmijas differ from region to region, and this difference is also witnessed amongst various socio-economic sections amongst them. As for instance, the Zamindars who claim themselves to be Rajputs have become largely Hinduised and employ the Brahmins as their family priests and offer worship to the Hindu deities. But the general Bhūmijas still continue their traditional worship of Sing-boṅgā and Dharm. They also worship a large number of minor deities like Jahir-buru, Kārākātā (Kārā = buffalo ; kātā = to cut), an agricultural deity, Baghut, i.e., the presiding deity over the tiger, Grāmdēvātā i.e., village deity, Buru, i.e., mountain deity, Kudra, i.e., malignant ghost and Pañchvāhinī worshipped in the district of Bāñkurā. The Bhūmijas also observe a number of festivals, such as, the Karam. In general, the Bhūmijas employ their own priests called Lāyās for the performance of their religious rites. Now-a-days even some degraded Brahmins have started acting as their priests. The Zamindars and the affluent Bhūmijas employ Brahmin priests who claim superiority over those Brāhmaṇas who serve the general Bhūmij people. In fact, the latter is considered degraded Brāhmaṇas who also serve the Kurmis and other low caste and untouchable Hindus. The Bhūmijas generally cremate the dead body and charred/half-burnt bones and ashes are preserved in a vessel. Some of these bone-fragments are interred at the foot of a Tulsi-plant (sacred basil plant) and others are taken to the family cemetery for burial. On this burial ground, a large flat stone is laid over and a fowl is sacrificed on it. It would follow that the Bhūmijas were/are great Megalith builders. They build two types of Megaliths, namely, Dolmen and Menhir, i.e., table stone and upright stone or monolith. The former practice is performed by the general Bhūmijas and the latter, by the Zamindars and the affluent sections. Even today in the regions where the Bhūmijas have

their settlements, vast areas are to be found covered with Dolmens and a few Menhirs.

In physical appearance, the Bhūmijas have been described as inferior to the Hos and the best of the Muṇḍās. They are characterized by short stature, strong built and dark chocolate to dark brown skin-colour. Their mean stature, C.I. and N.I. are : 1592, 75°0 and 86.5. In other words, the Bhūmij ethnic type is primarily dolicho-platy. In respect of other characters they are least different from the Muṇḍās and other cognate tribes of Chhotanāgpur. Accordingly, the Bhūmijas may be also affiliated to the same ethnic group, i.e., Australoid. Linguistically, it may be said that the Bhūmijas originally belonged to the Muṇḍā language family, i.e., Austro-Asiatic. But subsequently, they adopted both Hindi and Bengali as their language. Even in the Bhūmij dominated areas of Bihar which are contiguous to Bengal, the language spoken is primarily Bengali as in Singhbhūm and Mānbhūm. In Bengal, the Bhūmijas invariably speak Bengali language, and for all practical purposes they have lost their Muṇḍā mother tongue.

In this context, it is to be noted that the Bhūmijas in Bengal have undergone tremendous changes because of their close contact with the Bengali Hindus. It would appear that they have been fully assimilated within the Hindu fold in such a way that they have now been transformed into a Hindu caste with its tribal name. This has been clearly pointed out by Risley who says that here is a tribe which has lost its original language and now speak only Bengali. They worship Hindu deities in addition to their own, and the most advanced section amongst them employ Brāhmaṇas as their family priests. Their traditional deities have been relegated to the women and children who worship them with their own priests called Lāyās. The leading men amongst them with band-tenures who call themselves Bhūinhārs employ Brāhmaṇa priests. They also claim to be Rājputs and have started adopting Rājput class titles⁸⁷. They have, however, as yet retained their totemistic exogamous divisions like their parent tribe. But now-a-days the Bhūmijas are forgetting their totems which are being abandoned in favour of more honourable designations. They have even adopted the Brahmanical gotra, Sāṇḍilya. This is how this tribe is now being transformed into a Hindu caste in the fullest sense of the term. But their physical characters have undergone little change excepting in the case of those who have intermixed with other Hindu castes⁸⁸. By citing

the example of the Bhūmijas, Risley explains as to how a whole tribe of aborigines or a large section of a tribe enroll themselves in the rank of Hinduism under the style of a new caste which can be recognised only by its name that does not figure in the recognised or standard list of the Hindu castes⁸⁹.

It may be further noted, as has been already pointed out, that the more advanced peoples amongst them like the Zamindars have started claiming themselves as Kshatriyas or Rājputs, and for this purpose they have created also many legends of their family origins. This would be clear from the family legends of the Rājā of Bārābhūm. According to this legend, two brothers, Nāth-varāha and Keś-varāha quarrelled with their father, the king of Virāt and settled at the court of Vikramāditya. From them descended the Bhūmij-rājās. Similarly, the Rājās of Pātkum claim descent from Vikramāditya⁹⁰. The Rājā of Dhalbhūm claims descent from a washerman who was given a Brāhmaṇī as his wife by the Goddess Kālī, and the royal family descended from this union. All such legends appear to have been created in a very late period, and these have no historical bearings. Again, all these claims were made with the active support of the Brāhmaṇas who perhaps created these legends with the sole purpose of heightening the social position of the Bhūmija chieftains and landlords. But the general mass of the Bhūmij belong to a very low social status, even inferior in social rank to many other low caste Hindus. But in the near future, the Bhūmijas are like to be recognised as forming a full-fledged endogamous Hindu caste, though their upper sections have largely separated themselves from the general mass by claiming to be Kshatriyas or Rājputs and intermarrying only with the pseudo-Rajputs, because excepting a few cases the pure Rājputs have not yet recognised them as such. But in course of time, they are also likely to be recognised as Rājput-Kshatriyas.

It would be thus evident from the above that the Bhūmijas have largely intermixed with the Bengali people and have adopted Hinduism and adjusted themselves after the Bengali Hindu ways of life. Yet, the Bhūmijas in general have not yet been able to raise their social position which is below the rank of the Kurmis, but above that of the Bāuris and Bāgdis. They are still recognised as untouchables. But the more advanced sections have succeeded in enhancing their social position considerably. It is, however, to be admitted that by intermingling with many other caste peoples, the Bhūmijas have largely contributed towards the ethnic and cultural composition of Bengal.

(i) The Chuārs. :

A branch of the Bhūmijas of Jaṅgalmahal area of West Bengal is called Chuār or Chōyād. The term Chuār or Chōyād denotes a robber or a thief or a plunderer or marauder. It is not unlikely that the Bengali term Chōr i.e., thief, might have been derived from this non-Aryan word Chōyād. Amongst Derivation the Bhūmijas, those who were marauders and plunderers came to be called Chōyāds. In course of time, the Chuārs formed a separate unit altogether, and they are being transformed into a separate Hindu caste bearing the same name. To a large extent, the Chuārs have also become endogamous.

As to the distribution of the Chuārs in Bengal, it may be noted that they are largely to be found in the Jaṅgalmahal and in other parts of the district of Midnapur. The Chuārs are well-known for their fighting skill and plundering habits. The Bhūmij land-lords employed a large number of their own fellow beings as Pāiks (watchmen, peons and rent-collectors) and in other services and gave them landtenures. These Pāiks became marauders and plunderers with the establishment of the British rule over the district of Midnapur and its neighbouring areas. The East India Company started also collecting revenues from the Bhūmij land-owners and their employees. This created a tension between the Company's rulers and the Bhūmijas. Wherever there was a clash between the British rulers and the Bhūmij Zamindars regarding succession or the question of inheritance, the Pāiks sided with the one or other claimant. Even the verdict of the law court, if against their choice, was flouted, and they did not hesitate to take up arms. Besides, the Bhūmij land-owners refused Rebellions to submit to the East India Company and engaged these Pāik-Bhūmij as to fight out their cases. As a result, there took place several outbreaks of revolt against the Company's rule. These rebellions were accompanied by plundering and looting carried out by these peoples all over the district and its neighbouring areas⁹¹. Two notable outbreaks had taken place in the 18th century, and it is with great difficulty that these rebellions were quelled down. These outbreaks of the Bhūmijas are known as Chuāris or the 'Chuār rebellions'. Henceforth, the Chuārs became great terror to all the neighbouring peoples because of their plundering and marauding activities. They were, however, subsequently subdued.

The Chuārs do not actually form a separate tribal entity. It is simply a nickname of the Bhūmijas. There is hardly any difference between the Bhūmijas

and the Chuārs in respect of their physical and cultural characteristics. In course of their plundering raids into the district of Midnapur, many of them became settled therein. Naturally, they came into close contact with the neighbouring Hindus. As a result of this contact, the Chuārs have become largely Hinduised, and now they are on the way of forming themselves into a separate Hindu caste. Further, they have largely mingled with many low caste Hindus, and the cultural accomplices of the Chuārs have also undergone considerable changes, and as such, they have become different from their parent Bhūmij stock.

VIII. The ORĀOÑS :

Next to the Muṇḍās, the largest concentration of the primitive tribal peoples in Bengal has been made by the Orāoñs who also migrated primarily from Chhotanāgpur to Bengal from unrecorded times and spread over its various parts.

The Orāoñs in their own language call themselves Kūrukhs, and Orāoñ is their official appellations. In Orāoñ language, the term Kurugnā means fencing/enclosure, and the term Kuriā means 'to beat' and Kuru is one who beats. The Sanskrit term Kṛishṇa and Kṛishṇa-twāch (black skin) may be connected with Kurugnā. These are the epithets applied to the non-Aryans⁹².

Orāoñ : The term Kūruk is traced from the mythical hero called Karak name and derivation from whom the name Karūkh-deś was also derived. Buchanan has also referred to a Daitya named Karak who held the possession of the region between the Son and Karmanāsā⁹³. But the name Kūruk is, however, to be derived from its Dravidian root meaning 'man'. The name bears resemblance to Kṛishak and Kṛishān (plough-man) which were transformed into Krkhar and Orāoñ-Kṛūkhar. Grierson suggests that the term Kūruk may be connected with the Dravidian. Karugu (eagle), is the name of a totemistic clan⁹⁴. It has been also contended that when the Orāoñs entered into Chhotanāgpur, they had not forgotten their earlier affiliation to the Karkai of the Pandyan kingdom. Again, the Orāoñs call themselves Kurukh in the sense of the tribesmen of the traditional hero Kurukh and also in the sense of an agriculturist. Besides, an unmarried Orāoñ is called Jōnkh in Orāoñ language and Dhāṅgar in Hindi in the sense of labourers and servants. The term Dhāṅgar is usually applied to the Orāoñ by the alien peoples. Dalton derives the name Dhāṅgar from

Daṅg or Dhaṅg, i.e., hill. Thus the term Dhāṅgar actually denotes a hillman^{94a}. Some of the Orāoṅs again call themselves Kishāns or cultivators or Korās, i.e., diggers⁹⁵. In fact, some Orāoṅs of Bihar actually call themselves Korās or diggers.

The Orāoṅ of Chhotanāgpur and the Mālēr of the Rājmahal hills are indeed the two large sections of a single tribe which originally lived in Karus-deśā. It has been pointed out that the name Orāoṅ itself was coined by the Hindus to refer to the Kūrukhs. According to Grierson, the term Orāoṅ is simply a variation of the Indo-Aryan Uran which alludes to thriftless character of the people to whom it is applied⁹⁶. Besides, Roy has narrated as to how his Orāoṅ informants related to him that their neighbours called them also Rāvanaputs, i.e., sons of Rāvaṇa, the monster king of Laṅkā. The Kūrukhs have been also similarly described as the descendants of the demon king Rāvaṇa.

The Orāoṅs today preserve many legendary tales about their origins and the very derivation of the name itself. It is said that from the blood coming out of the chest of a Muni (ascetic) engaged in deep meditation emerged a boy and a girl who were asked to clear jungles and make agriculture. As the first parents of the Orāoṅs were born out of the blood of the chaste (uras or ur in Sanskrit) of the ascetic, their descendants came to be known as Uragon-Thākurs or Urāoṅs. In those ancient days, they were quite respectable, but soon they fell from the high status because of their taking recourse to unclean food and occupations, and they came to be known simply as Orāoṅs. It has been pointed out by Roy that this story is almost similar to the one narrated in the Uttarakāṇḍa of the Rāmāyaṇa while relating the origin of the Vānara-king Sugrīva. Roy suggests that the ancestors of the Orāoṅs formed a part of the formidable monkey-host of the epic hero Rāmachandra. Rāma in fact is recognised by the Orāoṅs as their grandfather, Sita as their grandmother and Hanumān as their uncle. It may be further noted that in the Rāmāyaṇa, the Vānaras have been described as cloud-coloured people, i.e., dusky with large teeth, and addicted to drinking and singing songs in accompaniment with the Māṇḍal (Kishkindhyākāṇḍa). All these characteristics are very common among the Orāoṅs of Chhotanāgpur and the Dravidian jungle Vānaras tribes of South India. It is not quite unlikely that the Vānaras of South India whom Rāmachandra met were indeed the Dravidian hillsmen. These

peoples were so called because the Vānara or monkey was perhaps their totem. Most interestingly, even today amongst the Orāoñs, there are several totemistic groups named after monkeys, such as Hanumān, i.e., baboon and Gari, i.e., a common monkey. In reality, the Orāoñs as per totemic taboos abstain themselves from killing or injuring or domesticating a monkey and also from eating its flesh. It is not unjustifiable to suggest that the modern Orāoñs had monkeys as their totems, and their ancestors were indeed the Vānaras of South India who formed a part of the army of Rāma. In this connection, Roy has drawn our attention to the story of the Rāmāyana wherein the Vānara chief Sugrīva speaks of the witchcraft of the enemy, and this is similar to the Orāoñ theory of the Chhain or the magic power of the shadow of man.

It is further learnt from the Rāmāyana that the Vānaras had their principal habitat in the Kishkindhyā region. When Rāma returned to Ayodhyā after the conquest of Lankā, the Vānaras also accompanied him, and they were all loaded with valuable presents. Before coming into contact with Rāma, the Vānaras lived in mountain caves and used sticks and stones as weapons and ate all kinds of roots, herbs and unclean food articles including drinking Vānaras of liquor. They had little knowledge even of their paternity. In fact, the Vānaras lived in a very primitive stage of savagery. It is only after their return to North India in accompaniment with Rāma that some of them might have settled down and learnt all about agriculture, cattle-breeding, use of metal tools, etc. Instead of nomadic life, they became settled. They had largely settled in Sāhābād district in Bihar where one of their cheiftain Karakh became supreme.

When other tribes became predominant in that region, the ancestor of the Mālers and the Orāoñs took shelter on the Rohtas plateau. It was from here again that they were dislodged by the Hindus and subsequently by the Muslims. But it is more probable that the Cheras actually dislodged them. Thereupon, these peoples became divided into two groups : one known as Mālē proceeded northwards up to the valley of the Ganges and established themselves on the Rājmaḥal hills and the other branch went down the ſon and moved South-eastwards in the Chhotanāgpur plateau. On reaching Chhotanāgpur, they found the Muṇḍās already in occupation. Naturally, they took shelter in the Muṇḍā houses. Being divorced from the advanced peoples, the Orāoñs

were put a little down in the scale of cultural status. At first, they remained under the domination of the Muṇḍās for some times but subsequently because of their superior intelligence and material cultural accomplishments they could become predominant in North-western and central parts of the plateau, and the Muṇḍās retreated to its southern and eastern parts. As the number of the Orāoñs increased, they extended their settlements in different directions. So far as their present locale is concerned, it may be contended that the Deccan "has been the area of their physical characterisation, the valley of the Śōṇ, the area of their social, economic, moral and mental characterisation and Chhotanāgpur, the area originally of their consolidation and subsequently of disintegration and degradation"⁹⁷.

It was from Chhotanāgpur that the Orāoñs dispersed in various directions, more particularly to Bengal. What made the Orāoñs to move on a large scale towards East into Bengal is not precisely known. The only apparent reason appears to be that the Orāoñs had to leave their ancestral home towards East in search of their livelihood. When this migration or movement of the Orāoñs into Bengal did take place is not also known. It is, however, quite clear even from a perusal of the Census Reports that the movement of the Orāoñs into Bengal might have taken place in small or large bands at different times. In Bengal, the Orāoñs became gradually well distributed over different districts. In undivided Bengal towards the end of the 19th century, i.e., in 1881, their total number has been recorded as only 2,921. In Bengal the number is reported to have been 25, 168. The total number of the Orāoñs for the year 1872 appears to have been wrongly recorded. This figure might have included some other aboriginal tribes as well. From the subsequent Census returns of the Orāoñs it would appear that their numerical strength shows a steady increase upto 1951. This would be evident from a perusal of the Census enumeration tables relating to the Orāoñs in West Bengal.

From 1901 to 1951, i.e., within 50 years there has been a tremendous growth of the Orāoñ population. The Census enumeration tables stand as : 1901 - 102983 ; 1911 - 139593 ; 1921 - 175809 ; 1931 - 197466 ; 1941 - 170915 ; 1951 - 203296⁹⁸. In 1941 a sudden drop in the number of population is witnessed. Then again, in 1951, i.e., within 10 years an abnormal growth is revealed. It is very difficult to explain the reasons behind this decrease and increase.

The decrease might have been due to wrong enumeration caused by the very fact that a large number of the Orāoñs might have given up their tribal designations and returned themselves as the Hindus. The increase can be explained by referring to the usual or natural growth rate and also by pointing out to subsequent migrations of the Orāoñs from Chhotanāgpur into the plains of India. A study of the districtwise distribution of the Orāoñs further shows that their main concentration is to be found in the district of Jalpāiguri. Their total number in the district in 1951 was 115776, but this figure is less than the one obtained for the year 1941 (117235) and 1931 (127530). This decrease in the district of Jalpāiguri in 1951 was perhaps due to their large scale migration to the district of 24-Parganās where their number increased from 12908 to 20428 in 1951. This was perhaps due to easy availability of agricultural lands and forest produces in the southern part of the district. In reality, wherever they found their means of subsistence they moved and settled.

It has been already stated that the Orāoñs originally came from the Deccan and are to be affiliated to the Dravidian linguistic family. In fact, the Dravidian languages fall into several groups and the Northern group Language includes a number of speeches which include Kurukh or Orāoñ and Māler or Mālpāhāriā. It has been pointed out by Gait that their language is more allied to the Canarese than to any other South Indian languages⁹⁹. In Bengal, the Orāoñs have, however, mostly lost their original Dravidian speech, and the language they speak today is a mixture of the original Kurukh and the Indo-Aryan tongues. In general, the Orāoñs speak and understand Bengali language quite well. But in reality, they are bilingual peoples. At home they speak their own language and outside, Bengali.

Regarding their physical characters, it may be said that the Orāoñs are characterised by short stature, dolichocephalic head and platyrrhine nose, dark brown approaching black skin-colour, coarse and curly hair, less plentiful on cheeks, medium size and small eyes with dark . . . iris, projecting jaws, thick lips and depressed nose¹⁰⁰. The average cephalic index is 75.4 and the average nasal index is 86.1¹⁰¹. The cephalic and nasal indices of the Orāoñs may be also compared with those of the Muṇḍās. Risley has done so, and he has concluded that both belong to the Dravidian type. But there are serious doubts about this finding. The Muṇḍās and the Orāoñs though living

together may be, however, easily distinguished. Anthropometric measurements of the Orāoñs of Bengal as given by Risley reveals that amongst 100 persons measured, dolicho, meso and brachy elements are present. But dolicho element, however, figures largest. Similarly, platyrrhine is also the predominant element¹⁰². Thus the Orāoñs belong primarily to the dolichoplaty type.

Subsequently, Basu and Majumdar measured the Orāoñs of Bihar¹⁰³. It would appear from the tables of measurements furnished by them that the Orāoñs measured by Majumdar do not wholly resemble the Orāoñs measured by Basu in respect of head length and nasal width. There is only slight resemblance with regard to head-breadth and nasal height. But a good deal of resemblance can be found in regard to stature. It would further appear from the anthropometric data presented by both of them that the Orāoñs of U.P. measured by Majumdar belong to a certain physical type different from those of Rāñchī as measured by Basu. Accordingly, it is not possible to postulate anything about any distinct Orāoñ ethnic type. This is more so with regard to the Orāoñs of Bengal. From all measurements of the Orāoñs in Bengal so far taken, it would appear that they are primarily a dolicho-platy type, and their other physical characters are not also different from those of the Australoid ethnic stock.

The Orāoñs claim to have introduced agriculture in Chhotanāgpur. It is they who perhaps introduced plough-cultivation instead of jhuming. They were no doubt very early settlers of Chhotanāgpur and naturally, they became a land-owning class. But due to the infiltration of the exploiting plain-peoples vocations the Orāoñs gradually lost their land and were reduced to landless agricultural labourers. This very factor might have caused the Orāoñs to leave their original homeland in Chhotanāgpur and moved towards the plains of Bengal in search of agricultural labour, and today all over Bengal the Orāoñs belong primarily to an agricultural labour class. Only a very few of them possess land for cultivation. As to their other occupations, it may be noted that the Orāoñs have not wholly given up their original primitive food-gathering habits. They are still good-hunters and food-gatherers.

The Orāoñs are very simple peoples. Their dress and ornaments are also very plain and meagre. They are no doubt very fond of beads and

brass ornaments consisting of anklets, bracelets, etc. It is only during their festivals and dance performances that their dress become a little gorgeous. They observe no discrimination whatsoever in respect of food-articles. In Bengal, however, because of their close contact with the Hindu culture, they have taken to Bengali food giving up their primitive food habits. One of the most important socio-economic institutions of the Orāoñs of Chhotanāgpur is of course Dhumkuriā or the Bachelors' dormitory. Here the boys and the girls are trained after the tribal fashion. But in Bengal in the Orāoñ villages/habitats hardly any trace of a Dhumkuriā can be found. In other words, this institution has been also lost to the Orāoñs of Bengal.

The Orāoñs are an endogamous tribal group with a number of exogamous totemistic septs, and the name of the sept descends in the male line alone. Different kinds of marriage are practised by the Orāoñs. Even pre-marital relation is recognised by them. All kinds of marriage are, however, to be solemnised by their traditional ritual performances. Polygyny is permitted, but they are too poor to afford to have more than one wife. Widow-remarriage and divorce are quite common.

The religion of the Orāoñs is of a composite order. Their original religious beliefs and practices have mixed up with those of the Muṇḍās and other cognate tribes. Yet, there is a sharp distinction between the religious system of the Muṇḍās and other peoples. As for instance, the Muṇḍās have no symbol or make no representation of their deities. But the Orāoñs and their cognates do always make some visible objects of worship like a piece of stone or a wooden post or a lump of earth. Though like the Muṇḍās they believe in the supreme deity and adore Dharmesh yet more prominence is given to the malignant spirits. The sole object of their religious ceremony is the propitiation of the demons. In cases of diseases and other sufferings, the Ojhā (magician) is contacted for redress. He makes necessary prescriptions which mainly consist of the performance of magical rites and offering of sacrifices to the malignant spirits. Like the Muṇḍās, they also observe many similar festivals like the Karam, Sārḥūl, etc. The performances of their religious rites are supervised by the priest of their own tribe known as Naiyas. The dead body is cremated and charred bones and ashes are preserved in a pot which is thence ceremoniously taken to the village and finally deposited

in the burial ground whereupon a large flat stone is placed over them. The Orāoñs of Bengal have, however, mostly modified their religious beliefs and practices after the Hindu fashion. And in fact, many of them have also adopted Hinduism.

To the Bengali Hindus, the Orāoñs have no social status because they are outside the pale of the Brahmanical caste system. They are even looked down by the low caste Hindus like the Bāgdis, Bāuris, etc., because of their integration unclean occupations and diet. But due to their long residence in different parts of Bengal as immediate neighbours of the Hindus and also due to their working under them as labourers the Orāoñs have been persistently maintaining very intimate and close relationship with the Bengali Hindus. As a result of this close contact many Hindu cultural elements have percolated, and the Orāoñs have readily adopted them to adjust themselves to the prevailing environs needed for their peaceful living and harmonious blending of their culture. The Orāoñs in Bengal have become Hinduised in such a way as to advance their claim of having an affiliation with the Kshatriyas.

IX. The MĀLS/MĀLPĀHĀRIĀS/MĀLĒS/MĀLĒRS

Other cognate tribes coming from Chhotanāgpur are the Mālpāhāriās and the Māls. The Māl-pāhāriās live primarily in the Rājmahal hills, and they are known under various names as Māler, Māl, Māle, etc. The Māl-pāhāriās were also primarily food-gathering people, and later on they started jhum-cultivation. It is only in recent years that they have taken to plough-cultivation.

(i) Equation of Names

Regarding the relationship between the Māl-pāhāriās, Māls, Mālers, etc., Buchanan contended that all these terms are synonymous and denote the same peoples. He says that the northern tribal group calls the southern group Mālēr (plural of Mālē), and the latter calls the former Chet; but all of them describe themselves as Māl/Mār, perhaps derived from Mālēr¹⁰⁴. He further describes the Māl-pāhāriās as a Hinduised branch of the Mālēr. Dalton and relationship does not, however, agree with this view¹⁰⁵. He says that the Māl-pāhāriās are different and unconnected with the Rājmahals. Similarly, Ball considers all these peoples as distinct in appearance, customs and language from those who occupy the Rājmahals¹⁰⁶. Risley, however, agrees with the identity of these peoples, and he says that by Buchanan's time the differences

became very sharp ; the southern peoples became more Hinduised, but the Mālēs were not¹⁰⁷. It has been shown in the following pages that the Māl appears to be a generic name and the Māl-pāhāriās in that case should be recognised as highlanders/hill-dwellers and the latter because of their purity became distinct from the former. It, however, appears that the Māls, the Mālēs, the Māl-pāhāriās, etc., are all cognate peoples belonging to the same linguistic family and ethnic stock, but called a little differently.

(ii) The Māl-pāhāriās

Linguistically, the Māl-Pāhāriās or the Mālēs belong to the Dravidian family of languages, and in this respect, they are not different from the Orāōñs. In regard to their physical characters it may be noted that they are characterised by short to medium stature, dark skin-colour, medium nose, dark wavy hair and strong built. In fact, there is a little difference between the Mālēs and other tribal peoples of Chhotanāgpur. Ethnically also, the Māl-pāhāriās can not be separated from the Orāōñs. They may be assigned to the Mediterranean racial stock intermixed with the Australoid. In Bengal they, however, mingled with many other peoples and as a result the physical characters of the Māl-pāhāriās have undergone considerable changes.

The Māl-pāhāriās are to be found well-distributed in different districts of Bengal. According to the Census Report of 1951 their total population figure has been recorded as 2658 (m) + 2155 (f) = 4813¹⁰⁸. Their numerical strength in Bengal in 1941 Census Report has been, however, recorded as 6219. It implies that out of this figure of 6219, about 4813 (1951) persons are to be located in West Bengal. Significantly, in 1931 their total number has been recorded as 7809 + 6834 = 14643 and in 1911 and 1901 their numbers were enumerated as 8635 and 3908¹⁰⁹. It thus appears that from 1911 to 1931 there was an abnormal increase of their number, and the same decreased in 1941 and 1951. The primary reason for the decrease in their number appears to have been their absorption within different Hindu caste groups. In West Bengal, they have been mostly found in Jalpāiguri, Murśidābād, Darjeeling and Dinājpur, and their largest concentration is in the district of Jalpāiguri.

The Māl-pāhāriās are essentially food-gatherers and hunters. But they have now taken to agriculture. They are also collectors and sellers of forest-produces. The Māl-pāhāriās are of course believers in diverse religious

rites and practices. The sun is the head of the Māl-pāhāriā pantheon. But coming under the influence of Hinduism they have adopted the worship of many Hindu deities. Many village deities of their creation after the Hindu fashion like Dharitrī, Bhūindey, Sīnghavāhinī, etc. The village Māñjhi acts as the priest. They also believe in ghosts and spirits. The dead is cremated and ashes are thrown into water. Some of them perform also Śrāddha-rite after the Hindu fashion. Many village deities are also worshipped by them. It is quite interesting to note that the Māl-pāhāriās eat pork and fowl, but abstain from eating beef, snakes and rats. Polygyny, Sororate, widow remarriage and divorce are permitted and levirate is common. In their manners and customs they have adopted many Hindu ways of life-patterns. Of the Māl-pāhāriās, the Komār-Bhāg, i.e., Kumārpālī section has become more Hinduised. On the whole the Māl-pāhāriās are on the way of being transformed into a Hindu caste.

(iii) The Māls

Another allied tribal group that played a significant role in the composition of the Bengali people is of course the Māl. The term Māla denotes hillman and Malla means a wrestler. The latter word is no doubt Sanskrit, and its derivation from Māla is unsound. The name Māla appears again to be a variant form of the tribal name Mālē. Some have, however, derived the name Mālē from Māla. It is not unlikely, however, that the term Māla is a derivation from the Canarese word Male and the Tamil word Malei meaning hill, i.e., the people living in the hills came to be called Māla. In other words, the high-landers were known as Mālas. Again, the term Mālē means man. If Māla is taken to be variant of Mālē, the Māl-pāhāriās and Māls would have thence meant simply man. Further, the term Maltus has been taken to be the Indian vernacular of the Latin term Mons¹¹⁰. But the Māls/Mālē appear to have been a Dravidian term. In fact, the Māls/Mālē are the Dravidian speakers of Chhotanāgpur. This becomes evident also from the fact that the occupational system of the Māls is similar to that of the South Indian Mālas¹¹¹.

It has been pointed out by Beverly that the Māls and Māl-pāhāriās are akin to the Orāoñs and the Śavaras, and they are of the same origin. But in East Bengal, the Māls trace their origins from a different tradition altogether. It has been claimed that the name was derived from the term Malla, i.e., wrestler. In fact, they were employed as wrestlers at the court of the Nawab of Dacca¹¹². Cunningham while tracing the origin of the Mālas/Mallas has referred to two

passages in the account of Pliny wherein it is stated : "Mandei, Malli, Quorum, Mons, Mallus and Monedes ... Mallus". It has been contended that both the names refer to the mount Mandār on the south of Bhāgalpur. Again, Mandei has been identified by Cunningham with the inhabitants of the Mahānadī river which is again mentioned as Manada in Ptolemy. The Malli/Malei is therefore the same as Ptolemy's Mandalae living on the right bank of the Ganges. Cunningham Names and has further contended that they may be the people of the Rājmaḥal meanings hills, and they are called Mālēr¹¹³. Further, Mandalae or Mandali has been identified with Manedes and modern Muṇḍā-kols. It appears from the passage quoted from Pliny's account that both the names appear to refer to two distinct peoples : Mandei corresponding to Manedes or Muṇḍās. The word Malli then corresponds to Suari, Quorum, Mons, Mallus, i.e., the hills bounded by the Ganges at the Rājmaḥal. These Mallas may be the same as the Māls. The words Mālēr and Malhar appear to be its plural forms. It has been further contended by Risley that the Māls may be a branch of the great Suarian family to which the Rājmaḥal Pāhāriās, the Orāoñs and the Śavaras belonged. Dalton calls all of them Dravidians.

Risley describes the Māl (Māla) as a Dravidian caste of Central and Western Bengal. It has been further found out that originally their locale was in the Rājmaḥal hill and its neighbouring region. Subsequently, they might have been driven eastward, and they spread over different parts of Bengal and mingled with other peoples of the land. In West Bengal alone as per 1951 Census Report, the numerical strength of the Māls was 46,992 (m) + 441051 (f) and now it has increased further. From 1872 to 1951 the figures of the total number of the Māls in West Bengal show varying trends : 1872 - 65,813 ; 1891 - 64,144 ; 1901 - 84,802 ; 1911 - 83,383 ; 1921 - 82,620 ; 1931 - 91,547 ; 1941 - 82,953, 1951 - 91,097¹¹⁴. The Māls are, however, largely concentrated in the districts Distribution of Bīrbhūm and Bāñkurā in West Bengal. In East Bengal, they are distributed over the districts of Dacca and Mymensingh. It is evident from the above figures that from 1872 to 1901 there was a steady growth of population, but from 1911 to 1921 their number dropped. There was a little growth in 1931 and then again a decrease in 1941. Finally, in 1951 the number of their population increased considerably, and this increasing trend is witnessed in the returns of the subsequent Census Reports. The fluctuating trend as witnessed in the population figures might have been due to various factors. The Māls were originally

nomadic food-gathering peoples, and it is only after coming over to Bengal that they became settled. Accordingly, they moved from place to place even in Bengal and some of them might have also returned to their original homeland. But the most important factor appears to be that they mingled largely with many low caste Hindus of Bengal. It has been also found out that some tribal and non-tribal peoples of Bengal may be affiliated to the Māl tribal community. As for instance, many Māls have become subsequently transformed into Chaṇḍālas, Bediyās, Bhuiyās, Kaivartas, Turis, Muchis, etc. The decrease in the number of population might have been due to their amalgam and formation of these low Hindu castes. Again, the increase might have been caused by the incoming of the Māls from their original habitat and also because of their natural growth rate. From a perusal of the spatial distribution of the Māls and their numerical strength it becomes quite evident that many of them became amalgamated with other peoples and some however, have retained their original tribal nomenclature and character.

In Bengal, the Māls have become settled people adhering to agricultural pursuits besides their primitive food-gathering activities. In East Bengal, they are mostly noted for their such occupations as wrestlers, snake-charmers, extractor of worms from teeth, drug-sellers, curer of various diseases, etc. Further, it has been found out that the Māls are also expert-workers in folk arts and crafts of Bengal. This becomes evident from the very fact that there are two groups of the Māls, namely, Sanākar-Māl and Kaikuiyā-Māl, i.e., the former group being painters and the latter, workers. The occupational system of the Māls is similar to that of the South Indian Mālas like the Loom-Mālas, the cart-Mālas, the hammar-Mālas, the sea-saw-Mālas and the doll - Mālas¹¹⁵. These Māls who are engaged in arts and crafts are mostly to be found in the western border of Bengal. Besides, the Māls also work as Chaukidārs or watchmen, and some of them are said to possess great propensities for stealing or other criminal activities¹¹⁶.

Sociologically, the Māls belong to an endogamous tribal unit having a number of exogamous groups. Both infant and adult marriages are present among them. Widow remarriage is common excepting among the Rājvaṁśī-Māls of the district of Midnapur, and divorce is allowed. They eat all sorts of articles of food. Beef and pork are abjured. This might have been due to their contact with the Hindus. Regarding their social organisation, it may be said that the

Māls are divided into several sub-castes, one of which is called Rājvaṁśi-Māl. Social life The title Rājvaṁśi has been also adopted by the Koch of North Bengal as discussed in the following pages. The Māls are not, however, Kōch. They perhaps adopted the name by identifying themselves with the lineage of the local Rājā. The Rājvaṁśi-Māls, according to Risley, may be the same as the Rājā-Māls among the Māl-pāhāriās¹¹⁷.

The Māls have no doubt retained their primitive tribal name and some of their cultural traits, but in religion they have become largely Hinduised. It has been contended accordingly that no vestiges of primitive religion can now be found amongst the Māls. Generally, they claim to profess Hinduism by affiliating themselves with its local popular religious sects, i.e., Vaishnavism, Religion Saivism, etc. But their great patroness is the deity Manasā who is worshipped in the same manner as the Bāgdis of West Bengal do. Besides, they also believe in many village deities and spirits, but the Māls have not yet been able to become fully transformed into a caste because no Brāhmaṇa as yet acts as their priest. Generally, the village headman serves as the priest in their socio-religious performances. Sometimes of course, the degraded Brāhmaṇas act as priests of the Māls. In fact, the degraded Brāhmaṇas are employed as priests in the Santal-parganās. Along with their beliefs in Hinduism and performances of the Hindu rites, the Māls also practise magical rites for various remedies. Ancestor - worship is very popular, and they perform the Śrāddha-rite after the Hindu fashion.

There are, however, certain confusions regarding the affiliation of the Māls to a particular religious community. Some have expressed the opinion that the Māls are Musalmans, and they are to be identified with the Bediyās and Bābājiyās. But these two groups are not identical, the latter though nomadic like the former are primarily sellers of drugs. It is very interesting to note that the previous Census returns mostly show them as Musalman. In reality, the different sections of the Māls profess either Hinduism or Islam. It would Religious be, however, wrong to suggest that all the Māls have become virtually affilia- Musalmans. On the other hand, in their religious beliefs and practices tions Hinduism predominate. At the same time, it is to be noted that since the Māls are mostly nomadic people, they have largely mingled with the local

peoples including the Muslims. This has happened mostly in East Bengal and not certainly in West Bengal. As a result of this mingling many of the Māls might have adopted some of the Islamic views and practices which probably caused the Census enumerators to record them as Musalmans.

The Hinduised Māls have been also made identical with the Chaṇḍālas or Namaśūdras of East Bengal. They appear to have formed one of the 45 groups of the Chaṇḍālas. It has been, however, found out that the Māls might have lost their name and character under the generic Chaṇḍāla group. In other words, the Chaṇḍālas/Namaśūdras have perhaps absorbed many Māls. This happened more particularly in the South-eastern districts of Bengal. In West Bengal, more Absorption particularly in the district of Bīrbhūm and Bāñkurā, the Māls have succeeded in retaining their tribal individuality and character. In other words, the Māls of West Bengal are more pure than those in East Bengal where they have largely mixed with other low caste peoples.

Besides, the Māl has been also considered as a parent tribal stock from which the Bediyās have separated and assumed the present name. On the other hand, the Bediyā tribe has been again divided into two sections, namely, Māl and Samperiā (Sāpuriā). But Risley thinks that the Māl might have been actually the parent group and the Bediyās have separated themselves because of their adherence to the gipsy life-patterns¹¹⁸. There are, however, many cultural elements common to both the Māls and the Bediyās. As for instance, the Māls of Dacca are called Poñkwāh because of their profession of extracting worms from teeth like the Bediyās. Some Bediyās again recognise the Māls as their kins, and in social and religious behaviour patterns there are also many similarities between the two. Despite marked similarities like wandering habits, physiognomy, occupations, etc., the Māls can be distinguished with a great difficulty. Besides, the Māls of East Bengal also work as Mahājan advancing small loans, the rate of interest being 50% per annum during Risley's time. In this respect the Māls in ancient times might have played the role of the Kābuliwālās (the people of Kabul in Afghanistan who move over Bengal giving loans on high interest). Not only that, the Dacca Māls do not keep snakes like the Bediyās, and they are ignorant of treating snake-bites. But their women claim to possess secret knowledge of curing abdominal pains and also of treating certain other diseases. Besides, the Māls of Eastern Bengal do not also intermarry

with the Bediyās. The implication is that some bonds of kinship between the Bediyās and the Māls may be traced, but it would be difficult to suggest that all of them belong to the same tribe. Not only that, even the Sāpuriā-Māls of Midnapur have been identified with the Samperiyā-Bediyās of East Bengal. But evidences in respect of such an identity are not very precise and firm. It may be borne in mind that snake-charming is an occupation which would have been or can be adopted by any band of people having gipsy-like propensities. Further, Risley contends that there is no reason as to why the Māls and the Bediyās could not have taken to snake-charming occupation quite independently of each other¹¹⁹. The implication is that the Bediyās and the Māls are two separate tribal groups living in different parts of Bengal. It can not at the same time be denied that these Māls might have mingled largely with the Bediyās, other tribes and Hindu castes of Bengal.

That the Māls intermingled considerably and became absorbed into several Hindu castes and tribal groups becomes evident from the names of the sections of some tribal and non-tribal groups. As for instance, Māl is the name of a sub-caste of the Bhūmīs in Singbhūm. The term Māl is also used as a title of the Kaivartas of Bengal. Further, a section of the Turis is also called Māl. Again, a sub-sept of the Saren sept of the Santals is also known by this name. Again, the Māl is the name of a sub-caste of the Mauliks of Chhotanāgpur. Further, the Mālabhūmiyā is the name of a sub-caste of Muchis of Bengal. The retention of the name Māl or Mal appears to be a positive indication of the assimilation of the Māls within all these tribal and caste groups. Besides, the Māls were once very prosperous and influential peoples. They came into prominence more particularly in the Mānbhūm region of Bihar and Bengal. This was perhaps the Mālabhūmi, i.e., the land of the Māls or of the Mons Mallus. The whole region might have been once predominantly occupied by the Māls. It has been also suggested that they were also a dominant people in the areas covered by the present district of Maldah. In fact, the name Māldaha or Mālda appears to owe its origin to the name Māl.

All these are positive indications that the Māls were once widely distributed over different parts of Bengal, and that they intermingled largely with both the tribals and the non-tribals, i.e., particularly those who have risen above the tribal ways of life. Accordingly, the Māls appear

to have mingled with the diverse peoples in Bengal. Not only that, as a result of this mingling it has been possible for the Māls to make marked contribution of the Dravidian cultural elements in the composition of the Bengali culture.

(iv) **Male :**

Along with the Māls and other cognate tribes a reference is also to be made to another group of people called Mālē. The Mālēs are also variously known as Māl, Sāmariā, Śavar-Pāhāriā, Sauriā, Sāmil-Pāhāriā, Asal-Pāhāriā and Saṅgi. It has been contended by Risley that the actual name of all these groups Mālēs of people is Māl which is combined with pronouns ..en, em and ē in order to form the present of the verb substantive. As for instance, Mālēn is the first person singular, i.e., I am a Māl, and Mālē is the third person singular; Mālēm is the first person plural and Mālēr, third person plural. The name of the tribe Mālē has been again considered by Risley as arbitrary and incorrect. The name Mālē was given only to distinguish the Māls from the Māl-pāhāriās of the Southern hills and also from the Māl caste of Bengal¹²⁰.

The Mālēs live primarily in the Rājmahal hills, and it is because of the rocky and forestbound character of their country that the Mālēs could maintain their virtual independence for a long time during the Muslim period. It is they who were in possession of the hill passes and routes. They had their own systems of administration. Subsequently, the Mālēs driven by poverty had taken to robbery and brigandage, and there had been also several uprisings during the earlier part of the British rule in India. It was only towards the end of the 18th century that the Mālēs were brought under control by the British Government by giving them all sorts of concessions.

The origin of the Mālēs is unknown. But Shaw in 1795 narrated a story of 7 brothers who were deputed by the God to people of the earth. According to this story, a grand feast was arranged, and each brother was asked to eat food of his choice and retire to the land chosen by him for habitation. It is very interesting to note that the Hindus, Muslims and many other Hindu castes are described in the story as descendants of each one of these 7 brothers. It is said

that the brother who took goat-flesh became the ancestor of the Hindus, and another who took all kinds of flesh excepting pork became the father of the Muslim ; the brother who took pork became the ancestor of the Kirātis and another, of the Kādār. The eldest brother who was sick kept all food articles in an old dish, and accordingly he was left in the hills as an outcaste, and it is from him that the Mālēs descended. This legend is similar to the one current amongst the Muṇḍās, Hōs and other tribes. It appears that this legend was perhaps created when the tribal people of Chhotanāgpur came into contact with the Hindus and the Muslims¹²¹. Nothing more is known about the origin of the Mālēs.

The Mālēs are primarily hill peoples living on its summits, and their houses are made with bamboo and other available forest materials. They are primarily food-gathering peoples, but they practise also jhum-cultivation. The Mālēs have no exogamous or endogamous social structural divisions and sub-divisions. It implies accordingly that the Mālēs have been largely influenced by the Hindu culture. Marriage by both negotiation and courtship is present. Divorce is very common, and widow remarriage is also permitted. The Mālēs observe no restrictions in respect of food articles. They eat whatever is available.

The religion of the Mālēs is characterised by animism and animistic practices. The Sun is their supreme deity called Dharmergosāi and is represented by a roughly hewn post set up in front of each house. He is worshipped with all sorts of offerings and sacrifices. They also believe in a number of minor deities. The Mālēs have no priest of their own. It has been, however, suggested by Buchanan that formerly they had their priests called Naiyas or Laiyas, a designation which is also found in West Bengal. But they are no more to be found, and their place has been taken over by the Demanos who are diviners or magicians. The village headman acts as the priest and Demano is merely a spiritual director as he is endowed with superhuman power. The Mālēs believe in all sorts of ghosts or spirits as well. They usually bury their dead and funeral rites are performed.

The Mālēs live in isolated hill-pockets without little or no contact with any alien people and culture. Accordingly, it has been possible for the

Mālēs to retain their original physical characters to a large extent. They are characterised by low stature and dark complexion. Risley took measurements on 100 men of the tribe and the average nasal index found out by him is 94°5, which, in his opinion, approaches the proportions ascertained for the Negro. Risley further contends that the Mālēs represent the extreme type of the Dravidian race as found in Bengal¹²². The measurements taken by Sarkar furnish all details of the ethnic affiliation of the Mālēs. He has found out that the Mālē, the Cheñchu and the Kannikar agree with one another in majority of characters and that they are the 'closet congeners'^{122a}. This relationship, in his opinion, is 'indicative of racial affinity with the Vedda'. (Australoid^{122b}).

It would appear that the Mālēs are not fundamentally distinct from the Māls or Māl-pāhāriās. But they are different from the latter in respect of their isolation and adherence to resorting to the hilly region. The Māls and other peoples separated themselves from the parent stock and gave up their old original tribal pursuits. Some of the Māls being driven towards East spread over different parts of Bengal and became settled peoples. Other sections of the Māls even after coming to Bengal adhered to their wandering life pursuing all sorts of vocations. It has been made clear that like the Bediyās and others the Māls intermixed largely with both the tribal and non-tribal peoples, and thereby they have formed sections and sub-sections of many tribal and caste groups. Besides, a large number of Māls have been also transformed into a Hindu caste with a social status lower than that of the Bāgdis. In all cases, however, the original tribal name has been most jealously retained. They have no doubt lost their tribal language and many of their cultural traits, yet some primitive elements of their socio-religious life-patterns can still be traced. Taking into consideration all these factors pertaining more particularly to their amalgam with other peoples on a large scale, it may be observed that the Māls or Mālēs have made distinct contributions in the composition of Bengali people and culture.

X. The BEDIYĀ (Vediā)

Another associated tribal group as already referred to is the Bediyā (Vediā or Bedea or Bejea). In early Indian literary texts the term Vyādha in the sense of the hunter in general occurs frequently. The Brahmavaivarta-purāṇa makes also a specific reference to the Vyādhas. The Bediyās appear to be the precursor of the Vyādhas.

The Bediyā is indeed a generic name which includes a large number of gipsy-like groups of peoples pursuing a vagrant life and all kinds of low avocations. It has been stated above that the Bediyās were perhaps originally a cognate section of the Māls or Mālpāhāriās. Further, the Bediyās are also supposed to be the cousins of the Kurmis. Formerly, the Kurmis and the Bediyās intermarried, but their separation occurred when it was found out that the latter, i.e., the Bediyās eat beef, and the latter gave it up. They do not, however, claim any connection whatsoever with the Munḍās nor do the latter. In this context, it may be again noted that one of the sept of the Santals bears the name Bediyā. If it be so, the Bediyās may be considered as a branch of the Santals. But it is very difficult to say as to what extent the Bediyās of Chhatonāgpur are to be connected with the Bediyās of East Bengal. It would, however, become clear that the Bediyās might be recognised as a cognate tribal group associated closely with the Māls, the Kurmis and the Santals.

The Bediyās were originally a tribal group of Chhatonāgpur living primarily on hunting and other gathering pursuits. It is perhaps in search of their livelihood that the Bediyās turned east-ward and migrated to different parts of Bengal leading entirely a gipsy life like the Beduins of Arabia. In undivided Bengal as per Census enumeration made in 1872, their number has been recorded as only 4,080. But in 1881 the number increased to 8,063. In West Bengal, the numerical strength of the Bediyās from 1901 to 1951 shows variations : 1901 - 7,902 ; 1911 - 5,720; 1931 - 4,351 ; 1941 - 4,241 and 1951 - 11,043. It would thus appear that in 1911 Bediyās in their numerical strength decreased from 7,902 to 5,720. A further decrease Bengal : population figures is also noticeable from 1931 to 1941. It was in 1951 that the number increased considerably, i.e., more than double. This abnormal increase within 10 years might have been caused by two important factors, namely, more migrations of similar wandering primitive peoples from Chhatonāgpur to Bengal and the natural growth rate. Further, a perusal of the districtwise distribution of the Bediyās would show that upto 1941 their largest concentration was in 24-Parganā district (1652), but in 1951 in the district of Midnapur (8080). In all other districts their number is insignificant in comparison¹²³. Further, it would appear from the sex-wise population figures in different districts that the females are a little less in number than the males.

The Bediyās are the wandering peoples primarily engaged in hunting and other abominable practices. They have been accordingly divided into a number of sections or groups on the basis of their vocations. All these sections or groups are included within the generic name Bediyā. These Bediyā groups as described by Risley are¹²⁴ :

(i) The Bābājiyā (Lava or Patwā)

They are pedlars. They wander about singing songs in praise of Rāma and Lakshmaṇa by exhibiting their painted scrolls depicting the exploits of the epic heroes, more particularly of Hanumān. The women of this section are also engaged in treating children diseases. They are also said to be experts Bābājiyā in regard to the removal of nervous and rheumatic pains. They are also sometimes engaged in tattooing. The Bābājiyās profess Islam. But it is surprising that being muslims they even sing songs of Rāma, Sītā, etc. This shows that previously they were followers of tribal religion, but gradually came under the influence of Hinduism. But in course of their wanderings in Muslim dominated regions they came into direct contact with them and adopted Islam.

(ii) The Bāzigar (Kabutari, Bhānumatī and Dorābāz)

They are primarily acrobats and conjurors. In their acrobatic performances, both women and girls take active parts, and men simply play all kinds of tricks with balls and knives. Their women also engage themselves in medicinal practices including massaging for removing rheumatism.

(iii) The Māl (Poṅkwāh)

The gypsies included within this group are engaged in extracting worms from teeth and hence is the name. As the name indicates the members of this Māl group appear to have been cognate Māls of Chhotanāgpur. Though they are no doubt called Bediyās yet they claim to be superior to others, and as such, they also refuse to intermarry with other Bediyā groups.

(iv) The Mirsikār or Chirimār

The peoples of this group are primarily hunters and fowlers. They catch birds with birdlime or horse-hair nooses and hunt with lance. Some of

the animals hunted by them are highly prized for medicinal purposes as for Mirsikār instance, Banrhu or Bajrakeet, crow, etc. The name Chirimār is very significant in the sense that Chiri is Chiriyā (bird). In Bengali language Chiri means bird and mār denotes killings. It is because of their excellence in catching and hunting birds that they have been so named.

(v) The Samperiā

As the name indicates, the Samperiās were primarily snake-charmers and snake-catchers. These peoples used various means/devices for catching snakes. Samperiā They also extract snake poison which is highly prized for its medicinal use. They also exhibit snakes and play with them in accompaniment with the changing of mantras and blowing of pipes. These peoples are also said to be great experts in treating snake-bites. Their patron deity is accordingly the goddess Manasā who is worshipped in the month of July - August, and the Samperiās play on their pipes and sing songs on this occasion. They also catch and domesticate cocks for entrapping the wild ones. They hunt all sorts of birds and animals. Besides these, they are also the hawkers of various sorts of domestic articles and expert makers of fish-hooks.

(vi) The Shāndār

Another group of the Bediyās is called Shāndār, the members of which are said to be most industrious and orderly. It has been pointed out by Risley that the name Shāndār is derived from Shanah, i.e., a comb which is in great demand to the Tāñtis and the Julāhs for their looms. The Shāndār is an expert in making very cheap and fine comb which is made of bamboo-split and wood. He is also a pedlar wandering about villages ~~selling~~ beads and many other domestic Shāndār articles. He is also an expert in catching birds by Satnāli or a bamboo-rod with seven joints tipped with bird-lime. Like the Samperiās, the Shāndārs domesticate also cocks and other animals. They have become converts to Islam, but unfortunately, the Muslims do not admit them into their community. This is perhaps because of their persistent adherence to their primitive ways of life and religious beliefs.

(vii) The Rasiā-Bediyās

Still another community is called Rasiā-Bediyās who use a peculiar type of bottle-shaped boat tapering towards the stern. The name Rasiā appears to have been derived from the term Rasa, i.e., mercury. In fact, the members of this class deal with zinc and mercury. They are expert craftsmen in the sense that they make anklets, bracelets and collars for the neck for the use of both the Hindu and Muslim women. They move about from village to village in their boats. But when they return to their home, they become engaged in cultivation. Prolonged absence from home and continuous adherence to boat-life are not permitted in their society. They have also become Muslims, and unlike the Shandārs, the Muslims recognise them as such.

In respect of physical characters the Bediyās in general do not appear to be different from other tribes of Chhotanāgpur. They are on the other hand more akin to the Māls or Mālers in their physical appearances. But the members of the different classes of the Bediyās have undergone considerable changes in their physical features due to intermingling with many low caste Hindus and Muslims as well. Accordingly, the Bediyās of today do not possess any ethnic homogeneity.

In regard to their cultural behaviour-patterns, the Bediyās portray diversities in the sense that their ways of life have become a compound of tribal, Hindu and Muslim life-patterns. The latter two patterns were adopted by them in course of their movements in different parts of Bengal. In fact, their socio-religious position is a mid-way between Islam and Hinduism. In some respects, certain sections of the Bediyās obey the Muslim Kāzis in their marriage performances, but at the same time their women use conchshell-bangle and put vermillion marks. Most curiously they bear Hindu names and almost all sections of the Bediyās have become endogamous units. But the rules of endogamy are not very strictly followed. Their social position is very low. This is so more particularly because of their unclean vocations, such as, snake-charming, hunting, etc. If the Bediyās of today can be identified with the Vyādhas of ancient times as described in the early literary texts, it may be contended that the former are undoubtedly the descendants of the latter. But at present, the Bediyās have lost their homogeneity altogether and both racially and culturally they are now heterogeneous wandering peoples or gypsies of Bengal.

XI. GENERAL OBSERVATION

All the tribal communities discussed above are to be found spread over all districts of Bengal. In some districts that are contiguous to Chhotanagpur, all these tribal communities are to be found largely concentrated. These tribal communities, as already stated, may be divided into two distinct groups, namely, the Muṇḍā or the Kol and the Dravidian. This categorization has been done primarily on the basis of languages spoken by them ; the former, i.e., the Muṇḍā or Kol is to be affiliated to the Austro-Asiatic linguistic family. As early as 1906, Schmidt propounded the theory of the kinship between the Muṇḍā and the Mon-khmer group of languages. This theory of Schmidt was, however, challenged by Hevesy in 1932. He pointed out the affinity between the Muṇḍā and Finno-Ugric. Others like Bowless rejected both the contentions on the ground of the absence of any demonstratable proof. Generally speaking, however, the scholars have largely accepted the theory of Schmidt, and it is almost now agreed upon that the Muṇḍā language is a branch of the Austro-Asiatic linguistic family.

Schmidt has not only shown the linguistic affinity of the Muṇḍā with the Mon-khmer and other languages of South-east Asia, but also assumed physical relationship between the Muṇḍās, the Khāsis and the Mon-khmer peoples. This physical relationship with the peoples of South-east Asia is also revealed by the study of blood-groups indicating the relation of the Muṇḍās with the people of East Indian archipelago¹²⁵. If there was/is such a physical relationship, the presence of the Pareoean element amongst the Muṇḍās is quite suggestive. Sarkar has further pointed out that as an evidence of the existence of Pareoean element among the Muṇḍās, a reference may be made to the presence of straight hair amongst them¹²⁶. Against this finding, it has been urged that the very absence of brachycephalic element amongst the Muṇḍās negatives the presence of Pareoean element. In this regard, Haddon has clearly stated that the Pareoeans have intermixed with the non-Mongoloid people, and as such, the head forms changed. This may explain the preponderance of non-brachy elements amongst the Muṇḍās. In fact, Haddon has also referred to the reminiscence of Mongoloid traits^{126a}.

Closely allied with the Muṇḍā tribe there are many other tribal communities like the Santals, Kols, Khariās, Birhors, Bhūmijas, etc., who all speak the same Austro-Asiatic language. Each of these peoples speaks a language named as such. But all these languages are simply dialectical forms of the original Muṇḍā language. These languages are in fact branches of the Muṇḍā. Even from the ethnic consideration, it may be noted that all these tribal groups belonged originally to the same racial stock. The physical characters of each of these Muṇḍā and other tribal communities have been partly discussed in the foregoing pages, and it has been found out that the prepondering element amongst them is indeed the Australoid or Veddā. Haddon has placed them in the Pre-Dravidian group. He describes the Kolarian (a generic name) as characterised by dark brown, almost black skin, coarse black hair inclined to be curly and scanty beard, low medium stature, i.e., 62-63¹/₂" (Hos are taller) and sturdy limbs, dolichocephalic head (C.I. 74.5-76), low narrow forehead, thick lips, bright and full eyes (not oblique), broad nose (N.I. : Korwar -92.5 ; Muṇḍā-89.9 : Kharwār-89.7 : Santal-88.8 ; Bhūmij - 86.5), i.e., platyrrhine nose^{126b}. Accordingly, it may be contended that all these tribal communities belong to one basic ethnic stock, i.e., Australoid. Now-a-days of course, the presence of some other ethnic elements amongst these peoples are quite evident. The presence of such elements might be explained by pointing out their heavy admixtures with other tribal and non-tribal peoples belonging to different ethnic stocks.

The second group, i.e., the Dravidian is also represented by several tribal communities of Bengal like the Orāoñs, Māls, Māles, Vedyās, etc. All these tribal communities originally spoke Dravidian language. It has been already discussed that the principal or the most dominant Dravidian tribal community of Chhotanagpur and Bengal is of course the Orāoñ, and that the Dravidian speaking tribes Orāoñs and other cognate tribes actually migrated from South-India to North India. Roy has tried to prove that the Orāoñs of Northern India are the descendants of Vānaras of South India as described in the Rāmāyana.

Risley could not, however, make any linguistic differentiation between the Dravidian and Austro-Asiatic languages and therefore, all these peoples including the Muṇḍās and their branches have been described by him as Dravidians. On the other hand, Risley has called the Dravidian as an ethnic type as well

and has included all the tribal communities of Chhotanāgpur within this ethnic group. In the opinion of Risley, the Muṇḍās and the Dravidian speaking people of Chhotanāgpur have identical ethnic and linguistic origins.

Haddon has also explained the relationship between the Muṇḍā and Dravidian speaking peoples by pointing out that physically they are allied and belonged to the Pre-Dravidian group and that the Orāoṇs and their cognates speak a Dravidian language closely allied to the Canarese and their C.I. and N.I. are 75.4 and 86.1 respectively, and that the Māls and Māl-Pāhāriās are physically allied to the Orāoṇs. But the Mālē N.I. (94.5) is higher than the Orāoṇ nasal index^{126c}. But unfortunately, the view of Risley is hardly acceptable. It has been already stated that the Muṇḍās and the Orāoṇs belong to two distinct linguistic groups. Not only that, the term Dravidian itself is a linguistic one and can not be applied in the sense of an ethnic stock. It has been also found out that amongst the Dravidian speaking peoples of South India there are diverse ethnic elements, and it would be an absurdity to make them belong to one particular ethnic group. Accordingly, the Orāoṇs can not be assigned to the so-called Dravidian ethnic stock. On the other hand, anthropometric studies on the Muṇḍās, Muṇḍās and the Orāoṇs, the Māles and others made by the anthropologists have revealed significant differences between these groups of peoples. Basu has pointed out ethnic differences between the Muṇḍās and the Orāoṇs¹²⁷. In fact, he has shown that the Muṇḍās show no affinity with the Dravidians. This is also supported by the study of blood groups of these peoples¹²⁸.

Even the anthropometric study of the Māles and the Muṇḍās shows significant results. There is a long tradition of the common origin of the Mālē and the Orāoṇ. It has been found out by Sarkar that the Māles resemble the Cheñchus, the Kanikars and the Khonds of South India in many characters. Not only that, Sarkar also made a comparative study of the skulls of the Mālēs and the Muṇḍās and the Mālēs and the Orāoṇs, and the results obtained thereby are extremely important. The cranial index of the Muṇḍā skull has been noted as 72.46 and nasal-index, 72.64. The average cranial length and breadth are 179 mm and 180 mm and the average cranial length and breadth of Mālē's skull are 167 mm and 121 mm. Here difference is seen in the size of the skull. Such differences can be also noticed in respect of the craniometric study of the Mālē and the Orāoṇ. The cranial length and breadth of the Orāoṇ skull are 182.75

and 130.5. It follows that the Orāon's skull differs from the Mālē's skull, the Orāon and former being larger. But in cranial shape, the skulls are similar. The Mālē : Mālē and the Vedda cranial indices are : 79.62, i.e., brachy cranial anthropometrical study and 68.7, i.e., dolichocranial. The difference lies also in the length of the skull. As to nasal index, the data almost agree as the indices are : Vedda - 57.2 and Mālē - 60.98. It may be noticed that there is difference in cranial length between the two skulls, but in respect of cranial breadth the Mālē is nearer to the Vedda skull. The shape of the skull is also similar, and the cranial index roughly agrees.

A reference may be also made to the cranial and the nasal indices of the Muṇḍā and the Mālē. The cranial indices are : Muṇḍā - 67.88 and Mālē - 79.62. The two crania agree in certain respects, but there are differences in form and shape of the head. In respect of nasal indices, the agreement is closer (Mālē - 60.98 ; Muṇḍā - 59.52¹²⁹). A comparative study between the Mālē and the Santal has been also made, and it has been found out that the difference exists between the Santal and the Mālē, but the relationship of the Mālē with the Muṇḍā is closer.

It would appear from the study of the anthropometric measurements that both the Muṇḍā-speaking and the Dravidian speaking tribes agree and also disagree in respect of some physical characteristics. This ethnic diversity amongst these tribal peoples has been primarily due to intermingling and admixtures. Otherwise, two distinct ethnic stocks could be easily differentiated : one representing the Australoid or Vedda racial stock and the Mediterranean mixed with Australoid. The Muṇḍā-speakers belong to the former type and the Dravidian speakers to the latter. It has been already shown as to how all these tribal peoples migrated to Bengal and spread over its different districts. In Bengal these tribal communities have no doubt succeeded in retaining their respective tribal names, and as such, they are known by their own nomenclatures. It is not known for certain when all these peoples did migrate to Bengal and got themselves firmly settled. Some of these aborigines might have moved to Bengal at a period subsequent to the infiltration of the Aryans and others appear to have come to Bengal before the coming and settlements of the Aryans. But most of these aboriginal peoples have not been described like some others

in the Brahmanical and other records, though many of them were brought within the fold of Brahmanical culture. The primary reason appears to be that they mostly took refuge in deep jungles, forests and hills and as such, escaped the notice of the Brāhmaṇas. Those who came into direct contact with the Brahmanical culture were mostly given a place in the Brahmanical socio-economic order.

Besides these aborigines whose number is numerous and who are extant even today in different parts of India, there were other very primitive tribal peoples who were in Bengal from hoary antiquity and certainly before the so-called Aryan infiltration, and as such, they came into direct notices and recording of the Aryans. Again, these primeval primitive tribal peoples were also spread over different parts of India and everywhere they collided/confronted the Aryan immigrants who mostly succeeded in subduing them and many of them were brought within the fold of Brahmanism. As a result, most of these tribal communities figure in the Brahmanical and other records which furnish some details about them. Some of those very primitive peoples of India settled in or wandered over certain parts of Bengal as well from indeterminable times, at least long before the infiltration of the Aryans. These primitive tribal peoples may be actually branded as the real indigenes or autochthones of Bengal. A few of these indigenous tribal communities of Bengal have been treated in the next Chapter.

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CHAPTER FIVE

INDIGENES OF BENGAL

In the preceding Chapter a ~~penal~~ of the extant aborigines or primitive tribes of Bengal has been made purely on the basis of ethnological study. All the tribal communities discussed in the foregoing Chapter are rarely to be found mentioned or even referred to and described in the early literary texts and epigraphic records. It appears that these aboriginal peoples did not come into any close contact or relationship with the infiltrating so-called Aryans and the members of the Brahmanical order. Accordingly, they were either ignored or not taken any note of their very existence. It further implies that these tribal communities at least up to the time of composition of the literary texts and inscriptions lived in complete isolation in the forests and hills. Besides these unrecorded or unnoticed tribal communities, there were also many other primitive tribal communities living in Bengal long before the coming of the so-called Aryans. It seems that these tribal communities were the real autochthones who were perhaps in possession of Bengal even before the migrations of the Muṇḍās and other peoples from the Chhotonāgpur region. Accordingly, it may be presumed that the so-called Aryans perhaps had to confront these peoples during their settlements in the plains of Bengal. It is because of their close contact with these peoples that the Brāhmanaṣ became largely acquainted with them, and as such, they could describe them in their literary compositions. Not only that, as these early peoples came first into direct contact with the Brahmanical culture-bringers, there was every attempt to draw them within their own cultural fold. To a great extent they succeeded in doing so, and as a result, several tribal communities were transformed into Hindu castes. In such transformations, the original tribal name has been sometimes retained, and in several other cases, the tribal name has been modified or transformed suitably for assimilation by giving them due recognition of a Hindu caste. Accordingly, many of these primitive tribal communities and their remnants can hardly be traced at present in Bengal.

The first and the second groups of the tribal communities of ancient Bengal, as discussed in Chapter IV require a comprehensive and separate treatment. Accordingly,

the peoples belonging to these two groups, though interlinked, have been discussed under two independent Chapters entitled (i) Indigenes of Bengal and (ii) Ancient peoples of Bengal. The former group of peoples has been again taken to be the original settlers of Bengal, about whom sufficient materials are available for their ethno-historical reconstruction. True, these peoples can not be genuinely branded as the indigenous peoples of Bengal because all of them appear to have come and settled in Bengal in the post-Brahmanization period like some other tribal communities discussed in the preceding chapter. The extant primitive communities of Bengal coming from West, particularly from Chhotanāgpur and Orissa, are not to be found described in the Brahmanical documents. The implication is that all these tribal communities might have moved to Bengal and settled therein at a subsequent period. This contention is amply borne out by the available ethno-historical facts. If the Aryans did really confront them during their movements and settlements in Bengal, all these tribal peoples would not have been unrepresented in the Brahmanical literature. On the other hand, the Aryans in course of their advance and movements in different parts of Bengal had certainly confronted the peoples belonging to the first group, and they have been well represented in their literary accounts. It implies that the tribal communities of the first group along with a few others were firmly settled in Bengal before the incoming of the Aryans. It is in this sense that these peoples may be treated as the indigenes of Bengal.

The first group includes several tribal communities, but only a few of them like the Nishādas, the Śavaras and the Pulindas have been selected for treatment in the present Chapter by way of an illustration. Here a somewhat comprehensive treatment has been made on each of these three tribal communities laying emphasis on an analytical study of their names, origins, distribution, culture, identity, assimilation, contributions, etc. Of these three primeval tribal communities of ancient Bengal, the Nishādas have been treated as the oldest one. (Map. 12)

I. The NISHĀDAS

The Nishādas like many other ancient settlers of Bengal belonged to the most primitive tribal community forming the very base of the Bengali people and culture.

i) Early References - derivation and meaning :

The term Nishāda has been derived from Nishida meaning 'sit down'. In other words, the term perhaps implies the meaning of 'settled down'. This contention is supported by its derivative meaning as well, i.e., ni=down and Derivation sad=settle.¹ Accordingly, Weber interpreted the Nishādas as those and aborigines who were settled as distinguished from the nomadic peoples.² This is supported by the rituals of the Viśvajit-sacrifice which requires a temporary residence with the Nishādas.^{2a} The term Nishāda again denotes a repository of sins, and it has been very often synonymously used with the Chañḍāla and the Pārasāva. The term Nishāda has been also very often used in a genetic sense meaning the non-Aryan tribes in general.

The Nishādas are first named in the Rudrādhyāya of the Yajurveda along with the Vrātyas (nomads), etc.³ The Nishādas and their chieftains are also found mentioned in the Vedic texts. It has been stated that a Nishāda-sthapati shall perform Ishti to Rudra. In the Aitareya-Brāhmaṇa, a simile has been used stating : "Just as the Nishādas or Selāgas (thieves) or evil-doers seize a wealthy man in a forest and throwing him in a well run away with his wealth".⁴ Here the Nishādas have been described as thieves and robbers. In the Taittiriya-Saṁhitā, the name Nishāda occurs in the list of a number of vocational groups. Again, in the Śāṅkhāyana-Brāhmaṇa, the food of the Nishādas has been regarded as lowest, and one who performs Viśvajit-sacrifice is only allowed to take that food and also to stay in their habitat.⁵ Even the Nishāda has been permitted to offer Rudra-ishti which, however, does not entitle him to perform Vedic consecration of fire.⁶ All these references relate to the very fact that the Nishādas were outside the pale of the Aryan culture. This would be further evident from other textual references.

Yāska's Nirukta excludes the Nishādas from the Chatvārovarṇa, i.e., four Varnas or castes and designates them as forming the fifth caste.⁷ While explaining the expression, Pañchajanānāma hotram jashadhvam, occurring in the Rigveda, the Niruktas point out that according to Aupamanyava, the Pañchajanā, i.e., the five peoples include the Nishādas as the fifth one.⁸ Here the Nishādas have been distinguished from four other Varnas. Again, the Niruktas urge that the Nishāda is so-called because 'sin of evil sits down in him' or

in other words, he is the repository of all vices.⁹ According to the statement of the Padma-purāṇa, the Nishādas, the Kirātas, the Bhillas, the Nāhalakas, the Pulindas and other Mlechchha tribes were addicted to vices. (Nishādāścha Kirātaścha Bhillānahalakastathā bhramaraścha Pulindaścha ... mlechchha-jātayah).¹⁰ It would not be thus unjustifiable to presume^{that} the Nishādas were the most scorned or evil peoples.

In the context of the derivative meaning and significance of the word Nishāda, a particular reference may be made to Pāraśava which has been taken to be another name for the Nishāda. The synonymous use of the terms Nishāda and Pāraśava has been made by Baudhāyana, Yājñavalkya, Manu (Nishādah sūdrakanyāyam yah Pāraśava uchyate) and Kauṭilya in their respective works.¹¹ Manu derives the word Pāraśava from the root Pāray, i.e., to go across and Śava, i.e., a corpse, meaning thereby that 'though living, a Pāraśava is like one dead.'¹² The Nishāda is also found mentioned in the later Samhitās and the Brāhmaṇas.¹³ From all these references, it seems that the word Nishāda was used not to denote a particular tribal community, but in a wider sense to include all non-Aryan tribes who were not under the Aryan control like the Sūdras.¹⁴ As for instance, the word Nishāda occurs in the Vājasaneyī-Samhitā as meaning a Bhilla or Bhil.¹⁵ Accordingly, the Nishādas are found mentioned along with the Śavaras and the Pulindas or as Bhilla-Kolla tribes. Besides, they are also synonymously used with the Chañḍālas and the Pāraśavas.

Thus it becomes evident that the Nishādas, the Chañḍālas and the Pāraśavas were outcaste peoples outside the Aryan organization, and in fact, the Rāmāyaṇa contains references to the Nishādas as aborigines living outside the pale of the Aryan culture.¹⁶ In this context, a particular reference may be made to the Ādiparva of the Mahābhārata (109.25) wherein Vidura has been called Pāraśava, and that he married Pāraśavī, a daughter of the king Devaka.¹⁷ The Pāraśava is also referred to in some texts of the historical period. As for instance, Bāṇa in his Harshacharita narrates that during his sojourn Harsha was accompanied by two Pāraśava brothers, namely, Chandrasena and Mātrisena (Bhrātarau Pāraśavau Chandra-sena-matrisenau).¹⁸ Not only that, even in an inscription of Bengal it has been stated that the king Lokanāthaś

maternal grandfather Keśava was a Pārasāva.¹⁹

ii) Origins :

In the Dharmasūtra-texts, the Pārasāvas have been, however, differentiated from the Nishādas.²⁰ This would be evident from the explanations given by the different Dharmasūtra-writers regarding the respective origins of the Nishādas and the Pārasāvas. As for instance, Gautama states that the Nishāda is the offspring of a union of a Brāhmaṇa male and a Vaiśya female, and the Pārasāva, of a Brāhmaṇa male and a Śūdra female.²¹ This is also the opinion of Nārada who stated that the Nishāda is born of a Kshatriya male and Śūdra female.²² The statement of the Mahābhārata supports this view as well.²³ But in some other works like the Arthasāstra of Kautilya, the Nishāda has been described as the offspring of a Brāhmaṇa male and a Śūdra female, and the son of a Nishāda by a Śūdra female was Pukkusa and the issue of a Śūdra male by a Nishāda female, Kukkuṭa.²⁴ In the opinion of Manu (X.8) the Nishāda is the offspring of a Brāhmaṇa and Śūdra woman. (Brāhmaṇā ... Nishādaḥ Śūdrakanyāyāḥ).²⁵ In the Baudhāyana-Dharmasūtra, Vaśiṣṭha-Dharmasūtra, Mahābhārata, Yājñavalkya, Arthasāstra, Usanas - Saṁhitā and Vaikhānasa-Saṁhitā, the Nishāda has been made an issue of a Brāhmaṇa male and Śūdra female.²⁶ But in the Gautama-Dharmasūtra, it has been stated that the Nishāda was born of a Brāhmaṇa father and Vaiśya mother.²⁷ Besides, the Nishāda has been again made an issue of a Kshatriya male and Śūdra female.²⁸

A perusal of most of the Dharmaśāstras and other related texts would reveal that both the Nishādas and the Pārasāvas originated from a union of a Brāhmaṇa male and a low caste female. Such attempts to explain the origins of the Nishāda and the Pārasāva were made at a subsequent period when the non-Aryan peoples were being gradually brought into the fold of Brahmanism. It is significant to note that in both cases the Brāhmaṇa has been made the father of the Nishāda excepting in one instance in the Mahābhārata. This has been of course the result of Brahmanization when the Brāhmaṇas had to take wives from the non-Aryan communities during their migrations and settlements in various parts. It may be further contended that the Nishādas, the most primitive non-Aryan community of India, were gradually brought

within the fold of Brahmanical culture, and one way of doing so was to categorize the Nishādas as forming a caste arising out of illegal unions. Significantly, the Brāhmaṇa has been mostly made the male partner of such a union implying thereby a special recognition being given to the Nishādas for bringing them within the Brahmanical caste order. It would be thus apparent that a low origin has been ascribed to the Nishādas, Pārasāvas, Bhīllas and others, implying thereby that they all belonged to non-Aryan communities, and it was not possible for the Brahmanical writers to make any clear differentiation between various tribal groups. Hence is the confusion. But in the later period, each tribal group was distinguished, and its origins separately attributed to the unions between the Aryan Brāhmaṇa males and non-Aryan or Śūdra females. It has been, however, specially stated in the Smṛtis that even the lower caste peoples like Nishādas could be elevated to higher caste status by merit and intermarriage with girls of higher castes continuously for a number of generations. But such elevations must have been very rare.

Ancient texts are also replete with many stories regarding the origins of the Nishādas. Such stories are mostly to be found in the Epics and the Purāṇas, more particularly in the Vāyu, Brahmāṇḍa, Bhāgavata and Vishṇu Purāṇas.²⁹ According to the Puranic story, the king Veṇa was greatly hostile to the performances of Vedic sacrifices, and as such, there was a war with the Aryans.³⁰ The king Veṇa was, however, defeated and killed by the Aryans. But from the left thigh of the dead king sprang out a short, dark, broad nosed and ugly man who was ordered : 'Nishida', i.e., sit down, and as such, the descendants of this man came to be called 'Nishādas'.³¹ In the Garuda-purāṇa, a similar story has been narrated. It is said that after killing the irreligious Veṇa, the Rshis churned his thigh for a son and there sprang up a dwarfish and black son who was ordered to 'sit down', and as such, he was a Nishāda.^{31a} In the Harivaṃśa, the Nishāda has been described as the son of Atithi, a grandson of Rāma. 'The son of Nishāda was Nala whose son was Nabha, and Devashrava's son Ekalavya was brought up by the Nishādas and was accordingly called Naishādhi'.^{31b} A similar story is also to be found in the Mahābhārata which contains a vivid account of the origin of the Nishāda³²: "Veṇa, a slave of wrath and malice, became unrighteous in his conduct towards all creatures. The Rshis, the utterers of Brahmā, slew him with Kuśa-blades

Mythical
Stories

(their weapons) inspired with Mantras. Uttering Mantras, those Rshis pierced the right thigh of Veṇa. Thereupon, from his thigh came out a short-limbed person on earth, resembling a charred brand with blood-red eyes and black hair. Those utterers of Brahma then said unto him : 'Nishida', i.e., sit here. From him have sprung the Nishādas, viz., those wicked tribes that have the hills and forests for their abodes as also those hundreds and thousands of others called Mlechchhas residing on the Vindhya mountains. It is also learnt from the Mahābhārata that the Nishāda was also one of the sons of Janamejaya.^{32a} Such stories have, however, little historical bearings except revealing that the Nishādas originated from the king Veṇa who certainly represented the non-Brahmanical communities in general. It has been already stated that in the Dharmaśāstras and other texts, the origin of the Nishāda has been traced from Pratilōma marriages denoting a very low and vile origin. This attempt to trace the origins of the Nishādas from all sorts of Pratilōma unions was made when the Nishādas were brought within the Brahmanical fold, and as such, links or relationship with the Brahmanical caste orders were established. Yet, the Nishādas have always been attributed a very low position in the society. In the Buddhist texts, they have been included within the Hīna-jātis. In the Suttavibhāṅga, the Nishādas along with the Chaṇḍālas, the Pukkusas, the Rathakāras, etc., are Hīna-nāmajāti.^{32b} Despite their absorption and inclusion within the Brahmanical social order, the low and vile position of the Nishādas has been most zealously upheld all throughout the period of the Indian history.

iii) Distribution :

As to the distribution of the Nishādas in different parts of India, detailed accounts are to be found in the Purāṇas (Bhāgavata, Padma (Bhūmikhaṇḍa), Vāyu and Garuḍa) and the Epics.³³ Some Purāṇas like the Garuḍa-purāṇa place them in Western parts while others like the Harivaṁśa refer to their habitat in both East and West of the country.³⁴ The western habitat of the Nishādas is clearly borne out by the Harivaṁśa.^{34a} There are also many references to the Nishāda kingdoms in various parts of the country.³⁵ In this context, a reference may be made to the account of the Nishāda king Guhaka as related in the Rāmāyaṇa.³⁶ It is learnt that the Nishāda king Guhaka became a friend

of Rāma and accorded a hearty reception to him, Sītā and Lakshmaṇa during their sojourn to Daṇḍakāraṇya.³⁷ According to the Mahābhārata, the Nishādas had also their kingdom round about the drying bed of the Sarasvatī (Svāraṁ Nishādar-āshtrasya Yeshāṁ doshyāt Sarasvatī/ Pravishtā - Prithivīmdhīra mā Nishāda-hi-mām viduh//).^{37a} Not only the Epics and the Purāṇas, even Varāhamihira in the Brhatsamhitā refers to 'Nishāda-rāshtrāṇi' on the South-eastern side of Madhyadeśa.³⁸ Kern translates the expression as the 'territory of the aborigines'. Further, there is a reference to 'Nishāda-saṁghāh' which has been translated as 'savage tribes'.^{38a} In the Junāgaḍh Rock inscription of the second century A.D., it is stated that Mahākshatrapa Rudradāmana subjugated the Nishāda country along with the Eastern and Western Malwa, Dwaraka, etc.³⁹ The Nishāda country may be also placed between Sindh and Pāriyātra (Western Vindhyas).⁴⁰ Sircar equates this kingdom with the region about the Western Vindhyas and Ārāvalli ranges.⁴¹ Kālidāsa in his Raghuvamśa (18.1) refers to the Nishādha country as situated on North-west of Berar.^{41a} In the early period, the Nishādas, however, occupied the district of Hissar and Bhatnir, Marwar or Jodhpur.⁴² In this connection, a particular reference may be made to the Nishāda city, Śrīṅgavera, on the side of the Ganges.⁴³ In fact, the Nishāda Kingdom as described in the Rāmāyana has been identified with Śrīṅgaverapura.⁴⁴ The name of this very city Śrīṅgavera is composed of both Aryan and non-Aryan elements indicating thereby the Aryan influence on the Nishādas. A perusal of all these references to the Nishāda habitats as given in the early literary texts would reveal that the Nishādas occupied primarily the outlying parts of the Madhya-deśa or Āryāvarta, particularly the western portion of the Vindhyan mountains.

There are of course very few references to the settlement of the Nishādas in the Eastern region, more particularly in Bengal, excepting some generalised statements in some texts to the effect that the Nishāda habitats included eastern parts also. If the Nishādas were so widely distributed over Settlement different parts of the country outside the pale of Āryāvarta, it in Bengal may be reasonably presumed that they also made their settlements in different parts of Bengal as well. Accordingly, they may be considered as the most primitive or original settlers of Bengal. In this context, a particular reference may be made to the Tipperah Copper plate of Lokanātha belonging

to be middle of the 7th century A.D. wherein it is stated that the king's maternal grandfather Keśava was a Pārasāva, i.e., Nishāda.⁴⁵ It has been already pointed out that the Pārasāva has been made synonymous with the Nishāda. In that case, it may be contended that the Nishādas of Bengal might have been known as Pārasāvas as well. Besides, in Eastern India, more particularly in Bengal, the Nishādas have been mostly equated with the Vyādhas or Chañḍālas or even the Kirātas. The Vyādha is a very common designation in Bengal applied to all groups of people engaged in hunting operations as their only means of subsistence. The Chañḍālas have been also made equated with the Nishādas. In the Dharmasāstras, the Chañḍāla has been described as an issue of a Brāhmaṇa female by a Śūdra male (Sudrāt Chaṇḍāla Brāhmaṇastriyām) and depicted as a hunter or a fisherman.⁴⁶ It appears that in Bengal the Vyādhas, Chañḍālas, etc., are all to be included within the primitive Nishāda community. It is in this context that the primitive hunters and fishermen of Bengal or food-gathering peoples might be recognised as the Nishādas of the ancient texts.

iv) Culture :

Regarding the general pattern of the Nishāda culture as described in the literary texts, it may be said that these peoples were primarily food-gatherers engaged in hunting and fishing. They lived on killing wild animals. In the Pāli-texts, the Nishādas have been actually described as wild hunters and fishers.⁴⁷ In the Jātakas, the Nishādas are also represented as hunters.⁴⁸ It is significant to note that the Cchadanta-Jātaka gives an interesting portrait of the Nishādas whom it calls Luddhakas.⁴⁹ This would be vividly evident from Vālmikī's first Śloka in the Rāmāyaṇa (Vālakāṇḍa)⁵⁰ : Mā Nishāda pratish-
thām tvamagamah śāsvatīḥ samāḥ/ Yat Krauñchamithunādekamavadhīḥ Kāmamō-
hitam.// It is further learnt from the Rāmāyaṇa that the Nishādas were so great expert archers that they could venture to oppose even Bharata.⁵¹ The Nishādas were also very good fighters, and in fact, they played a very prominent part in the Kurukshetra war taking the side of the Pāṇḍavas. Once they were defeated by the great hero Karna in the war.^{51a} In this context, it is to be noted that the Nishādas who were hunters par-excellence or Vyādhas have

been also referred to by Megasthenes who has included the shepherds and Hunting hunters within his sixfold caste categorization of the people of India.⁵² These shepherds and hunters appear to correspond to the Nishādas. It has been already pointed out that the Brāhmaṇa-texts refer to Pañchajañas which according to one interpretation as recorded in Yāska's Nirukta denotes the four traditional classes and the Nishāda (Pañchamanushyajātāni).⁵³ In the Jātaka-stories there are many references to the Nishādas as hunting or capturing deer/peacock, etc.^{53a} Besides hunting, other main occupations of the Nishādas Craftsmen- consisted of catching fishes and supplying the same to the consumers.
ship This has been specifically stated in the Manusāṃhitā : Matsyaghāto-Nishādanām.⁵⁴ The Kathā-Sarīt-Sāgara similarly records that the Nishādas were fishermen and sons of female slaves.⁵⁵ Besides their main occupation relating to hunting and fishing, there are also references to their skill and excellence in craftsmanship. This is evident from the Rāmāyaṇa which tells us that when Rāma with Sītā and Lakshmaṇa expressed his desire to cross the river, Guhaka, the leader of the Nishādas, ordered his men to make a boat suited for the purpose.⁵⁶ It is also learnt that there were five hundred of such boats, and in each boat, there were one hundred archers.⁵⁷ The intimate contact of the Nishādas with water and forest made them expert boat-builders and ferrymen. The Nishādas generally lived in the hills and forests. It is thus stated in the Padma-purāṇa that the Nishāda's descendants are settled in the hills and forests (Parvateshu vanedheva tasya vaṃśaḥ pratisthitah).⁵⁸ Their settlement in the Vindhya region is also known from the Vāyu-purāṇa. (Nishādava-mśa ... (Vindhyanilayah)).⁵⁹ In fact, a Nishādā-sthapatī has been also referred to in the Kātyāyana-Śrautasūtra.⁶⁰

There is also a specific reference to the craft of boat-making by the Nishādas in the Manusāṃhitā : "Nishādō mārgavaṃ sūte dāsaṃ naukarma jībinaṃ".⁶¹ In the Harivaṃśa, the Nishādas have been also depicted as collecting precious gems and jewels found in the river-beds.⁶² It is further learnt that the Nishādas used earthen pots for drinking purposes. This would be evident from the statement of Kātyāyana : Grāmyabhōjanaṃ Nishādanaṃ Mr̥ṇmayāpānaṃ.⁶³ It is not, however, absolutely clear whether the Nishādas could make earthen wares as well. In this context, mention may be made to the references wherein baked earthen wares have been tabooed in funeral rites, and these

have been associated with the Asuras.⁶⁴ The making of earthen wares and their burning or rather the use of burnt earthen wares appears to have been the creation of the non-Aryan Asuras, and as such, their use in Brahmanical religious rites has been prohibited. It may be noted here that even today Other Crafts Pindas are to be offered to the Pitris only in unburnt clay pots as provided in the ritual texts. It would thus appear that the making and use of burnt earthen wares are to be attributed to the Asuras and Nishādas. The Nishādas were also expert players on musical instruments. This becomes evident from Usanas who refers to the Nishādas earning their living by playing on musical instruments.⁶⁵ About the Nishāda's food and drink and other life-patterns Kātyāyana states : Grāmya bhōjanam Nishādānām mṛinmayapānam cha, i.e., the Nishādas partake undesirable food articles and drink water in earthen pots.^{65a}

From the above discussion it may be presumed that the Nishādas were not simply nomadic food-gatherers. Some of them might have also pursued different crafts as well. That some Nishādas settled down would be also evident Village from the Lātyāyana-Śrautasūtra which refers to a village of the Nishādas.⁶⁶ The Nishādas being outcastes were not allowed to live inside a town or city. The Nishāda villages are frequently mentioned in the Buddhist texts. It has been said that a Nishāda lives not far from the town of Sakula in the Mahimsaka kingdom in a Nesāda village (nagarato avidūre ekasmin Nesādagāmake). Again, in the More-jātaka there is a reference to a Nesāda village near Benares (Bārānasiyā avidūre Nesādagāmavāsī-nesādo).^{66a}

The Nishādas also established kingdoms in different parts of the country. There are also references to the Nishāda kings and kingdoms in the early texts. Besides the story of the Nishāda king Guhaka as narrated in the Rāmāyana, the Mahābhārata relates the story of Nala, the Nishāda king, living near Pāriyātra.^{66b} In the Naishādhacharita, Nala, the Nishāda king, has been Kingdom described as a chariot-driver and well-conversant with the nature and character of the horses.^{66c} Further, in the Mahābhārata Giriprastha is said to have been the capital city of the Nishādas. The Brahmāṇḍa-purāṇa refers to the Nishāda kingdom.^{66d} The Bṛhatsamhitā (XIV.10) refers to the Nishāda Rāshtra in the South-east of the Madhyadeśa. In the inscriptions as

well there are references to the Nishāda kingdom. It has been already stated that the Junāgaḍ inscription refers to the conquest of the Nishādas by Rudradāmana. The Udayendiram grant No.2, records that Udayachandra defeated the Nishāda king Prithivī-vyāghra who was accompanying the Aśvamedha-turaṅgama.^{66e} Regarding their religious beliefs and practices very little information is available. They were, however, worshippers of some primitive deities. According to Usanas, the counterparts of the Nishādas, namely, the Pāraśavas, were worshippers of the deity Bhadrakālī.⁶⁷

It has been already pointed out that the Nishādas belonged to a non-Aryan tribal community living outside the pale of the Aryan culture. The Mahābhārata places them in a vile company : Nishādān Purushādamaścha Karnaprāvaranāpi.⁶⁸ But gradually they came into indirect and direct contact with the Aryans, and a process of admixture and cultural acculturation began. This is evident from the Rāmāyaṇa wherein Guhaka, the Nishāda king, offered all kinds of food to Rāma during his journey in the forest. But Rāma accepted only the fodder for the horses and declined all other articles with thanks. On the other hand, Bharata accepted every kind of food offered by Guhaka.⁶⁹ These factual statements appear to be confusing at the first instance. But it is to be noted that Rāma had taken the vow of a recluse, and therefore, he declined to take food from the Nishāda king. On the other hand, Bharata who was not bound by such a vow accepted every kind of food offered by Guhaka. From these facts, it appears that the Aryans had neither any objection to touch these peoples of the forest or to partake food articles given by them. The same process of adjustment and assimilation is noticeable in the sphere of religious activities as well. As for instance, in the Kauśītaki and Pañchaviṃśa-Brāhmaṇa it is stated that the performer of the Viśvajit-sacrifice is required to live for three days amongst the Nishādas.⁷⁰ It seems that the Nishādas who would permit any Aryan to reside temporarily amongst them must have been partially amenable to the Aryan influence. In the Śrautasūtra of Kātyāyana (1.12) and in the Mīmāṃsāsūtra of Jaimini a provision has been made for the Brāhmaṇa priests to allow the chieftains of the Nishāda-descent for offering certain sacrifices.⁷¹

Position
and assi-
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v) Ethnic Affiliations :

As to the ethnic characters of the Nishādas detailed descriptions are to be found in the Epics and the Purāṇas. In the Śāntiparvan of the Mahābhārata, and in the Vishṇu-purāṇa and Mārkaṇḍeya-purāṇa, the Nishādas have been described as having Mahāhanu (hanu=chin), i.e., projecting chin.⁷² In the same Parvan they have been also depicted as having short stature, reddish eyes and black hair.⁷³ It is stated that the Nishāda who came out of the thigh of Veṇa was a short limbed person resembling a charred brand with blood red eyes and black hair.^{73a} A description of the Nishādas is also to be found in the Cchadanta-Jātaka wherein Soṇuttara has been described as broad footed with a calf (thigh) swollen like an alms-basket, big ribbed, thick bearded with copper coloured teeth and with disgustingly (prominently) red eyes, ill-shaped and revolting to the sight (Patthapādāṃ bhatta-puta-sadisa-jaṅghaṃ mahājānum mahā-phāsukaṃ bahala-massuṃ tāmba-dāthikaṃ nibbiddha piṅgalaṃ dussanthānam bhibha-ccham ... Soṇuttaram nāma Nesādam).⁷⁴ The Purāṇas, however, make more specific references to the physical features of the Nishādas. The Vāyu-purāṇa while narrating the story of the Nishāda describes him as dark and dwarfish.⁷⁵ The same Purāṇa and the Mahābhārata describe the Nishāda as Lambakarāṇa, i.e., long ear like that of an ass or goat.⁷⁶ The Garuḍa-purāṇa states that the Nishāda was dwarfish or short and black.⁷⁷ The Bhāgavata-purāṇa, however, describes the Nishāda as "black-like crow, short stature, short armed, snub nosed, high cheek bones, red eyed and copper-coloured hair" (Kākakṛshṇoḥśrīhrasvāṅgo hrasvabāhurmahāhanuḥ hrasvapānnimnāsāgro raktākshastāmra-murddhajaḥ).⁷⁸ As to the colour of the hair the Bhāgavata-purāṇa uses the expression Tāmramurdhaja, i.e., copper coloured hair.⁷⁹ But in the Śāntiparvan of the Mahābhārata, the Nishādas are said to bear black hair.⁸⁰ In the Vishṇu-purāṇa the Nishādas are again called Dagdastuna-pratikaso, i.e., black-skin coloured tribe.⁸¹ They are also depicted as a people with flattened feature and dwarfish stature.⁸² The Bhāgavata-purāṇa further describes the Nishādas as possessed of Nimnanāsāgra, i.e., depressed nose.⁸³

It would appear from all these accounts of the physical characters of the Nishādas as contained in the Epics and the Purāṇas that there are certain discrepancies in respect of the description of their physical features. As for instance, in the Mahābhārata, the Nishādas are said to bear black hair, but the Bhāgavata-purāṇa refers to their copper coloured hair.⁸⁴ Besides a few

similar discrepancies, the physical characters of the Nishādas may be well determined from all these complexities of accounts. It would appear that the Nishādas were characterised by black skin colour, short stature, copper-coloured or black hair, broad and depressed nose, long ear and projected chin.

The Nishādas of the ancient Indian literary texts have been very often identified with Nysaeans of the Classical writers.⁸⁵ They are said to have sent an embassy to Alexander when he was in the Aśvaka country.⁸⁶ But this identification has not been agreed upon. Ctesias speaks of one of the Indian tribes as possessing short stature, black skin-colour and snub nose.⁸⁷ This description of the physical characters of a tribe is precise enough to identify them with the Dasyus or Nishādas of the early Sanskrit texts.^{87a}

It would not be, however, a difficult task to identify the racial stock represented by the physical characters described above. Significantly, all the aforesaid physical characters are analogous with those attributed to the Australoid racial stock characterised by short stature, dark skin-colour, Ethnic identity dolichocephalic head, platyrrhine nose and curly to wavy hair. Some scholars suppose that the Śūdras and the Nishādas correspond to the Dāsas of the Vedic texts.⁸⁸ But to others, the Dāsas were the Dravidian speaking Mediterraneans and the Nishādas, the pro-Australoid aborigines.⁸⁹ It has been also pointed out that the Nishādas, Śūdras, Pulindas, Bhillas, Kollas, etc., were all Proto-Australoid (Australoid) of India after they became modified into the primitive Austric Speaking peoples.⁹⁰

It was, however, Chanda who for the first time earmarked the Nishādas as a distinct ethnic stock in India.⁹¹ According to Chanda the Nishāda characters are still conspicuous amongst the Bhils and the Gonds of the Vindhya regions.⁹² Both of them are still short in stature and dark in skin-colour with broad nose.^{92a} These features speak of their Nishāda affiliation. Risley classified

Distinct ethnic stock these dark, short and broad nosed peoples of Central and Southern India under his Dravidian type⁹³. Others call this type pre-Dravidian,

Chanda observes that : 'Since all these physical features characterised the Puranic Nishādas and indicated the affinities of the Puranic Nishādas with the so-called pre-Dravidian, so I should prefer to classify the dark, short statured and broad nosed jungle tribes as the modern Nishādas representing the old Nishāda race'⁹⁴. Chanda's Nishāda stock may be again made identical

with the Australoid race which forms the substratum of the Indian people even today.

In this connection, it may be noted that the Australoid peoples are again supposed to have been the speakers of Austro-Asiatic languages like the Muṇḍās, Santals, Hos, Birhors, Khariās, Bhūmijas, etc., distributed all over Chhotanāgpur and its neighbouring regions including Bengal. This contention has been also directly referred to in Chanda's hypothesis when he stated that if our hypothesis relating to the Nishāda race is correct, we must assume that Muṇḍā was originally spoken by the Nishāda race as a whole, and Indo-Aryan and Dravidian dialects have been adopted by some of the Nishāda tribes as a result of their contact with their more civilized neighbours⁹⁵. In fact, all these dialects referred to above belong to the Austro-Asiatic branch of the Austric language⁹⁶. Chatterji, however, prefers to call these Austric languages of India by the generic name Muṇḍā. It implies that the Muṇḍā-speaking peoples of India have a genetic relationship with those of South-east Asia. These Muṇḍā-speakers were no doubt the Nishāda peoples. In fact, the physical characters of the Nishādas indicate their affinities with the Veddas of Ceylon and Sakais of Malay Peninsula as well⁹⁷.

It is also very significant to note that the prepondering racial element amongst all these Muṇḍā peoples is no doubt Australoid. Again, the Austro-Asiatic or Muṇḍā language forms also the substratum of the Bengali language and culture as well. Even today many words of Austro-Asiatic or Muṇḍā affiliations can be traced in modern Bengali dialects as would be evident from the discussions made in the following Chapters.

(vi) Identity ;

No tribe as such bearing the name Nishāda can be now accurately identified or located. The word Nishāda has been taken as a generic name for the non-Aryan tribal communities⁹⁸. Generally, the Bhils of Central and Western India are taken to be the representatives of the ancient Nishādas. It may be, however, stated that the Bhillas have been also mentioned as forming a separate or independent tribal community in the early texts. The only alternative in that case would be to accept the term Nishāda as a generic one denoting

tribal peoples in general who were outside the pale of Brahmanism. But the early textual references are very positive in the sense that the Nishādas have been always described as retaining a separate identity amongst the host of tribal communities. Though no particular tribal community can be earmarked as the ancient Nishādas, their remnants are still surviving in the names of the hills (Nishāda-parvata) and rivers (Nishādha-nadi)⁹⁹. It appears that the ancient Nishādas became gradually integrated with other tribal communities and also with many other peoples belonging to the Brahmanical fold, and as such, they formed a separate caste order at the lowest bottom of the Brahmanical hierarchy, and accordingly, they have been described as originating from illicit unions between men and women of different castes. In course of time the Nishādas lost their separate identity altogether and might have formed various inferior or low castes under new names and garbs. This is what happened in Bengal, and it is in this sense that the Nishādas may be said to have formed the very base or substratum of the Bengali people and culture.

(vii) Observation ;

From the above discussion on the Nishādas it would appear that they were the most ancient peoples and widely distributed over different parts of India including Bengal, though only a few references to their habitats in this part (Bengal) of the country are available. In Bengal, the counterparts of the Nishādas were perhaps the Vyādhas and others. That the Nishādas belonged to the most primitive community of India is also amply borne out by the fact that they were primarily food-gathering nomadic peoples living on hunting and fishing. Linguistically speaking, the language spoken by the Nishādas might be affiliated to the Muṇḍā or Austro-Asiatic branch of the Austric family of languages. From ethnic point of view it has been found out that the physical characters of the Nishādas have been most specifically described in the early literary texts. Taking into consideration the accounts of their physical characters it has been possible to affiliate the ancient Nishādas to the Australoid racial stock. A perusal of the early literary texts also reveals that the Nishādas were gradually brought within the fold of Brahmanical culture, and there followed a process of cultural acculturation wherein the Nishādas made substantial contributions in the formation of the Brahmanical culture.

In respect of both ethnic and cultural formation, the Nishāda elements predominate and even today their relics are vividly present. From all these facts, it may be reasonably upheld that the Austro-Asiatic or Muṇḍā-speaking Nishādas belonging to the Australoid racial stock is to be recognised as the very substratum of the ethnic and cultural composition of the people of Bengal, nay of India as a whole.

II. The ŚAVARAS

Another important primitive non-Aryan tribe of ancient Bengal is most widely known as the Śavaras who have been elaborately described in most of the early literary texts, indigeneous and foreign and also in some inscriptions. The Śavaras are the most widespread tribal community of Central and Eastern India having produced a tremendous impact in respect of cultural amalgam that had taken place in India from bygone days.

(i) Forms and Meanings :

Variant forms of the word Śabara or Śavara are Śabar, Śaur, Śar, Śavar, Śuir and Świre. In Sanskrit the term Śavara means a corpse. From the account of Herodotus it is learnt that the Scythian word for an axe was Sagari. As g and v are interchangeable letters, Śavar appears to be the same word as Sagar¹⁰⁰. Cunningham has actually traced the origin of the term Śavara from the Scythian word Sagari meaning an axe^{100a}. Sastry, however, translates the term Śavara and Pulinda as occurring in the Arthasāstra by the English word archer and hunter respectively¹⁰¹. It appears that there is a direct relationship between Śavara and Sagara, the latter denoting axe. Therefore, it may be presumed that the people who were in the habit of always carrying axes came to be called Śavaras. Even today a Śavara man can hardly be noticed without an axe in his possession¹⁰². Thus it may be contended that the people having in their constant possession axes came to be designated as Śavaras. Besides, Śava means dead body, and Śabara may consequently denote a carrier of the dead body, implying thereby perhaps their vile and ignoble occupation.

This is also amply borne out by the Charyyāgīti where it is stated : Tanhi tōli Śavara dāha Kaelā/Kāndai Sagun Śiyāli, i.e., the Śavaras cremated the dead body and vultures and jackles wept¹⁰³.

(ii) Early References :

The Śavaras have been frequently referred to in the early Indian literary texts. In the Aitareya-Brāhmaṇa and Sāṅkhyāyana-Śrautasūtras, the Śavara has been mentioned as a wild tribe and classed with the Dasyus, the Āndhras, the Mutivas, the Pulindas, the Paundras, etc.¹⁰⁴. In several texts, the Śavaras have been grouped into two or three classes. These are called Nagna (naked) and Parna (leaf-clad) Śavaras and the third group is simply called Śavara¹⁰⁵. The Brhatsamhitā of Varāhamihira, however, makes a specific reference to Nagna-parṇa-śavaraiḥ¹⁰⁶. In this context, it may be noted that the term Śavara occurs several times in the Bṛhatsamhitā with adjectives, Nagna or Parna. Varāhamihira also speaks of the distribution of these two groups of the Śavaras. He places the Nagna and Parna Śavaras in the South-eastern quarter and in the south¹⁰⁷. The Śauris and Kirṇas have been also referred to. The commentator on the Brhatsamhitā has, however, taken the two names Śauri and Kirṇas as one, i.e., Śauri-Kirṇas who have been again taken as Kirṇa-Suvarṇa of Hiuen Tsang.¹⁰⁸ The same expression Nagna-parṇa-Śavara occurs also in the Mārkaṇḍeya-purāṇa¹⁰⁹.

The term Nagna-Śavara denotes the naked Śavara. In the same way, Parna-Śavara denotes leaf-clad Śavara, i.e., the Śavaras wearing leaves of trees¹¹⁰. In the Amarakōsha, however, there occurs the expression of Patro-śavarah, i.e., the Śavaras wearing feathers (peacock's tail¹¹¹). According to Kern, the Parna-Śavaras are to be identified with Phyllitae of Ptolemy¹¹². But the expression Parna-Śavara has been also explained as Śavaras living on eating leaves. Oppert is, however, in favour of translating Parna-Śavara as leaf-clad Śavara. It has been also contended that the term Parna-Śavara (leaf-wearing Śavara) may be applied to women of Central India who wear no clothes, but only a string round the waist to which they suspend a bunch of leaves and another behind. This is also a common practice amongst the Śavara women of Orissa¹¹³.

Again, in the Brhatsamhitā there occurs the expression not of the Śavara savages or savage Śavaras and Pulindas, but of various tribes of Śavara savages.¹¹⁴ In this context, a reference may be made to the very phrase occurring in the Brhatsamhitā as : Dvi-kāñchabarasūdrām Śavara-Pulinda-pradhvaṃsakaro and Taṅgaṇa-Kaliṅga-Vaṅga-Drāviḍāḥ Śavaraśchanai-Kavidhāḥ.¹¹⁵ Here, the Śavaras are mentioned, but not as the Śavara-savages. Varāhamihira speaks of the Śavaras and the Pulindas as savages.¹¹⁶ In the Amarakōsha (Sūdravarga) there is an expression : Kirāta-Śavaraḥ-Pulinda-Mlechchhajātayah.¹¹⁷ It is thus evident that the Śavaras have been allied with the Kirātas, the Pulindas and other tribes, and that they have been classed as Mlechchhas. The Parna-Śavaras in the early centuries of the Christian Era became most powerful. In the opinion of Cunningham their chief town was at Sagar.¹¹⁸

(iii) Origins :

The Śavaras along with other allied tribes like the Āndhras, the Puṇḍras, the Pulindas, the Mutivas, etc., have been mentioned in the Aitareya-Brāhmaṇa, Sāṅkhyāyana-Śrauta-sūtra, Epics and the Purāṇas. In all these early texts, the origins of the Śavaras have been very often referred to.

While dealing with the origins of the Śavaras and the allied tribes, a particular reference may be made to the widely current legend relating to the curse of Viśvāmitra. In the Aitareya-Brāhmaṇa, the Śavaras along with the Āndhras, the Puṇḍras, the Pulindas, etc., are said to have been the offsprings of the cursed elder sons of Viśvāmitra who was originally a Kshatriya, but subsequently got himself elevated to the position of a Brāhmaṇa.¹¹⁹ The Śavaras and other allied tribes have been also called Dasyus who are said to have lived on the borders of the Aryan territory.¹²⁰ The Mahābhārata furnishes another story regarding the origins of the Śavaras and other allied tribes. It is stated that Viśvāmitra had forcibly taken away the cow of Vaśiṣṭha, and from the dung of this cow came out the Śavara.¹²¹ It has been also narrated in the said story that the Pahlavas, the Drāviḍas, the Yavanas, the Puṇḍras, the Kirātas, the Pulindas, the Keralas, the Chīnas, etc., also originated from different parts of the body of the cow, and that they formed the great army engaged in routing Viśvāmitra.¹²² It is also very significant that all these non-Aryan tribes came to the rescue of Vaśiṣṭha. According to another tradition,

the Śavaras are said to have descended from the dark-skinned flat nosed dwarfish Nishāda who was again produced from the rubbing of the thigh of the impious king Veṇa.¹²³ All these stories regarding the origins of the Śavaras appear to have been created when they were largely brought within the fold of Brahmanism and given a place in the Brahmanical social hierarchy.

(iv) Distribution and Movements :

A perusal of the early literary texts and a few casual references in the inscriptions would reveal a wide distribution of the Śavaras in different parts of India. The Mahābhārata locates the Śavaras in the Deccan along with the Āndhras and the Pulindas.^{123a} (Dakṣiṇāpathajanmānah sarve naravarāṇdhra-kāḥ/Guhāḥ Pulindāḥ Śavarāś Cucukā Madrakaiḥ (?) Saha//).^{123b} From the Rāmāyana it is learnt that the Deccan and Central India were once occupied by the Śavaras who were accustomed to evil customs.¹²⁴ The Brhatsaṃhitā, however, refers to the Nagna-parṇa-Śavaras along with the Vaṅgas, the Suhmas, the Kaliṅgas, the Bahlikas, the Śakas, the Yavanas, the Māgadhas and others implying thereby that these were all cognate and neighbouring peoples.¹²⁵ It is thus evident from the references in the Brhatsaṃhitā that the Śavaras were well settled in Bengal along with other ancient peoples. The Mārkaṇḍeya-purāṇa locates the Parṇa-Śavaras amongst the people who lived in the right forefoot of the tortoise.¹²⁶ In the Matsya-purāṇa, however, the Śavaras along with the Pulindas and others are included in the Dakṣiṇāpatha-Janapada.¹²⁷ From all these references, it would appear that the Śavaras occupied a wide belt of territory of Central and Eastern India. Here a particular reference may be made to the classical writings. Megasthenes states that after crossing the desert for 250 miles one would come across the Organagae, Sibarae, Sauertae and others.¹²⁸ Here, the desert might refer to the great Thar desert, and Sibarae to the Śavaras. Pliny stated that next to Prasii, in the interior were the Monedes and the Suari who are to be identified with the Muṇḍās and the Śavaras respectively.¹²⁹

It has been suggested that the Śavaras moved from the Indus region in the time of Megasthenes eastwards to the Gangetic basin.¹³⁰ The actual distribution of the Śavaras (both Nagna and Parṇa Śavaras) along with the Nishādas has been vividly described in the Brhatsaṃhitā as :

"Vrshanālikeracarmadvīpā Vindhyānta-vāsinah-tripuri/
Śmaśradhara Hemakūṭya Vyālagrīvā Mahāgrīvāh//
Kishkindha-Kaṇṭhakasthala Nishāda-rāshṭrāṇi purikā Dāsārṇāh/
Saha Nagna-Parna-Śabaraiḥ-āsleḥādhyaitrike deśāh"//¹³¹

According to Oldham, in the Christian Eras the Śavaras occupied the inland hills and jungles to the South-east of Rāñchī district.¹³² Cunningham thinks that they covered the region from the Mahāndī to the sea.¹³³ The Śavaras also occupied the central part of India as well and also settled in places like Dāmoh, Saugar, Siṅghbhūm, Orissa, Chhotanāgpur, Gañjām and Vizāgāpatam districts.¹³⁴ Bāṇa actually places the Śavaras in the Vindhyan forest.¹³⁵ That the Śavaras were once an important tribal community in ancient Bengal is proved by their frequent references along with the Vaṅgas, the Puṇḍras, the Pulindas, etc., who were undoubtedly the most ancient peoples of Bengal. Again, the Śavaras were also once widely distributed over ancient Bengal and this is borne out by their frequent references in Bengali literary texts and the Saduktikarṇāmṛta. The oldest Bengali literary work, namely, the Charyyāpadas, also contains frequent references to the Śavaras and their life-patterns. If the Śavaras were not so widely distributed over Bengal, they would not have certainly attracted the attention of the Charyyāpada-poets. It is also very interesting to note in this connection that the Naiḥāṭī Copper plate of Vallālasena makes a specific reference to Śavarālaya, i.e., houses of the Śavaras.¹³⁶ From the same plate it is learnt that many princes surrendered to Vallālasena (V.13), and his great enemy was the king of the Śavaras whose children were prohibited by their mother from holding even a mock ceremony of coronation as she was afraid lest it might invite his anger (jananyā ... sabhayam nishiddhāh).¹³⁷ This passage of the inscription shows that the Śavaras did also wield the sceptre. Not only that, even the Śavaras figure prominently in the terracotta plaques discovered from Pāhārpur.¹³⁸ If the Śavaras did not settle or play an important role in the socio-economic life-patterns of ancient Bengal, they would not have been represented in such a fashion on the terracotta plaques. All these evidences certainly speak of the Śavara habitations in ancient Bengal. But at present, the Śavaras as a distinct tribal community can hardly be met with in Bengal. There are some peoples in the districts of Bāñkurā and Midnapur called Śavar or Śaura who

have been largely Brahmanized.^{138a} The fact remains that the ancient Śavaras of Bengal have been largely integrated into the Brahmanical society in such a way that they lost their identity as a distinct tribal community like those extant in Bihar and Orissa.

Though the Śavaras as a primitive tribal community do no more exist in Bengal, they are to be found largely in Chhotanāgpur and Orissa as the most primitive peoples. In certain parts of Orissa, even today the leaf-clad Śavaras are to be found in dense jungles and forests living entirely on food-gathering activities. The Śavaras are also to be found in Central India and Vindhyan region. In reality, the Śavaras, the Bhils and the Gonds live in Central India in such a way that one can not be distinguished from the other. It is, however, to be noted that the Śavaras did once form the most important tribal community in Orissa and neighbouring regions. They had their own kingdoms and chieftains. According to the Korni Copper-plate grant, the founder of the Gaṅga dynasty of Kalinga is said to have defeated and killed Śabarāditya who, as the very name suggests, might have been a Śavara chieftain.¹³⁹ Most significantly, the Śavaras are inseparably associated with the Jagannātha-cult and its temple in Orissa. In reality, it has been found out that the Jagannātha-cult originated from the Śavaras. Even today in the worship of Jagannātha, the Śavaras play a key role in all matters. All these point to the conclusion that the Śavaras were once a prominent tribal community covering the entire Eastern region including Bengal.

(v) Life-patterns and Culture :

A vivid picture of the life-patterns of the Śavaras of ancient Bengal can be obtained from the early literary accounts, the most important one of which is of course the oldest Bengali literary work, namely, the Charyyāpadas. The habitation, livelihood, occupation, dress and ornaments, amusements and all other aspects of the Śavara life have been most lively portrayed in some other early texts as well. The Śavaras have been described as living in the huts on the top of the high hills. Besides, they are also described to have lived on the outskirts of the villages and the cities (Uñchā uñchā pāvata tañhñi vasai Śavarī-vālī/... Varagiriśihara uttuṅga muni savaññe Jahi kia vās/).¹⁴⁰

The Śavaras were dwellers par-excellence of the mountains, and their primary vocation was hunting and gathering of food-articles from the forest. The Amarakōsha refers actually to the 'band of the Śavaras, hunters and thieves' (Śavara-vyādha-chaura-saṁgha).¹⁴¹ This implies that perhaps the Śavaras did hunting, etc., in an organised way. In the Sāhitya-darpana,
 Dress a direct reference to the Śavaras has been made regarding their language and livelihood. It is said that the "language of the Ābhīras and the Śavaras should be used by those who gained their living by wood and leaves, i.e., by wood-cutting and leaf-gathering (Ābhīri Śavari chapī Kāshthapatrōpajīviṣhū)".¹⁴² From this it follows that the Śavaras had their own language, and that they used to live on food-gathering. Here the reference appears to have been made to the Parna-Śavaras. The Śavaras were very particular about their colourful dress and ornaments. In this context, a particular reference may be made to the account of a young Śavara given by Bāṇa in his Harshacharita. Bāṇa states that "the Śavarayuvā with his hair tied into a crest above his forehead was like a night, that always accompanied him in his wild exploits ... ; his ear had an earring of grass like crystal fastened in it and assumed a green hue from a parrot's wing which ornamented it"¹⁴³... In the Kathāsaritsāgara, a Śavara is described as carrying a bow in his hand with hair tied up in a knot, behind with a creeper, black himself and wearing ^{a loin} a cincture of bilva-leaves.¹⁴⁴ But a more vivid picture of the Śavara and the Śavarī is to be found in the Charyyāpadas. The Śavara women used to adorn themselves with peacock's feather or tail kept on the knot of their hair. (Mōraṅgi-pīchchha parahīna/Śavarī gīvata guñjarī-mālā).¹⁴⁵ They used to decorate themselves with garlands of guñjā-seeds. The garlands of guñjā-seeds were very favourite to the Śavaras as is evident from the verses in the Charyyāpadas as well as from the inscriptions like the Naihāṭi Copper plate of Vallālasena which refers to necklaces of guñjā-seeds as favourites of the Pulinda women.¹⁴⁶ They wore Vajrakuṇḍala in their ears. This is also evident from the Charyyāpadas (Ekeli Śavarī vana hīndai/karṇakuṇḍala vajradhāri).¹⁴⁷ A vivid picture of the dress and ornaments of the Śavara women has been also drawn by Brāhmaṇ-kavi (C. 16th century) as : "...with black bodies, wearing the sprouts of Āśokā-plant and seeds of the wild liquorice (guru-guñji) and black pearls obtained from the bamboos in their braids, the Śavara-women shone like Sandhyā - Lakshmi."¹⁴⁸

The Śavaras were again used to chewing betel-leaves, betel-nuts and camphor as evidenced from the verses in the Charyyāpadas (hiā tñābōlā mahāsuḥē kāpur khāī).¹⁴⁹ Drinking of liquor was very common with them, and they were used to spend even the whole night in merry-making. In one Food verse of the Charyyāpada, there is a wonderful description of an angry Śavara moving about to and fro in the hills and the Śavarī being engaged in anxiously searching or finding out his consort.¹⁵⁰ Both singing and dancing were very common amongst the Śavaras, and the Śavara-songs attained great excellence, and a singing note is even today known as Śavararāga.¹⁵¹

The ancient Śavaras were primarily food-gatherers. They were expert hunters as well. Bāṇa has narrated as to how the Śavaras of the Vindhya forest killed the lions for pearls attached to their nails.¹⁵² But the Śavaras were not simply hunters and food-gatherers. They were engaged in farm activities Food-gathering as well. The Charyyāpadas narrate that pleasures or joys of the Śavara men and women know no bound when they find full-blooming cotton-flowers in the moonlit night (kāpāsu). It is also stated that the Śavaras expressed their great pleasures when Kāganī (paddy) started ripening, and they adopted all sorts of measures for the protection of their paddy-plants against the jackles and vultures and rejoiced with the ripening of Kāganī (rice) and Kaṅguchinā. In the Charyyāpadas it is thus described : Heri śe mōr tailā Food-producing badī khaṣamē samatulā ... kāpāsu phuṭilā Kaṅguchinā pākelā rē Śavara-Śavarī mātela...Chārivāse gadilāre diā chañchālī tanhi tōli śavarō dāha ka-elā kāndai sagun śālī.¹⁵³ It appears from such accounts that the Śavaras were also acquainted with a kind of primitive cultivation, and rice was indeed their staple food.

Besides, the Śavaras were also experts in different crafts, more particularly in making baskets with bamboos and other jungle products. Even the Charyyāpadas vividly describe the Śavaras engaged in various sorts of craft.¹⁵⁴ They were also engaged in all kinds of low occupations. In this connection, a particular reference may be made to the Arthaśāstra wherein it is stated that the "interior of the kingdom should be watered by the trap-keepers (Vāgurika), the Śavaras, Pulindas, Chaṇḍālas and wild tribes (aranyacharāṇ).¹⁵⁵

In this context, it would be very interesting to refer to a host of terracotta plaques discovered from Pāhārpur and other places of Bengal. Many of these terracotta plaques bear various sorts of human representations in diverse positions, some of which have been identified with the Śavaras. If the identification is accepted, there is little doubt in saying that the Śavaras had permanent settlements in ancient Bengal and that they came into close association with other peoples, and thereby played an important role in the then Bengali society. Otherwise, they would not have been depicted in such an elaborate fashion in terracotta plaques. These plaques actually present vivid representations of the Śavara life-patterns. One plaque depicts a Śavara-couple in an embracing position. The Śavara is also represented as wearing Dhuti (a long piece of cloth worn by males) in folds at a little below the navel and held in position at the waist by a belt. In another series of plaques, Śavara's right hand is found on the quiver held on his right shoulder and the left hand being placed on the bow.¹⁵⁶ He also wears a leaf-girdle, and two hands of cord-patterns cross his breast. Further, a Śavara archer has been depicted in another plaque as a bearded figure wearing boots and a leaf-girdle. Besides, there are also plaques depicting a Śavarī as wearing a lower garment upto the ankle fastened with a waist-band. She is also represented as wearing a Śādi (woman's cloth) in a Kāchhā (the hem of a cloth tucked behind at the waist band between the legs) fastened and a scarf as upper garment thrown over her body. Another female figure is found as wearing a leaf-girdle and also a garland of leaves in the Upavīta-fashion (a sacred thread worn by the males of the twice-born). In another plaque, a Śavarī is found wearing Kucha-bandha (breast-knot) round her breast and a scarf on the upper part of her body, which may be the loose end of the Kucha-bandha, and its lower portion bears a leaf girdle. Besides, the female figures are found wearing fillets. A Śavarī carrying her prey is represented with her hair in a bun kept in place by a plain fillet. Another Śavarī wears a small bun. The hair is found arranged in two or three knots. In case of two knots, one is found at the top and another on right. Further, the Śavara archer or warrior is represented as wearing fan shaped head-dress.¹⁵⁷

A study of all these terracotta plaque representations would reveal dress, ornaments and general life-patterns of the Śavaras of ancient Bengal.

It is remarkable to note that the Śavara males and females are represented as wearing Dhuti and Śādi and even boots. Along with these, they are also depicted as wearing leaves or garlands of leaves, their traditional dress. The implication is that many of the Śavaras were imbued with the traditional Bengali fashion of wearing Dhutis, but at the same time they retained their own traditional jungle dress. This is a clear indication that the Śavaras even by the 8th and 9th centuries A.D. were not fully assimilated within the fold of the general patterns of the Bengali culture. The representations of the Śavaras with bows and arrows depict a picture of their traditional hunting occupation. In fact, these terracotta plaques present lively representations of the Śavaras of ancient Bengal.

(vi) Religion :

The Śavaras were extremely religious, and their religious beliefs and practices were/are similar to those of other kindred tribes. They were in the habit of worshipping various deities like Durgā and Chandikā.¹⁵⁸ In this connection, a particular reference may be made to the great deity Vindhyavāsini, the mountain goddess of the Vindhyan region.¹⁵⁹ In a hymn addressed to the Goddess as given in the Harivaṁśa it is stated : "You are worshipped by the Śavaras, Barbaras and Pulindas (Śavarairbbarais-chaiva Pulindaischa supūjitā).¹⁶⁰ In reality, the deity Vindhyavāsini is actually addressed to as Śavarī in the Gaudavāho of Vākpāṭirāja (V.305).¹⁶¹ Again, in the Varāha-purāṇa (28.34), the deity is addressed to as Kirātinī (Kirāta-woman). In Hemachandra's Abhidhāna-chintāmanipariśiṣṭa she is also addressed to as Kirātī.¹⁶² It is thus clear that the deity Vindhyavāsini has been associated with both Śavaras and the Kirātas. But Vindhyavāsini was primarily a deity of the Śavaras. In this context, it would be very interesting to note that one of the rites observed during the Durgā-pūjā in Bengal is actually called Śavarōtsava.¹⁶³ This is a kind of merry-making on the Daśamī-tithi (10th lunar day when the image of Durgā is immersed in Bengal) when the participants cover their bodies with leaves and besmear with mud, etc., to resemble the Śavaras, and then they indulge themselves in all sorts of jumping, singing, beating on drums, etc., including sexual inter-courses as described in the verses of the Kālaviveka and the Kālikā-purāṇa. It is not known whether the peoples participating in the festival actually engaged themselves in such actions as described in the

verses of the Kālaviveka and the Kālikā-purāṇa : bhaṅga-līṅga-kriyābhis-
cha krīḍayeyur=alam janāḥ (61,22-22).¹⁶⁴ Perhaps the participants in the cere-
 mony did indulge in those practices. That is why the Bṛihaddharma-purāṇa
 Worship of deities had to impose certain restrictions on such wild actions in the cere-
 mony by stating : "People should not utter before others words
 which are expressive of such things as the male and female organs of generation;
 they should utter these during the days of the great worship of the goddess Durgā
 in the month of Āśvina (Sept.-Oct). But even then they should never pronounce
 them before their mothers and daughters and female disciples who have not
 been initiated to Śakti-worship. But one who is worthy of worshipping her
 should utter such expressions with a view to creating her pleasure."¹⁶⁵ This
 is the support given in favour of the observance of this festival. It is thus
 clear that the primitive Śavara practices have actually crept into the Durgā-pūjā
 of Bengal as its integral parts.

The religious temperament of the Śavaras is also indicated by
 the account given in the Rāmāyaṇa wherein it is stated that Rāma went
 to visit the hermitage of the Śavarī. It has been narrated in the Epic : "O !
 Rāma, seeing you who is worthy of being saluted by all creatures and who
 is like a god, Śavarī, who is ever devoted to her pious deity will go to heaven."¹⁶⁶
 It is learnt from the Jaina-sūtra that the Śavaras like other allied tribes
 were proficient in the performance of magical rites of various sorts like
 casting the people asleep, opening the door, etc. But at the same time, it
 has been pointed out that the Śavaras did not practise any occult sciences
 for the sake of food, clothes and other luxury goods.¹⁶⁷

While describing the religion of the Śavaras it is to be particularly
 noted that they have attained great celebrity because of their close association
 with the famous temple of Jagannātha at Purī. Today of course, the Suars,
 a section of the Śavaras, are simply continuing as the cook par-excellence
 of the great deity Jagannātha, but previously they were the actual worshippers
 of the Lord of the Universe. In this connection, a reference may be made
 to the story narrated by Kṛishṇa Das, the Oriya poet of the 16th century.
 According to this story, the great king Indradumnya wanted to worship the
 living Vishṇu, and the people were sent out all around in search of the deity.
 One of them, namely, Vidyāpati went to the house of a Śavara chieftain and

married his daughter and thereby learnt that the chief used to worship a living Vishṇu in the forest. One day, Vishṇu refused to partake fruits and wanted to eat cooked rice. At this, the chief got angry with Vidyāpati and threw him into prison. But Vidyāpati managed to get out of the prison and ran away to the king and informed him all about the living Vishṇu. Thereupon, the king went there with his army, but the idol disappeared and the divine Jagannātha voice directed him to build a temple for the installation of the deity. The king was also informed that Vishṇu actually stayed in a black log of wood lying on the sea beach. This log was brought and a carpenter was engaged to make the idol of the deity. The carpenter, however, agreed to do so in a closed door-room and asked the king not to open the door till the making of the image was complete. But the impatient queen opened the door and found the partly made images of Jagannātha, Balarāma and Subhadrā. These unfinished images were then installed in the newly built temple which was consecrated by Brahmā, and the Śavaras became the Sevakas of the images. Subsequently, they were engaged simply as cooks for the preparation of Mahāprasāda (boiled rice offered to the Jagannātha). In this context, it may be further noted that a community known as Suddhā-suār claiming descent from Vidyāpati became in-charge of the kitchen of Jagannātha. Other sections of the Śavara community called Daityas or Daityapatis living at Purī enjoy the great privilege of touching the feet of Jagannātha during Rathayātrā (the car festival of Jagannātha) and Snānayātrā (the bathing festival of Jagannātha) ceremonies. At present, they refuse to call themselves Śavaras, and those living at Purī are now known as Sevakas and the kitchen of Jagannātha is managed by the Suārs.

Not to speak of the Jagannātha temple at Purī, other temples of Orissa bear also close association with the Śavara community. The chief priest of the Liṅgarāja-temple at Bhuvaneśvara is indeed of Śavara descent. Again, in the Śiva temple at Dheñkānal, the Chintapatis are in charge of cooking. They are also a branch of the Daityapatis of the Śavara origin, being perhaps the original worshippers of the deity. At present, they claim to belong to an upper social order being an endogamous unit having no intermarriage with the Śavaras as such. Not only

Śavaras
associated
with other
temples

that, there are also some other temples named after the Śavaras. In this connection, a particular reference may be made to a place called Śavarī-Nārāyaṇa, a famous place of pilgrimage, which has been identified with the principal Śavara town Sora-Arcati Regia.¹⁶⁸ The local people, however, have given the name Śramana-Śavarī after the Rāmāyaṇa. The oldest extant building is indeed the temple of the Sun (Arca) which has been referred to by the foreigners as Arcati Regia.¹⁶⁹ The temple at present no doubt contains an image of Viṣṇu, but it is not a Vaiṣṇava Shrine. On the other hand, there are positive indications that the temple originally belonged to the Sun god. This is proved by the presence of the figure of the Sun god on the temple's very doorway. The presence of this representation of the Sun deity is undoubtedly a distinct indication that the shrine was originally a Sun-temple.¹⁷⁰ Another place of interest as mentioned by Cunningham is the ruined site called Suirkarāj, near Gāzipur, which is derived from Suirs or Śavaras.¹⁷¹ The Sambalpur region was once widely inhabited by the Śavaras.

Many more instances can be cited from Orissa where temples were originally associated with the Śavaras. Subsequently, they were all brought within the fold of Brahmanism. Besides worshipping deities in the temples, a particular reference may be made to the village deities or Grāmadevīs whose worship is very popular in both Orissa and Bengal. At one end of each and every village, a rough stone decorated with vermillion is to be found installed under a tree. Most significantly enough, the Suar headman is invariably the worshipper of these folk deities. The Śavara women move about before the day of the annual ceremony from house to house for the collection of alms. Without any discrimination whatsoever the people of all castes and creeds participate in the worship of these village deities.

On the whole, it may be said that the Śavara religion was or is a form of crude animism. They were or are also believers in many malevolent spirits and worshippers of several deities. Ancestor worship was also very common amongst them. Besides, they were proficient in all sorts of magical rites and witchcraft. Here, a reference may be made to the Bengal Tantricism wherein the Śavara contribution is well-marked. One Siddhāchārya is Śavarī (Śavara)-pāda. He is recorded as a hutsman of the hills of Baṅgāla, who was

converted by Nāgārjuna. Two vernacular Dōhās of Śavarī are also found in the Charyyāchārya.^{(Nos. 28, 50).} Not only that, he was perhaps connected also with new cults and ten Vajrayāna works are assigned to him in the Bstan hgyur. "He appears to be the same as Śavarīśvara, some of whose works in the Bstan hgyur are concerned with Vajra-Yoginī-sādhanā".^{171a} Many of the Śavaras, however, have been brought within the fold of Brahmanism. Most of them have become even converts to Vaishnavism, but at the same time they have been allowed to eat fish and meat. It is because of the influence of the Brahmanical sectarian attitude that the Śavaras became divided also into a number of classes, high and low. The Śavaras at present are, however, primarily a wild nomadic people wandering over hills and forests, living mainly on food-gathering activities, believing in divergent deities and practising all sorts of magical rites.

(vii) Physical features and Ethnic Affiliation :

Regarding the physical characters of the ancient Śavaras of India as can be gleaned from the early literary texts our knowledge is insufficient. In the Bhāgavata-purāṇa, the Śavaras have been described as Raktāksha, i.e., blood or red eyed people.¹⁷² Bāṇa in his Kādambarī has given a detailed account of the Śavaras by stating that they belonged to a community of Akutilāgraktakuntala, i.e., with tips of hair hanging straight.¹⁷³ It is, however, in the Harashacharita that Bāṇa has specifically described some physical characters of the Śavaras. It has been said that the Śavaras possessed Uchchala-lāṭa, i.e., projecting forehead, Sthūlanāsikā, i.e., flat nose, Viśālāksha, i.e., long and extensive eye and Chipitādhara, i.e., thick lower lips and also of dark skin-colour.¹⁷⁴ While referring to the physical characters of the Śavaras mention is also to be made of the story describing them as having descended from the dark skinned flat nosed and dwarf Nishāda who is again said to have been born as a result of the rubbing of the thigh of the corpse of the impious king Veṇa.¹⁷⁵ It would thus appear that the Śavaras were characterised by dark complexion, flat nose, long eyes, projecting forehead, thick lips and red eyes. Besides, a study of the terracotta plaques discovered from Pāhārpur reveals the physical features of the Śavaras. A Śavara is represented as wearing long curly hair falling on shoulders. His countenance also shows features which speak of very primitive characters.

Physical
features
in
literature

It becomes also evident that the Śavaras and the Nishādas possessed more or less identical physical features. In that case, it would not be improper to suggest that the Śavaras and the Nishādas belong to the same ethnic stock. It has been already pointed out that the Nishādas are to be affiliated to the Australoid ethnic stock. If it be so, the Śavaras are also to be attributed to the same racial group. This contention is also borne out by the study of the physical features of the present day Śavaras and their descendants.

The present day Śavaras are characterised by short stature, dark complexion, broad nose, wavy or curly hair, dolichocephalic head and platyrrhine nose. Even the Sauras who are their modern representatives, but more advanced in cultural attainments, are characterised by dark skin-colour, short stature, broad nose and long head. They do not actually possess a good physique. Muller, Cunningham and Cust recognised the Śavaras and their descendants as Kolarians.¹⁷⁶ But Dalton described them as Dravidians.¹⁷⁷ It may be noted here that there is little justification in identifying the Śavaras with the Dravidians. Linguistically, the Śavaras even today belong to Austro-Asiatic language group, i.e., akin to the languages spoken by the tribes of Chhotanāgpur. In that case, the Śavaras are linguistically and physically allied to the Chhotanāgpur primitive tribes. Most of the Austro-Asiatic language-speaking peoples of Chhotanāgpur belong even today to the Australoid racial stock. Accordingly, it may be rightly presumed that the Śavaras and their descendants are to be affiliated to the Australoid racial stock. While speaking of the Śavaras and their descendants in Bengal Risley stated : "Of those races in Bengal with whose appearance I am familiar, they reminded me most strongly of the Bhūmij, who belong to the Muṇḍā family; but I could perceive in them some points of resemblance to the Dravidian Pāhāriās of the Rājmahal hills".¹⁷⁸ It appears then that the ancient Śavaras of Bengal belonged also to the Muṇḍā group, and that they are akin to other primitive peoples of the land.

(viii) Identity :

* There is little difficulty in identifying the ancient Śavaras because their descendants under the same or variant appellations are still to be found widespread in the forest areas of Chhotanāgpur, Orissa, Bengal and other neighbouring regions as would be evident from their present distribution.

The modern Śavaras variously known as Śabar, Śahar, Śurries, Śaur Śar, Śayar, Śuir, Śiwir, Śoriā, Śour, etc., have been well-recognised as the surviving remnants of the ancient Śavaras.¹⁷⁹ They are found well distributed in the district of Gañjām, Vizāgāpatam, Madras, Central provinces, Chatisgarh, Saugor, Damoh and largely in Orissa and to a lesser extent in Bengal.¹⁸⁰ Ptolemy has also referred to a class of the Śavaras whom he called Phyllitae.¹⁸¹ Fleet identified them with the leaf-eating Śavaras, i.e., Parnā-Śavaras.¹⁸² Besides, the Suari of Pliny and Sabarrae of Ptolemy have been identified with the Śavaras or Suaras, a jungle tribe.¹⁸³ The Śavaras are also identified with the Śuarīs or Saoras of the Vizāgāpatam hills and the Śavarīs of the Gōwalior territory.¹⁸⁴

The Amarakōsha makes no distinction between the Kirātas, the Beḍas, Śavaras and other kindred tribes. It includes all within Śūdravarga¹⁸⁵ as :

Chandāla-Pūlava-Mātaṅga-dvākir-iti-janaṅgamāh/
Nishāda-Svapachāva-antevāsi-Chandāla-Pulkaśāh//
Bhedah Kirāta Śavara-Pulindā-Mlechchha-Jātayah/
Vyādhō mrgavadhā-jivo-mrgayur Lubdhko-piśah//

It is very very interesting to note that the ancient Sauvīras have been also identified with the Śavaras by McCrindle.¹⁸⁶ He has also referred to a community in Gōwalior and South Rājputanā known as Surries. In the opinion of McCrindle they were the Saur or Śavaras.¹⁸⁷ The Parnā-Śavaras again have been identified with the Pāns who today form a very low aboriginal caste in Orissa and Eastern India.¹⁸⁸ Even the Sappu (Toppu) Koragars of South Cānārā who also wear leaves perhaps belong to the Śavara community.¹⁸⁹ Rice has told us the Sāukārs (traders) are also Śavara in origins.¹⁹⁰

That the Śavaras were once widespread over different parts of Bengal is attested to by their surviving remnants under different names. Of all the surviving Śavara remnants in Bengal particular reference is to be made to a large number of aboriginal peoples called Lodhās who are also known under different names as Lodhā, Lodh or Nodh.¹⁹¹ The Lodhās are also found in large numbers in Angul, Orissa, Singhbhūm and Midnapur. It may be noted that the Lodhās of Midnapur are said

to be identical with the Śavaras, but in Orissa they are different. Can the Luddhakas referred to in the Chchadanta-Jātaka be made identical with the Lodhās of Bengal ? It is not unlikely that the terms Luddhaka and Lodhā are identical. The Chiriāmārs of Midnapur are also said to be a branch of this tribe. Risley has described the Lodhās as a tribe allied to the Northern Śavaras. In accordance with the measurements taken by Risley, the Lodhās have the average cephalic and nasal indices as 72.6 and 83.4 respectively, and their average stature is 1628.¹⁹² Thus the Lodhās are dolichocephalic and mesorrhine peoples with medium stature. They are generally known as a criminal tribe in Midnapur and adjacent areas living on cultivation, collection of fire-woods and daily labour. The Lodhās have been considerably Brahmanized, but their original Śavara characters are still glaring.

Besides these Lodhās, in the district of Bāñkurā and Midnapur there are the Śavars who are indeed the descendants of the ancient Śavaras. They have been also considerably Brahmanized, and they follow the Brahmanical socio-religious rites and practices.¹⁹³ The ancient Śavaras have been integrated into the Bengali social mould, and some of the so-called scheduled castes of Bengal may be said to be remnants of the ancient Śavaras surviving under various names. This presumption will be borne out by a study in depth of a host of scheduled caste groups. In Bengal there were some castes, the names of which are to be found mentioned in the Bṛihaddharma and Brahmavaivarta Purāṇas. These are Śāvaka, Śāraka, Śāvāra, Śārka, etc. These castes are at present non-extant. But their very names appear to have been derived from the ancient tribal name Śavara. In the Brahmavaivarta-purāṇa, these castes have been described as Patitas, Mlechchhas, etc., i.e., belonging to the lowest order. The first two castes have been, however, included in the Madhyama-saṅkara category in the Bṛihaddharma-purāṇa. The ancient Śavaras and their modern descendants have all been, however, relegated to a very low position and are despised by the Brāhmaṇas and other high caste peoples in the Brahmanical social order.¹⁹⁴

(ix) Observation :

There is thus little doubt that the ancient Śavaras were once wide-spread over different parts of Bengal. But they have been mostly integrated into the Brahmanical social order, and the majority of the lowermost caste

groups in the Brahmanical hierarchy like the Lodhās, Śavars, Suārs, etc., or others under different names, still preserve Śavara surviving elements both in respects of physical features and cultural complexes. In fact, the Śavaras have been also mentioned as a low caste in a late work like the Bhāga-vata-purāna.¹⁹⁵ It is also to be noted that the Śavaras are not to be made absolutely distinct from the Nishādas. It appears that the Śavaras might have been one of the sections of the Nishādas. If the physical features and cultural characteristics of the Bengali people are taken into consideration, it will be noticed that some fundamental physical and cultural traits have been the veritable contributions of the Śavaras and the Nishādas. Another cognate tribal community is the Pulinda.

III. THE PULINDAS

Amongst several other ancient tribes who formed the very base of the Bengali population, the Pulindas along with the Śavaras, Mutibas and Kirātas are also frequently referred to in both literary and epigraphic records. The term Pulinda is derived from Pul+ind meaning barbarous or Mlechchhas being equal to the Chāṇḍālas.

The name Pulinda is interpreted in Tibetan by Gyunpo, i.e., outcaste; and in Chinese, by tu-kia, i.e., 'the race which kills the beasts for their food'. In an almost similar way, Ptolemy uses the epithet agriophagoi, i.e., agri (wild) and phagos (eater).¹⁹⁶ All these foreign appellations denoting one who lives on wild beasts or raw meat bear the very nature and character of the Pulindas.

(i) Early References :

The Pulindas like the Puṇḍras, the Āndhras, the Śavaras and the Mutivas are also mentioned for the first time in the Aitareya-Brāhmaṇa (Antan-vah-prajā bhakshīstetita-etyendhyāḥ Puṇḍrāḥ-Śavarāḥ-Pulindā-Mutivā dasyudatya vahavo bhavanti Vaiśvāmitrā, dasyūnām bhūyishthāḥ).¹⁹⁷ Thus the Pulindas, Early texts the Śavaras, the Mutivas and the Āndhras are grouped together and designated as the Dasyus.¹⁹⁸ According to this Brāhmaṇa text, the Pulindas and other peoples mentioned in association with them lived in a large number beyond the border (udantyāḥ). In the Amarakōsha, the Pulindas along with the Kirātas and the Śavaras are mentioned as outcastes. (Kirāta-Śavara-

Pulinda-Mlechchha-jāṭayah).¹⁹⁹ Accordingly, the Pulindas are also called Mlechchhas. Oppert, however, expressed the opinion that the Puṇḍras, the Āndhras, the Śavaras and the Pulindas are to be grouped together as belonging to the category of wild tribes.²⁰⁰ Besides, in the Vishnu-purāṇa the word Pulinda is applied to any wild or barbarian tribe.²⁰¹ According to an ancient tradition, the Āndhras, the Pulindas and the Śavaras are designated as dog-eaters or Mlechchhas.²⁰² Again, in the Garuda-purāṇa, the Pulindas are mentioned along with the Kambojas and the Karṇāṭas.²⁰³ In the Matsya and the Vāyu Purāṇas, the Pulindas are, however, grouped together with the Ābhiras, the Vaidarbhas (Western Berar) and the Dandakas (Mahārāshṭra)²⁰⁴ (Pulinda-Vindhya-Pushika or Mutiya-Vaidarbha-Dandakaihasaha).²⁰⁵ From this reference it appears that the Pulindas are to be associated with the tribes of the Vindhyan region as well. In the Rāmāyaṇa and in the Brhatsamhitā, the Pulindas have been referred to as Pulindagaṇa.²⁰⁶ In the Arthasāstra, the Pulindas along with the Śavaras are mentioned.²⁰⁷ In fact, the Śavaras have been often made synonymous with the Pulindas.²⁰⁸ In the early literary texts, the Pulindas have been thus closely associated with the Śavaras as possessing common cultural traits and perhaps also identical physical features.²⁰⁹

The Pulindas have been also referred to by the foreign writers. As for instance, Ptolemy refers to the Pulindas as Poulindae or Pulindaiagna-phagoi.²¹⁰ The term Poulindae is not also unknown to the author of the Periplus of the Erythraean sea.²¹¹ These Poulindae are indeed the Pulindas.²¹² The earliest epigraphic reference to the Pulindas is to be found in the inscriptions of Aśoka. In Rock Edict XIII the Pulindas are mentioned as Pālidās whose name occurs along with the Āndhras, the Bhojas, the Mutivas, etc., as wild Foreign or forest peoples.²¹³ Similarly, in the Ajaigarh rock-inscription, accounts the Pulindas along with the ~~Bhojas~~ and the Śavaras are also described and ins- as wild tribes.²¹⁴ It appears that the Pulindas were originally an aboriginal community centering around the Vindhyas, and that is why they are sometimes called Vindhyan mountaineers, but later on, the term was also applied to the aboriginal peoples in general.

(ii) Origins :

In the Aitareya-Brāhmaṇa an identical origin has been ascribed to the Pulindas, the Āndhras, the Śavaras, the Mutivas and other wild tribes

living on the border of the Aryan domain.²¹⁵ All these tribes are described as the descendants of Viśvāmitra's fifty sons. Viśvāmitra cursed his fifty sons who were relegated to the lowest caste order in the society when they refused to accept his proposal to treat Sunahṣēpa (Devarata) as his eldest son.^{215a} The Pulindas, the Śavaras, the Mutivas, the Āndhras and others were the offsprings of Viśvāmitra's fifty sons, and obviously, all these peoples occupied the lowest positions in the Brahmanical society. The origin of the Pulindas has been, however, differently described in the Mahāvamśa.²¹⁶ It is said in the Mahāvamśa that Pulinda was born out of the union of Vijaya (conqueror of Ceylon) with the Yakkha-princess Kuvāṇṇa. Again, the Pulindas are said to have originated from the foam thrown off by Vāśiṣṭha's cow.²¹⁷ But in the Padma-purāṇa the Pulindas have been described as the descendants of the Nishādas who sprang out of the left thigh of the corpse of the impious king Veṇa.²¹⁸ According to Usanas (16), Pulinda was the illegitimate offspring of a Vaiśya male from a Kshatriya female.²¹⁹ In the Vaikhānasa-smārta-sūtra (X. 14), a similar account of the origin of the Pulindas has been given.²²⁰

It would appear from a critical appraisal of the legends regarding the origins of the Pulindas that they were perhaps the offsprings springing from the union between the Aryan and the non-Aryan tribes. But originally, they were Mlechchas or Dasyus. As they were outside the four traditional social orders, Manu classed them amongst the Mlechchhas or Dasyus.²²¹ In fact, the Pulindas and other tribes are said to have originated from Mlechchha who sprang from the body of Veṇa. Thus a vile or low origin has been always attributed to the Pulindas. Even this origin has been ascribed to the Pulindas only after their Hinduization.

(iii) Settlements and Movements :

The Pulindas along with the Puṇḍras, the Śavaras, the Kirātas and others have been described as peoples of different parts of India. In the Epics, the Pulindas appear to have been peoples of the South.²²² In the Kishkin-dhyākāṇḍa of the Rāmāyaṇa, it has been specifically stated that the Pulindas occupied the middle portion of the Deccan.²²³ Besides, in the Rāmāyaṇa, their settlements have been referred to in other parts of India as well, Northern, Eastern, Central and Southern, even upto Ceylon.²²⁴ The Rāmāyaṇa locates

the habitat of the Pulindas between Ālwar and Mathurā.²²⁵ In Central India, their main concentration was in the Vindhya region, and they were thus the neighbours of the Āndhras who occupied the territory watered by the Godāvarī and the Kṛishṇā.²²⁶ In that case, they dwelt with the Bhils, the Śavaras and the Gonds in such a way as to be hardly differentiated.

The settlement of the Pulindas in South and East is also well testified to by the statement made in the Mahābhārata which actually locates the Āndhras, the Pulindas and the Śavaras in the Deccan (Dakshinā-pathajanmā nah sarve naravar Āndhrakāh-Guhāh-Pulindāh-Śavarāśchuchukā-Madrakaiḥ-saha).²²⁷ It is further learnt from the Mahābhārata that during the southern conquests of Bhīma, Sahadeva defeated the Pulindas in battles and went to the caves of Kishkindhyā.²²⁸ The Pulindas were also familiar to the people of the Karṇāṭaka.²²⁹ According to the Garuda and the Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇas the Pulindas were the peoples of the South.²³⁰ The Mārkaṇḍeya-purāṇa, however, refers to the Pulindas along with the Śavaras in the southern region.²³¹ But the same Purāṇa again refers to the Pulindas as living in the Himalayas and inter-mixing with the Kirātas.²³² A section of these peoples might have also lived in West on the Ārāvalli hill.^{232a} Similarly, the Matsya and the Vāyu Purāṇas, the Pulindas along with the Śavaras are described as Dakshinā-patha-vāsinah, i.e., inhabitants of the South (Teshām pare janapadā Dakshinā-patha-vāsinah).²³³ Again, the Matsya-purāṇa locates the Janapada of the Pulindas in the North of Bhāratavarsha.²³⁴ Besides, the land of the Pulindas is also grouped with the land of the Kirātas in the same Purāṇa.²³⁵ It is again stated that the abode of the Pulindas was watered by the Ganges and designated as an Aryan Janapada.²³⁶ In the story of Udayana as related in the Bṛhatkathā, the kingdom of the Pulindas has been located in the Vindhyan region.²³⁷ From the Kathā-sarit-sāgara it is learnt that the Pulindas were associated with the Nerbudda (Rewa) and the Vindhyan region (Pulinda-rāja sundarī-nābhi-maṇḍala nipitā salilā) (Revā).²³⁸ Further, in the Matsya and Vāyu-Purāṇas, the Pulindas are located in the Vindhyan and Southern regions of India.²³⁹ Pulindā Vindhya Pushikā (?) Vaidarbhā Dandakaiḥ saha/ (Pulindā Vindhya Mūlikā Vaidarbhā Dandakaiḥ saha). In the Kathā-sarit-sāgara as well the Pulindas have been described as peoples of the Vindhyan hills.²⁴⁰

In this context, it may be noted that the capital city of the Pulindas named Pulindanagara has been actually referred to in the Mahābhārata.²⁴¹ This city was not far from Bhilsā, and in the opinion of Raychaudhuri, the same may be identified with Rūpnāth, the find-spot of one recension of the Minor Rock Edict I of Aśoka.²⁴² The Navagrāma grant of the Mahārāja Hastin of the year 198 (A.D.517) refers to a Pulinda-rāja-rāshtra which perhaps lay in the territory of the Parivrajaka-kings, i.e., in the Dabālā region in the northern part of the present Madhyapradesh.²⁴³ Their capital has been also located on south-east of Daśārṇa on the basis of the Information derived from the Mahābhārata.²⁴⁴ The Pulindas have been again described as dwelling on the river Daśān (Dhasan) in Bundelkhand.²⁴⁵ Kālidāsa in his Meghadūta places the Pulindas in the Vidiśā or Bhilsa region.²⁴⁶ It is thus evident that the Pulindas settled also in Central and Southern regions. In the early Indian literature, the Pulindas are mostly associated with the Vidhyān region (Pulindā-Vindhyāśīleyāh). Again, the Pulindas are also to be located in Western India. A particular reference in this context may be made to the account of Ptolemy who places them in the interior behind Larike (the country of Lāṭa).²⁴⁷

The settlement of the Pulindas in the Eastern region is to be found around Magadha.²⁴⁸ It has been suggested that the Pulindas were primarily the peoples of South India, and that one of their branches might have moved towards East.²⁴⁹ Here, a reference may be made to the Aitareya-Brāhmaṇa wherein the Pulindas have been grouped together with the Puṇḍras, the Śavaras, the Mutivas and the Āndhras implying their association with both Southern and Eastern regions. Further, the grouping of the Pulindas with the Puṇḍras in Bengal and ^{the} Śavaras is very significant. The Puṇḍras were undoubtedly the people of Bengal, and their grouping with the Pulindas no doubt suggests the latter's presence in Bengal as well. Again, in the Matsya-purāṇa, the land of the Pulindas has been made contiguous to that of the Kirātas.²⁵⁰

It follows accordingly that they might have lived in the Himalayas along with the Kirātas as well. It would, therefore, appear that the Pulindas like the Kirātas, the Śavaras, the Puṇḍras, etc., were also once spread over different parts of Bengal and North-eastern India. That the Pulindas were one of the peoples of ancient Bengal is clearly borne out by the description of their

life-patterns in the Naihāṭi Copper plate of Vallālasena.²⁵¹ Not only that, even the Charyyāgītis also speak of the Pulindas as : Chanda-sūjja dui chakā, sithi samhāra Pulinda.²⁵² That the Pulindas were also peoples of Assam and Bengal appear to be attested to by a medieval work entitled Shatpañchāśaddeśa-vibhāga (C.16th or 17th century) wherein the Pulinda is placed to the east of Śīlahatṭa and possibly to the south of Kāmarūpa. This Śīlahatṭa is to be identified with the modern Sylhet. Again, in the same work, the Matsya-country is placed to the north of that of the Pulinda and east of Kaccha, the latter being Kācchār or Cochbihār. Kacchapa (Kaccha) has been actually placed by the Bhaviṣhya-purāṇa in the North-eastern region of Vaṅga. In this context, a reference may be also made to Pargiter's division of the Pulindas into several branches, namely, Western branch, Himalayan branch related to the Kirātas and Southern branch.^{252a} The Pulindas belonging to the second and third branches might have infiltrated into the plains of Bengal.

(iv) Life-Patterns :

Like many other aboriginal wild tribes, the Pulindas lived also in the forests and hills living on food-gathering activities. Their primary subsistence consisted of the forest-products like fruits, roots, herbs, etc. It has been clearly stated in the Vaikhāṇasa-smārta-sūtra that the Pulindas subsisted on the forest-produces.²⁵³ They also hunted animals as available in the forest and ate raw meat.²⁵⁴ The Pulindas have been also described as dog-eaters, i.e., eater of the flesh of the dog.²⁵⁵ In the Arthaśāstra, the Pulindas have been actually represented as hunters.²⁵⁶ Thus Kauṭilya says : Vāgurikaśāvarapulindachandālaranyacharā raksheshuh, i.e., the tribes like the Śavaras, the Pulindas and the Chandālas wandered in the forests, and the protection of the internal zone of the kingdom was vested in their hands as they were hunters par-excellence.²⁵⁷ According to Uśanas, the Pulindas lived by killing wild beasts.^{257a} This is also clearly borne out by Ptolemy who refers to Pulindai agriophagoi, i.e., raw flesh and wild fruits eating Pulindas.²⁵⁸ Alberunī also speaks of the Pulindas as hunters of the plains and robbers.^{258a} Subsequently, they might have learnt cattle-rearing and accepted it as their occupation. Thus according to Uśanas the Pulindas lived by rearing cattle as well.²⁵⁹ A very interesting information in this regard is furnished by the Naihāṭi Copper plate of Vallālasena which reveals that the Pulindas lived in forests, and

their womanfolk were strong, stout, healthy and youthful.²⁶⁰ The Pulinda women were also very fond of garlands made of guñja-seeds, and the menfolk used to be very keen to obtain their favour by supplying the same. This has been very beautifully expressed in the aforesaid inscription. It has been also stated that the men of the Pulinda tribe picked up pearls (mistaking for guñja-seeds) as they were yearning to passionately embrace the jar-like breasts of their beautiful wives who could be pleased by the (present of) necklaces of (even) guñja-seeds.²⁶¹ Again, the beauty of the Pulinda women has been described by the poet Sāṁva (c. A.D. 1550) as : '... the coquettish and charming Pulinda women shone in company of the female dwellers'.²⁶² The Pulindas have been again described as wicked and degraded peoples practising all evil customs.²⁶³ The Pulindas were also veteran fighters and attained celebrity as a separate political entity. It is learnt from the Udayana legend that the Pulindas were the allies and auxiliaries of the king of Kauśāmbī, and their kingdom was situated amidst the Vindhya on the route from Kauśāmbī to Ujjayinī.²⁶⁴ Their capital city Pulindanagara was also named after them as already referred to.

(v) Religion :

The Pulindas along with the Śavaras worshipped the Mother or Earth Goddess.²⁶⁵ The Devī living on the peaks of the mountains used to be worshipped by the Śavaras, the Pulindas and other aboriginal peoples of India. In the Kathā-Sarit-Sāgara, it is said that the Pulinda king adored the cruel Devī and offered her human victims.²⁶⁶ As for instance, Vindhyavāsini, the goddess presiding over the Vindhya mountain, was worshipped by the Pulindas, the Śavaras and others.²⁶⁷ In a hymn to the goddess as recorded in the Harivaṁśa it is stated : "You are worshipped by the Śavaras, the Barbaras and the Pulindas" (Śavarairbarrbbariśchaiva Pulindaiścha supūjita (3234)).²⁶⁸ In the Prākṛita poem Gaudavāho of Vākpati, the goddess is actually addressed to as a Śavarī. (Śavara-woman). In the Varāha-purāṇa (28, 34), she is again addressed to as Kirāntī, i.e., Kirāta-woman, and in the Abhidhāna-chintāmaṇi-pariśiṣṭa of Hemachandra, Kirātī is given as one of names of the deity.²⁶⁹ The deity Vindhyavāsini was in fact commonly worshipped by the Śavaras, the Pulindas, the Kirātas and other aboriginal tribes of India. The Pulindas are again said to have worshipped Nārāyaṇī, another name of Durgā, who is again described as very fond of drinks and meat.²⁷⁰ Even

now, a mountain deity like Marāṅ-Buru or the god living on the top of the mountain or hill is worshipped by the Santals and other tribes.²⁷¹ Like other primitive peoples, the Pulindas also practised or observed many other rites and practices having bearings of animism and magic. Further, the Pulindas appear to have been totemistic peoples. The sons of the Pulinda chief are said to have borne names of animals, and this is a clear indication of their belief in totemism.

(vi) Physical Features :

Information regarding the physical features of the Pulindas is very meagre. The Pulindas are, however, said to have descended from the dark-skinned, flat-nosed and dwarfish Nishādas. This has been clearly stated in the Vishnudharmottara.²⁷² The Bṛihat-kathā-śloka-saṃgraha has drawn striking picture of the physical features of the Pulindas who have been described as "appearing like a forest blackened in the fire". In fact, they have been compared with burnt trunks.²⁷³ In other words, the Pulindas had dark skin colour. Similarly, it is stated in the Nāṭyaśāstra (XXI,89) that the Pulinda is to be presented as one bearing black complexion. Further, in the Bṛihat-kathā-śloka-saṃgraha, the Pulinda has been described as Nikharva, i.e., dwarf having copper coloured eyes.²⁷⁴ In general, the physical features of the Pulindas appear to have been characterised by short stature, dark skin-colour and flat or broad nose. Not only that, the Naihāṭi Copper plate of Vallālasena speaks also of the good physique and beauty of the Pulinda women.²⁷⁵ But in the Kathā-sarit-sāgara, the Pulindas have been represented as human victims to Durgā, and they do not appear to have possessed any pleasing features.²⁷⁶ It would therefore appear that the Pulindas like the Nishādas belonged to the Australoid ethnic stock.

From the meagre information relating to the ethnic characters of the Pulindas it may be said that their physical features are indicative of their affiliation to the Australoid ethnic stock. In fact, the Pulindas along with other tribal communities like the Nishādas, the Śavaras, the Kollas, etc., may be affiliated to the Australoid racial stock characterised by short stature, dark skin colour, broad or platyrrhine nose and stout built.²⁷⁷ It has been also suggested that linguistically as well, the Pulindas like the

aforesaid tribes were also speakers of the Austro-Asiatic speech.²⁷⁸ In fact, even the very name Pulinda appears to be of Austro-Asiatic origin. It has been pointed out that the names with such prefixes as pam, par, pal, etc., are of Austro-Asiatic derivation. The term Pulinda originated from Pal+inda like kal+inda=kulinda.²⁷⁹ But Oppert expressed the opinion that the Pulindas were Dravidian speakers, for which there is hardly any concrete evidence.²⁸⁰ But if the Pulindas of Bengal belonged to the Himalayan branch and other tribes of Assam as already referred to, it may be possible to affiliate them like the Kirātas to the Mongoloid ethnic stock as well. It may be further urged that the Austric speaking peoples infiltrated into India also through the North-eastern region, and as such, the Pulindas became associated with the Kirātas. At present, it is, however, very difficult to ascertain the ethnic affiliation of the Pulindas with any amount of certainty. But the close association of the Pulindas with the Śavaras and the Nishādas perhaps speaks of their affiliation to the Australoid ethnic stock.

(vii) Identity :

As to the present representatives of the ancient Pulindas, it has been pointed out by Oppert that the modern Pallar, Pulayar and their kindred tribes bear resemblance in respect of the name, habit and customs with the ancient Pulindas.²⁸¹ In Bengal however, no distinct clues are available in respect of any surviving remnants of the ancient Pulindas. From the available information it is, however, evident that the Pulindas were not very widespread in ancient Bengal. They scarcely figure in the early literary texts and epigraphic records of Bengal. Even no community in Bengal having any faint semblance with the name and other characters of the ancient Pulindas could be traced. It may be, however, suggested that the Paliyās perhaps represent the ancient Pulindas of Bengal. Risley has taken the Paliyās as a cultivating caste of North Bengal.²⁸² They are also said to have been originally Koch. In that case, their ancestors, the Pulindas might be affiliated to the Mongoloid group. Again, Dey has traced the remnants/survivals of the ancient Pulindas amongst the Pods of Bengal.^{282a} But the Pods, a low caste of Bengal, appear to be the survivors of the ancient Paṇḍras outlined in the following pages. In reality the Pods today claim to be Paṇḍra-Kshatriyas. It is also likely that the Pulindas and the Paṇḍras were cognate peoples

and the latter might have been derived from the former. The very fact that the Pulindas have been mentioned along with the Puṇḍras reveals that they might have also lived in Bengal along with other tribes. It is quite likely that the Pulindas might have mingled with the Puṇḍras and other tribes, and as a result, they have lost their identity and got merged with the Bengali people.

(viii) Observation :

From whatever little information that has been gathered it may now be contended that the Pulindas might have belonged to the Australoid ethnic stock speaking an Austro-Asiatic language like the Śavaras and others or to the Mongoloid group like the Kirātas, and as such, they might be regarded as an element forming the very substratum of the Bengali people and culture. That the Pulindas, like the Puṇḍras, the Śavaras, the Mutibas, etc., were non-Aryan peoples of Bengal is clearly borne out by the statement made in the Aitareya-Brāhmaṇa wherein all these peoples have been described as Dasyus (ete=ndhrāḥ Puṇḍrāḥ Śavarāḥ Pulindā Mūtibā ity=udan-tyā bahavo bhavanti Vaiśvāmitrā Dasyūnām bhūyishthāḥ).^{282b} Thus the Pulindas along with other cognates were all originally outside the Aryan orbit, and subsequently they were brought within the fold of Brahmanism. But before Brahmanization, Buddhism also classed them among the 'inferior races' (Nīchakula) and Mlechchha (barbarians) and frontier population (Pratyanta-janapada).²⁸³ In fact, in the great Epic, the Pulindas have been frequently mentioned in the company of the sinners or bad peoples. It is said that the condition of the sinners is like that of the Pulinda, and that they will be reborn in the families of the Pulindas, the Śavaras, etc.²⁸⁴ In spite of the vile and low position, the Pulindas along with other indigenous tribes of Bengal have been also classed as Kshatriyas in some early texts.²⁸⁵ But generally, they have been all classed as Śūdras.

IV. General Observation

From the above discussion on three primeval tribal communities of Bengal, it would appear that they were perhaps the true indigenes of the land, and that they were drawn towards the Brahmanical beliefs and practices to such an extent that most of them were also included within the general framework of the caste hierarchy. Accordingly, they have been given recognition as a caste even by the Dharmasūtra-writers. As for instance,

according to Baudhyāyana (i.9.3,ii.2.33), Vasiṣṭha, (18,8), Manu (x.8) and Yājñavalkya (i. 91), the Nishāda is the offspring arising out of the marriage of a Brāhmaṇa male with a Śūdra women. In other words, the Nishāda, though of primitive tribal community, has been given recognition as an Anulōma-caste.²⁸⁶ According to other Dharmaśāstras like those of Baudhāyana and Manu and Kauṭilya's Arthaśāstra, Pārasāva is said to be another name for Nishādas the Nishāda. But Gautama makes a distinction between the two, and the Nishāda is described as the offspring of a Brāhmaṇa male by a Vaiśya woman and the Pārasāva, of a Brāhmaṇa male and Śūdra woman. Nārada, however, makes the Nishāda as the offspring of a Kshatriya male and Śūdra female. According to Uśanas, the Nishāda is the illegitimate offspring of a Brāhmaṇa from a Śūdra woman, who subsists of killing wild beasts and selling fishes.²⁸⁷ There is no doubt that the Nishādajāti was created when the Nishādas were brought within the Brahmanical fold. But the writers of the Smṛti-texts have tried to explain the origins of the Nishāda caste by both Anulōma and Pratilōma unions. There is hardly any agreement amongst them in this regard. This shows as to how the Nishādas were transformed into a caste, and while describing their origin, various writers tried to explain in different ways. But the fact remains that the Nishādas were actually transformed into a caste and given due recognition as such, though placed at the bottom of the social ladder.

In the same way, the Śavaras like the Nishādas were/are a very primitive tribal community, the members of which are still to be found surviving in a very primitive stage of their culture in Orissa and Bihar, and they have been also largely transformed into a caste belonging to a very low social position. A sort of recognition has been also given by creating a mythical story by which their origin has been traced from Viśvāmitra's sons. This Śavaras fictitious story was created as early as the Aitareya-Brāhmaṇa.²⁸⁸ Not only that, in the Bhāgavata-purāṇa the Śavaras have been actually described as a low caste. In Bengal, the Śavaras have been largely assimilated within the Brahmanical fold as a distinct caste order under various forms or names. It has been shown that in certain cases, the name Śavara has been modified as Suār. In other cases, they have been assimilated under new names. It has been stated that the Lodhās of the district of Midnapur are indeed the

modern descendants of the ancient Śavaras, and they have already formed into a caste. This is how the Śavaras were largely assimilated within the Hindu community.

Like the Śavaras, the Pulinda was another cognate tribe described as living in the hills. It has been found out from the above discussions on the Pulindas that they were also a very important indigenes of Bengal. These peoples were largely assimilated and formed into a caste either by changing their original name or by retaining their original tribal nomenclature under modified forms. Their origin has been also explained by Uśanas who says that a Pulinda is the illegitimate issue of a Vaiśya male from a Kshatriya female, and that he lives by rearing cattle and by killing wild animals.²⁸⁹ In Bengal, the Pulinda as a caste figures in the Bṛihadharma-purāṇa and also in the Jātimālā. In the former text, the Pulinda has been described as a Mlechchha caste, i.e., an untouchable caste at the lowest bottom of the social ladder. Not only that, even myths were created to trace the origin of the Pulindas to the sons of Viśvāmitra as described in Aitareya-Brāhmaṇa.²⁹⁰ The Pulindas have been also formed into a caste in Bengal under a modified name as Paliyās who are now a cultivating caste of Northern Bengal.

This is how all the above mentioned tribes were largely assimilated and included within the fold of Brahmanism and Brahmanical social structure. A consideration in depth of the physical characters of these peoples as described in the early literary texts would reveal their ethnic affinities with the Australoid racial stock. Though all these peoples today speak Bengali language yet a linguistic analysis of the language spoken by them would show its affiliation with the Austro-Asiatic speech. In regard to their cultural patterns, it has been noted that though they have adopted many Hindu cultural elements, their basic socio-religious life-patterns still persist in their respective primitive forms which are not distinct from the cultural patterns of other Australoid peoples of Chhotanāḡpur. It is because of these very facts, it may be contended that they were assimilated and given recognition as castes and relegated to a very low social position. An overall consideration leads to the conclusion that these three primeval communities along with a few others may be recognised as true indigenes of Bengal forming the very substratum of the

Bengali people and culture.

Besides the true indigenes of Bengal as delineated above, there were several other tribal or semi-tribal communities living in Bengal from remote antiquity. They came and settled in Bengal and wielded great power and exercised lasting influence on diverse aspects of the Bengali life and culture. Not only that, some of these early communities even confronted the Aryan immigrants, but were vanquished/subdued in such a way that they became fully/partially Brahmanized. Because of the direct and intimate relationship/ contact of these early peoples with the Aryans either as friends or foes, all of them have been largely recorded in all relevant details in various ancient documents which furnish necessary materials for their entho-historical reconstruction. Since all these early peoples figure largely in most of the early and later historical documents, they have been branded as the Ancient Peoples of Bengal. Most of these ancient peoples who figured prominently in historical and cultural milieu of Bengal have been treated in the next Chapter.

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285. Panchanan Tarkaratna, MBH, Vol.I, Ādiparvan (I), Chap. CIV, 11, 51-54, pp.43, 114; Vol.II, Āśvamedhaparvan, Chap.XXIX, 13-18, p.2053, VISP, IV, 8, 1 ; MSP, 48 ; MS, X, 44.
286. Kane, HD, Vol.II, pp.53,86.
287. Ibid, pp.53, 86-87.
288. Ibid, p.47.
289. Ibid, p.88.
290. Ibid.

CHAPTER - SIX

ANCIENT PEOPLES OF BENGAL

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In the previous Chapter the discourse on the 'Indigenes' has been made with the primary object of tracing the very base or substratum of the composition of the people and culture of Bengal. Excluding those 'Indigenes' who are virtually non-extant today in Bengal because of their amalgam with all other peoples who came to this region in subsequent periods, there were several other peoples who figure prominently in various ancient documents, literary and epigraphic, which furnish considerably detailed materials for their ethno-historical reconstruction. Again, those very peoples played the most vital roles in diverse fields of activities of the people of ancient Bengal through long centuries of her history which is succinctly glaring from the historical period. In fact, those peoples acted outstandingly in moulding and remoulding the Bengali culture as it stands today. Since those peoples have been described with considerably relevant details in various early documents shedding light on their manifold achievements, they have been branded 'Ancient Peoples' as distinguished from the 'Aborigines' and the 'Indigenes' of Bengal treated in the preceding two Chapters.

The present Chapter makes an analytical study of those very ancient peoples of Bengal in a somewhat comprehensive manner. Most significantly, those ancient peoples of Bengal represented well-defined and broadly determined different quarters of ancient Bengal, and their treatment has been made accordingly. Excluding the minor/insignificant ones, the major and historically and culturally the most potential ancient peoples of the different regions of ancient Bengal have been treated here with relevant details relating to their names, early notices, origins, settlements and movements, physical features and ethnic affiliations, culture and life-patterns, identities and contributions. These very potential ancient peoples of Bengal included amongst others the Vaṅgas, the Suhmas and the Rāḍhās, the Puṇḍras and the Gauḍas representing Eastern, Southern, Western and Northern regions of ancient Bengal.

I. The VAṄGAS

Of all tribal or semi-tribal communities of ancient Bengal, the oldest and most widely known one was the Vaṅga after whom the whole country and her people have been named as Vaṅga or Vaṅgadeśa, Vaṅgāla, i.e., Vaṅga country and Vāṅgālī (Vaṅgālī), i.e., the people of Bengal/Bengali people.¹

i) Derivations and Meanings :

As to the derivations and meanings of the word it may be noted that some scholars have suggested that the term Vaṅga originated from the Tibetan word bans or ban meaning marshy or moist land, i.e., watery land.^{1a} This implies that the entire area criss - crossed by rivers and marshy land was called Vaṅga. Again, one of the meanings of the word Vaṅga is cotton (Kāpās/tūlā). In other Indo-Aryan languages of Eastern India Vāṅg means Kāpās-tree, and in Bhōjpurī language, Vāṅgor (Vānput) means Kāpās-kōs.² It appears that the term Vaṅga has an inseparable connection with the cotton cultivation and industry, and the land producing cotton and excelling in manufacturing cotton fabrics came to be called Vaṅga, i.e., the country named after its chief production. The Muslim writers, however, called Vaṅga as simply Bang. Again, Vaṅga means also tin, i.e., raṅga, and in the Amarakōsha, the expression is Raṅga-vaṅga. Tin was, however, absent in Bengal, but available in Malaya, Pegu, China and East Indies. From these countries, tin might have been supplied to different parts of India through the coastal parts of South Bengal. Accordingly, the region importing tin from South-east Asia and supplying the same to other parts of India might have been called Vaṅga, i.e., named tin. But the former derivation appears to be more substantive. Moreover, in the findings of Phayre and Gerini a reference to Bong-long is found and its peoples have been called Bong. The expression Bong-long has been taken to be the original form of Bāṅgala.³ The term Vaṅga has been accordingly taken to be of foreign origins.

From the term Vaṅga originated several other words with the addition of suffixes, such as, Vaṅgāla, Vāṅgāl, Vaṅgāl, Bengāl, Bhangāla, Bengala, etc. Of all these words again, Vaṅgāla is the original one, and the subsequent Muslims

and Portuguese writers transformed it into Bangāl and Bengala. The term Vāṅgāl or Vaṅgāl is a colloquial transformation of Vaṅgāla meaning the inhabitants of Vaṅgāladeśa. The word Vaṅgāla is again derived from Vaṅga + āl (āli). It has been contended that āla has been again a derivation from the Dravidian word ālam which is a verbal derivative form from āl meaning to possess, and the expression Vaṅgālam denotes marshy and moist land.⁴ Again, in Mech language, the terms Vāṅg and lā denote capture, and Vaṅga appears to be derived from Vaṅg+lā. If it be so, the suffix āl was added subsequently by the local people. Regarding the derivation of Bangāl (Vaṅgāla), Abul Fazal in the 16th century states : "Its former rulers raised mounds measuring ten yards in height and twenty in breadth throughout the province, which were called āl. From the suffix āl the name Bengal took its rise and currency."⁵ As to this derivation, Sircar points out: "Although the derivation may be wrong and Vaṅgāla may have sprung from Vaṅga + the Prākṛit suffix āla in the sense of a notable district belonging to Vaṅga ... the interesting mention of the earthen mounds meant for keeping off the encroachment of sea-water from cornfields refers to a condition prevailing in the Bakhergunge region of the coastal area of Bengal even today".⁶ The original word Vaṅgāla was transliterated by the Muslims as Bang or Bangāla or Bangālah (Bangālā). From this word, the Portuguese derived the word Bengala. Tārānāth translated the same word as Bhaṅgāla. In Hindi language, the Bengali speaking region is called Vaṅgāl which has been actually transliterated by the English as Bengal.⁷ The term Vaṅgālī (from Vaṅgāla; meaning the people speaking Bengali language) is used in other parts of India to denote "the people of Bengal. The English transliterated form of Vaṅgālī is Bengali or Bengalee. In Bengali language, the term Baṅgālī is used to denote the peoples of Bengal. At present, Vaṅga and Vaṅgāla are generally used to denote or indicate the whole Bengali language-speaking area, and its peoples are thereby called Vāṅgālī or Baṅgālī.

ii) Early References :

The Rigveda does not mention the Vaṅgas or Vaṅgadeśa implying thereby that these peoples and their country were not known to the R̥gvedic hymn composers. It is, however, in the Aitareya-Āraṇyaka that the Vaṅgas figure along with the Puṇḍras and the Vagadhas⁸ (Vaṅgāvagadhās=Cherapādāh). In the Atharvaveda, the expression is found in an amended form as Magadha-Vaṅga-Matsyāh.⁹ Here, Vaṅga-Magadhah implying the Vaṅga and Magadha peoples have been specifically referred to. The Vaṅgas have been again compared or rather called birds as attested

to by the expression : Cherapādāh (Vayāmsi Vaṅgāvagadhās-Cherapādāh Magadāh).^{9a} Though the exact meaning or significance of the expression is not distinctly clear, it appears that the Vaṅgas and the Vagadhas have been plausibly delineated by their totemic names. It naturally implies that the Vaṅgas might have the birds as their totems. The Vaṅga territory has been further described by the Vedic Aryans in the Aitareya-Brāhmaṇa (about the 7th century, B.C.), as the land of the barbarians. It is also stated in the same Brāhmaṇa that the Puṇḍras, the Andhras and the Śavaras live on the border of the Ārya country, and the bulk of them are the Dasyus.¹⁰ It may thus be contended that in the post-Vedic texts, the Vaṅgas have been portrayed either as birds or barbarians implying thereby that those peoples were outside the pale of the Vedic culture.

This contention is fully supported by the Dharmasūtra texts. In Baudhāyana's Dharmasūtra, (about 6th - 5th century B.C.), the Vaṅgas along with the Puṇḍras and the Kaliṅgas have been regarded as impure peoples.¹¹ There are also certain other references to these people, and accordingly, it has been enjoined that any person visiting their countries shall have to be purified by performing purificatory rites like the Punastōma or Sarvapriṣṭha.¹² Later on, this injunction was modified by stating : "Aṅga-Vaṅga - Kaliṅgeshu Saurāshtra-Magadheshu-cha Tīrthayātrām-vināgacchan punaḥ saṁskāram=arhati".¹³ According to this prescription, anybody visiting Aṅga, Vaṅga, Kaliṅga, etc., except on pilgrimage was required to undergo initiation for the second time. In the Dharmasūtra of Baudhāyana, the Vaṅgas are also mentioned in a list of peoples who lived in regions beyond the zone of the Aryan culture.¹⁴ By the time of Baudhāyana, the Vaṅgas were, however, distinguished from the Puṇḍras.¹⁵

This outlook of the Dharmasūtra-writers underwent considerable changes in the Jaina and Buddhist texts and also in the Epics. It is to be admitted that the Vaṅgas do not figure prominently in the Jaina and Buddhist texts. In the full list of the Jaina-Upāṅga called Prajñāpanā, a reference has been made to the Vaṅgas whose capital city was at Tāmalitti (Tāmralipti).¹⁶ It is again very significant to note that the Prajñāpanā admits that the Aṅgas and the Vaṅgas belong to the first group of the Aryan peoples whom it calls Khettāriya-Vaṅgaya.¹⁷ Thus the Vaṅgas as the Eastern Āryas have been occasionally referred to in the Prajñāpanā. In the list of sixteen kingdoms as described in the Jaina Bhagavatī-sūtra the Vaṅga country is also included as one of the Mahājanapadas.¹⁸

In the Buddhist texts as well Vaṅga does not figure very prominently. Even in the list of Solasamahājanapadasa as given in the Aṅguttara-Nikāya, the Vaṅga country is not included.¹⁹ But the same Nikāya refers to Vaṅga once in place of Vatsa.²⁰ It is, however, in the list of the Mahāvagga that the word Vaṅg occurs. This was perhaps a mistake for Vaṁsa or Vatsa.²¹ Early references to Vaṅga have been also traced in the names of the two Buddhist Elders, namely, Upasena Vaṅgāntaputta and Vaṅgīsa who are said to be contemporaries of the Buddha.²² In the Milinda-Pañho Vaṅga is described as a maritime country frequented by ships with merchandise.²³ All these are indications which make it highly probable that the earliest use of the term Vaṅga was also related to the littoral region of Bengal which included that portions of the Suhma country which at some periods in ancient times were conterminous with Vaṅga. This is, however, a mere presumption. Again, in the Lalitavistara, there is a reference to Vaṅgalipi.²⁴ It appears that by the time of this work, the Vaṅgas had their own script. Further, in the Ceylonese Chronicles the prince Vijaya has been represented as the grandson of a princess of Vaṅga.²⁵ It thus appears that by the time of the composition of the Dipavaṁśa and the Mahāvaṁśa, Vaṅga was a kingdom ruled by a king.²⁶

In the Epics, the Vaṅgas have been generally mentioned along with other neighbouring peoples. As for instance, the Vaṅgas have been mentioned in the Rāmāyana along with the Aṅgas.²⁷ The Vaṅgas have been also referred to in the Rāmāyana as peoples in political alliance with the King of Ayodhyā.²⁸ In fact, Vaṅga has been described as a part of the king Daśaratha's empire. In the Digvijaya section of the Mahābhārata, there is a sequential account of the conquests of Bhīma.²⁹ We are told that Bhīma after subjugating the Puṇḍras fell on the Vaṅgas.³⁰ A perusal of the conquests made by Bhīma would attest that the country of the Vaṅgas was primarily a coastal territory. The Mahābhārata further informs us that the great conqueror Jarāsandha of Magadha established his supremacy over the Vaṅgas, the Puṇḍras and other peoples.³¹ In the same way, Karṇa is credited with the conquest of the Vaṅgas and other peoples.³² In fact, the Vaṅgas along with other neighbouring peoples played a prominent part in the great battle at Kurukshetra, and they are said to have been defeated by Vāsudeva.³³ In the Bhīshmaparvan of the great Epic, the Aṅgas, the Vaṅgas and the Kaliṅgas are mentioned as East Indian peoples.³⁴ In the Sabhāparvan of the Mahābhārata, there is also a reference to Aṅga and Vaṅga as forming one Vishaya.³⁵ In another passage of the Sabhāparvan, the Vaṅgas have been

more specifically mentioned.³⁶ In the Mahābhāshya of Patañjali, the Vaṅgas and their country have been excluded from the Āryavarta, and in the Arthaśāstra of Kauṭilya, the Vaṅgas figure as a very prominent people.³⁷

It is however, in the Purāṇas and the classical Sanskrit texts that the Vaṅga people have been specifically described. In the Mārkaṇḍeya-purāṇa, an account of the Vaṅgas along with other neighbouring tribes like the Aṅgas, the Suhmas and the Puṇḍras has been given.³⁸ The Vaṅgas, therefore, lived as neighbours of these tribes in the Eastern part of India. In the Matsya-purāṇa, Vaṅga and Suhma are included in the list of the Eastern countries.³⁹ In Kālidāsa's Raghuvaṃśa, the great conqueror Raghu is said to have exterminated the Vaṅgas and set up pillars of victory in the Island of the Ganges. (Vaṅganutkhāya tarasā netā nausāadhanodyatān Nichakhān Jayastamhān Gaṅgāsrōton . . . tareshu sah).⁴⁰ This establishes the connection of Vaṅga with the Gangetic Delta, and that it extended also up to Kapiśā (Kāśāi).⁴¹ Besides, the Vaṅgas are also referred to in the Kāmasūtra, Brhatsamhitā, Daśakumāracharita, Gauḍavāho and in many other texts. Varāhamihira places Vaṅga in the South-east division of Bengal.⁴²

Thus the Vaṅgas as a group of people have been abundantly mentioned in the early literary texts. Not only that, the Vaṅgas are often referred to in inscriptions as well. The earliest epigraphic record of Bengal, namely, the Mahāsthān inscription (3rd century B.C.) records the expression : Samvaṅgiyānam, i.e., the Samvaṅgiya people.⁴³ Here, the derivation of Vaṅgiyānam from Vaṅga appears to be explicit. Again, Bhandarkar regards the Vaṅgiyas as identical with the Vaṅgas.⁴⁴ In many other inscriptions, there are similar expressions in the forms of Vaṅga, Vaṅgeshu, Vaṅga Janapadeshu, Vaṅgāladeśam, Vaṅgas and so on. As for instance, in the Second Apsidal Temple inscription at Nāgārjunikoṇḍa (3rd century A.D.) the Vaṅgas are described as having been converted into Buddhism by the monks hailing from Tambapamna or Ceylon.⁴⁵ In the Meherauli Iron Pillar inscription of the king Chandra of the 4th Century A.D. it is said that the king Chandra destroyed his Eastern enemies designated as the Vaṅgas in Bengal (Vaṅgeshu, Vaṅga-Janapadeshu).⁴⁶ The Mahākūṭa Pillar inscription of the Chālukyas of Vātāpī (6th century A.D.) relates that in the 6th century A.D. Kīrtivarman of the Chālukya dynasty gained victories over the kings of Vaṅga, Aṅga, Magadha and the neighbouring countries.⁴⁷ In the Tirumali Rock inscription of the king Rājendra Chola (11th century A.D.), the expression Vaṅgāladeśam, i.e., the realm of the Vaṅgālas

or Vaṅgas is found mentioned.⁴⁸ The Bhuvaneśvara inscription of Bhaṭṭa Bhavadeva refers to "a ruler whose line was connected with Eastern Bengal".⁴⁹ Again, in the Pithāpuram plates of Prithivīśena (12th century A.D., the king Malla is said to have subdued among others the kings of the Vaṅgas, the Magadhas and the Gaudas.⁵⁰ The Vaṅga country is also mentioned in the Kamauli Copper plate grant of Vaidyadeva of Kāmarūpa, Bhuvaneśvara inscription of Bhaṭṭa-bhavadeva, Madanapāḍā grant of Viśvarūpasena of the 13th century A.D., Rāmpal Copper plate of Śrīchandrasena, Edilpur Copper plate of Keśavasena, Sāhitya Parishat Copper plate of Viśvarūpasena, etc.⁵¹ It would thus appear that in the inscriptions, there are frequent references to the Vaṅga people and also to the land inhabited by them, which refers only to a particular region of Bengal.

iii) Origins :

Regarding the origins of the Vaṅgas there are some mythical stories described in the Epics and the Purāṇas like the Vāyu, the Bramāṇḍa, the Matsya, the Bhāgavata, etc. It has been stated that Vaṅga, Aṅga, Kaliṅga, Puṇḍra and Suhmah were five sons of Sudeshṇā, the wife of the king Vali by the blind and old sage Dīrghatama.⁵² This story thus speaks of the non-Aryan origin of the Vaṅga people. It is evident from these texts that the Vaṅgas were the descendants of one of the five sons of the sage Dīrghatama. This story further gives an indication that serious attempts were made by the earlier writers to brand the Vaṅgas and others as originating from an Aryan and non-Aryan admixture.

iv) Settlements :

Both literary and epigraphic records present conflicting indications regarding the territorial limits of the land of the Vaṅgas. In the earlier texts, the country occupied by the Vaṅgas has been very vaguely stated. Even the Buddhist literature does not refer to anything specifically about the land occupied by the Vaṅgas. The Jaina Prajñāpanā, however, refers to the wide extent of the Vaṅga country which included Tāmralipti.⁵³ It is, however, from the Mahābhārata which refers to Aṅga, Vaṅga, Puṇḍra and Kaliṅga countries (Aṅga-Vaṅga-Kaliṅgaścha Puṇḍra tesāṃ deśāḥ) that some precise information regarding the land of the Vaṅgas are available.⁵⁴ The Mahābhārata relates also to a traditional account of the belt of the Eastern states : Aṅgān-Vaṅgān-Kaliṅgāścha Magadhān Kāśī-Kōśalan.⁵⁵ Of these, the collection of Aṅga, Vaṅga and Kaliṅga was in the

traditional order⁵⁶. In the Bhīshmaparvan of the Mahābhārata, the Aṅgas, the Vaṅgas and the Kaliṅgas are mentioned as the East Indian peoples⁵⁷.

Epics, In the Kiśkindhyā-Kāṇḍa of the Rāmāyaṇa, the Puṇḍras are mentioned
Buddhist as Eastern peoples⁵⁸. Suhma and Puṇḍra countries are sometimes
texts etc. tagged together and often dropped. All these countries have been, however, mentioned in an orderly fashion, not only in the Mahābhārata, but also in the Sūtras, the Arthaśāstra and the Kāmasūtra⁵⁹.

But a definite idea about the Vaṅga country can be gleaned from the Digvijaya section of the Mahābhārata⁶⁰. From the account of Bhīma's conquest in Eastern India, it would appear that the Vaṅga country was situated beyond Aṅga and occupied perhaps the whole territory covering the present districts of Murśidābād, Nadia, Jessore, Rājsāhi, Pābnā and Faridpur⁶¹. Bhīma during his military sojourn in Eastern India conquered the Vaṅgas after defeating the Suhmas. Thus, the Vaṅga country lay beyond the Suhma territory. Besides, the Vaṅga territory has been made distinct from Puṇḍra, Tāmralipta, Suhma and Karvaṛṭa. In the Purāṇas, the Vaṅgas along with the Aṅgas, the Suhmas and the Puṇḍras have been placed in the Eastern part of the country.

Yaśodharā (commentator on the Kāmasūtra) gives a connotation of the Vaṅga country by stating : Vaṅga-Lauhityāt-pūrveṇa⁶². But Raychaudhuri does not accept this contention on the ground that Yaśodharā had no precise knowledge about Eastern India⁶³. In the Raghuvamśa of Kālidāsa, there is, however, a specific description of the Vaṅga country⁶⁴. From Kālidāsa's account it appears that the realm of the Vaṅgas abutted on the Ganges which perhaps formed the dividing line between Vaṅga and Suhma⁶⁵. From the account of the Vaṅga country given by Kālidāsa, it also appears that a direct reference has been made to the undeveloped areas of the Southern coast of Bengal, i.e., Sundarbans (Vaṅgānutkhāya tarasā netā nausādhanodyatān Nīchakhān Jayasthambhān Gaṅgā Srōtontaresu sah)⁶⁶. The lexicographer Hemachandra (12th century A. D.) appears to have identified Vaṅga with Harikela (Vaṅgāstu Harikelīyā). Raychaudhuri thinks that it is only in a narrower sense that Vaṅga was identical with Harikela⁶⁷.

It would appear that the Vaṅga country was in the neighbourhood of Suhma having a distinct entity of its own. Following the accounts given by Kālidāsa in the Raghuvaṁśa, the Vaṅga country shall have to be placed beyond the river Bhāgīrathī including the southern coast of Bengal, possibly the region now known as Sundarbans⁶⁸. Again, Vaṅga is to be equated with Harikela which is mentioned by Rājaśekhara and frequently referred to in the inscriptions like the Chittagong inscription of Kāntideva (8th century A.D.), Rāmpāl . Copper plate of Śrīchandra (9th century A.D.), etc.⁶⁹ Hemachandra actually makes Harikela identical with Vaṅga which is the eastern limit of Eastern India in the opinion of I-Tsing⁷⁰. Harikela has been again made identical with Sylhet. It appears from a study of the inscriptions that Harikela included Chandradvīpa and perhaps also Vikramapura which again belonged to Vaṅga. On East, Vaṅga appears to have been bounded by Kāmarūpa and on South, by the Bay of Bengal. On West and North, the boundaries of the Vaṅga country varied from time to time. Sometimes Vaṅga included parts of West Bengal as well including Tāmralipta. In later periods, Vaṅga, however, stood for entire Eastern Bengal. This becomes evident from a perusal of the epigraphic records of later periods. The Brihatsaṁhitā includes Vaṅga in the South-east division and refers also to Upa-Vaṅga which may be identified with certain portions of the Gangetic Delta⁷¹. Some others have, however, equated Upa-Vaṅga with the districts of Noākhāli and Chittagong⁷². In the Digvijayaprakāśa, Upa-Vaṅga appears to denote Jessore and its forest regions⁷³. The Vaṅga country has been again specifically referred to in the Śaktisaṅgama-tantra⁷⁴ as :

"Ratnākaram Samārabhya Brahmaputrāntagaḥ Śibe
Vaṅgadeśo mayā prōktaḥ Sarvasiddhipradarśakāḥ".

It thus follows that the Vaṅga country extended from the Brahmaputra to the Sea, i.e., Bay of Bengal, which indicates that the Eastern half of Bengal was called Vaṅga. The old course of the Brahmaputra was perhaps the northern and eastern boundary of the Vaṅga country. Sometimes, the Vaṅga country included also certain parts of West Bengal as well. As for instance, in the Jaina Prajñāpanā Tāmralipta has been described as the chief city of the Vaṅgas. But in later periods, the association of the Vaṅgas with the eastern districts of Bengal became more closer than its original ties with the adjoining Rāḍha or Suhma countries on West⁷⁵.

(V) Nāvya and other Bhāgas :

Excluding the literary texts, the Vaṅga country with its various divisions is also mentioned in inscriptions as well. As already referred to, in the NāgārjunīKoṇḍa inscription of the 3rd century A.D., it is stated that the Vaṅgas were converted into Buddhism by the monks from Ceylon⁷⁶. In the Pāla epigraphic records, Vaṅga appears to have been divided into two parts : Uttara (Northern) and Anuttara (Southern). These two parts again might have corresponded to two Bhāgas (divisions) of Vaṅga, namely, Vikramapura-bhāga and Nāvya as recorded in the Sena inscriptions. These

Divisions two Bhāgas might have been connected with each other as well.
and
subdivisions As to the exact geographical boundary limits of these two Bhāgas or divisions, it may be noted that materials at our disposal are too scanty to arrive at any firm conclusion⁷⁷. It is very interesting to note in this connection that in the Kamauli Copper plate of Vaidyadeva, there occurs the expression Anuttara-Vaṅga which perhaps corresponded to a portion of South Bengal⁷⁸. Other inscriptions refer to Vaṅga as equivalent to Eastern Bengal. As for instance, the Madanapāḍā grant of Viśvarūpasena and the Edilpur grant of Keśavasena distinctly refer to the inclusion of Vikramapura within the Vaṅga country (Vaṅge-Vikramapurabhāga-pradeśa⁷⁹). Thus the district of Dacca was in the heart of the Vaṅga country in the Sena period.

Like Vikramapura, Nāvya appears also to have been another division of the Vaṅga country as mentioned in the Sāhitya Parishat Copper plate of Viśvarūpasena⁸⁰. In this inscription, the expression occurs : Puṇḍravardhana-bhuktantah pati-Vaṅganāvyē Rāmasiddhipāṭake⁸¹. That Nāvya was a part of Vaṅga is also proved by the Copper plate grant of Viśvarūpasena (Vaṅge Nāvyē). Again, there is a reference of Vaṅgālavādābhu in the Rāmasiddhipāṭaka of the Nāvya area of Vaṅga denoting perhaps the inclusion of the present Bariśāl district (Bāṅglādeś)⁸². The term Nāvya means a region which is accessible by boats. It seems to be synonymous with the Bengali word Bhāṭi, i.e., the region towards the sea. In the Muslim period, Bhāṭi was a district of the coastal strip between the estuaries of the Hugli river and the Meghna⁸³. But Bhāṭi also denotes the region watered by the inflow and outflow of

water from the Sea. This refers also to the district of Barisāl. The Madanapāḍā Nāvya and inscription mentions Vaṅgālavadā and Nidradvīpa (Chandradvīpa) Bhāti referring to Barisāl district. The Rāmpāl Copper plate inscription of Śrichandra refers also to Chandradvīpa which might have corresponded to the districts of Faridpur and Khulnā of the present Bāṅglādeś⁸⁴. It would appear from the Sāhitya-Parishat Copper plate inscription that Nāvya, a subdivision of the Vaṅga country, denotes the Southern extremity of the Dacca (Dhākā) district (present Bāṅglādeś) abounding in creeks of rivers navigable throughout the year⁸⁵. Others have contended that Nāvya of the Vaṅga country perhaps included Faridpur and Barisāl districts of the present Bāṅglādeś. Further, Samatāṭa, another regional name of a part of ancient Bengal, does not seem to be different from Vaṅga⁸⁶.

It is indeed a difficult task to determine the exact limit of the Vaṅga country. Generally speaking, the Vaṅga country was perhaps restricted to eastern part of the Gangetic delta, and as such, Southern Bengal was plausibly a part of the Vaṅga territory as well. This becomes also clear from the inscrip-tional records. But the Vaṅga territory became gradually limited to only eastern and southern districts of Bengal. Even in the Bhāturiā (Rājsāhi district) inscription of Rājyapāla, the Vaṅgas are said to have lived in South-eastern Bengal. From the Madnapāḍā Copper plate inscription of Viśvarūpasena, it is evident that the district of Faridpur was included within the Vaṅga country, Limits and other inscriptions also refer to the inclusion of the districts of Vaṅga of Dacca, Faridpur and Barisāl⁸⁷. The Sāhitya-parishat Copper plate of Viśvarūpasena records : Puṇḍravardhanabhuktantah pati-Vaṅga-nāvyē-Rāmasiddhi-pātaka⁸⁸. Again, the Rāmpāl Copper plate inscription of Śrichandra (10th - 11th centuries) refers to Chandradvīpa which might correspond to the districts of Faridpur and Khulnā⁸⁹. Moreover, during the rule of the Senas Vaṅga formed an administrative division of their kingdom. At the time of Vallalasena, Vaṅga might have comprised the tract bounded by the Brahmaputra-Meghnā and the Ganges on the south and the Khāsi hills on the north⁹⁰.

Evidently, it follows that neither from the literary texts nor the inscriptions any precise clues can be obtained regarding the exact location

and boundaries of the Vaṅga country which varied from time to time. Mostly, the Vaṅga country or Vaṅgāladeśa might have denoted Southern and Eastern Bengal only.

vi) Vaṅgāla and Baṅgāla :

Along with Vaṅga there are also references to Vaṅgāla which is a variant form of Vaṅga. The word Vaṅgāla denotes a territory, i.e., Vaṅgāladeśa, from which again is derived the present expression Vaṅgāl, i.e., one hailing from Vaṅgāladeśa or Vaṅgadeśa and Vāṅgālī or Vaṅgālī, i.e., the people of Vaṅgāla or of Bengal. Both the terms Vaṅgāla and Vaṅgālī (Vāṅgālī/Bengalee) have gained currency from the early medieval period⁹¹.

The first epigraphic reference to Vaṅgāla is to be found in the Nesarī plates of Govinda III (805 A.D.) wherein Dharmapāla has been mentioned as the king of Vaṅgāla⁹². The Tirumalai inscription refers to Vaṅgāladeśa where rain never stopped, and its king Govinda Chandra was defeated by Rājendra Chola⁹³. Vaṅgāla in Rājendra Chola's inscription is again to be distinguished from Uttara-Rāḍha and Dakṣiṇa-Rāḍha which is to be identified with the Northern and the Southern Rāḍha (West Bengal). Again, in the Goharwa plate of the Kalachuri king Karṇadeva, the Vaṅga country is referred to as Vaṅgāladeśam which in the 13th century came to be called Baṅgāla and during the Muhammedan times, Bāṅglā⁹⁴. In some inscriptions, however, Vaṅga and Vaṅgāla have been mentioned separately.

Some scholars have suggested that Vaṅga and Vaṅgāla are two distinct territorial units⁹⁵. It has been also proposed by some that Vaṅgāla may be identified with Chandradvīpa (parts of Barisāl, Khulnā and Noākhālī). This proposition has been, however, contradicted by other scholars⁹⁶. In the Āblur inscription, Vaṅga and Vaṅgāla are mentioned separately⁹⁷. Similarly, a work named Hāmmīramahākāvya of Nayachandra Sūri (15th century A.D.) refers to Vaṅga and Vaṅgāla as two separate geographical units⁹⁸. In this context, a reference may be made to Abul Fazal's account regarding the derivation of Bengal or Vaṅgāla (Baṅg+āl)⁹⁹. Here, occurs the equation of the two terms. But objections have been raised¹⁰⁰. Though the Chandra kings have been mentioned as rulers of Chandradvīpa and Vaṅgāladeśa, the former appears

to be a large geographical unit denoting also the northernmost areas of Vaṅga. The Tibetan historian Tārānāth uses the word Bhaṅgāla instead of Vaṅgāla as different from Rāḍha and Varendra¹⁰¹. It is, however, to be borne in mind that though Vaṅga and Vaṅgāla have been sometimes used as separate territorial units, it appears that both are synonymous and not distinct from each other¹⁰².

According to some, the most important evidence relating to the separate existence of Vaṅga and Vaṅgāla is furnished by the Ābḷuṣṭ inscription of Vijjala (1200 A.D.) wherein it is stated that Vijjala humbled Chedi, Vaṅga and killed the king of Vaṅgāla¹⁰³. It is, however, to be noted that this invasion of the Kalachuri king has little historical credibility. This appears to be an exaggerated statement, and the poet might have repeated the same incident by referring to the conquest of Vaṅga. Accordingly, Vaṅga and Vaṅgāla can not be treated as two separate countries on the basis of this inscription. Besides, the Tamil poem Kalīṅgattupparani furnishes a list of peoples who paid tributes to Kulottuṅga, and this list includes the name of the Vaṅgālas separately. But this reference also can not be wholly relied upon. The poet might have mistaken the two terms as different. On the other hand, Vaṅgāla appears to be simply an etymological variation of the term Vaṅga¹⁰⁴. In the face of the available records, it appears that Vaṅga and Vaṅgāla are identical. Even the medieval Bengali writers have used both the forms as denoting one geographical unit¹⁰⁵.

To the foreigners, however, the term Vaṅgāla became more acceptable as denoting the whole of Bengal. It would be evident from a Nepalese inscription which refers to the invasion of Samsuddin with the Vaṅgāla army¹⁰⁶. In the Tarikh-i-Firuz-Shāhi, the term Vaṅgāl denotes also the whole of Bengal¹⁰⁷. By the time of Akbar, the Subāh-Bāṅgālāh included the whole territory from Sylhet to Kāṅkol with the exclusion of Chittagong, Coochbihar, Midnapur and Hijli. In Marcopolo's account, there is also a reference to the king of Mien (Burma) and Baṅgāl (Vaṅgāla). Yule takes Baṅgāla as the entire province of Bengal¹⁰⁸. In Gastaldi's (1561) map, the expression used is Bengala, and in other maps as well Bengala has been referred to as indicating sea-coast areas of Chittagong. But Blochmann has not admitted the existence of the city of Bengala as it does not occur in accounts of some

travellers¹⁰⁹. There is, however, little justification of holding the view of the non-existence of Bengala. In fact, Majumdar thinks that Bengala was the capital city of Vaṅgādeśa near Chittagong¹¹⁰. Here, certain points may be noted : (1) It has been found out that the city of Bengala which figures prominently in Portuguese writings does occur neither in medieval Bengali texts nor in the Rājamālā ; (2) Even Rennel could not trace the existence of the city of Bengala ; (3) Other writers have questioned the very existence of the city as such¹¹¹. It appears that the Bengalis and others did not know anything about Bengala. The Portuguese might have simply referred to Vaṅgāla's chief city as Bengala, and when the port of Chittagong became prominent, they perhaps called it 'Bengala city'^{111a}.

It would thus appear that Vaṅga and Vaṅgāla became synonymous in later period, and the latter came to be used in the sense of the people of Vaṅga country in general and more specifically of the people of her eastern and southern regions. This becomes also clear from the Saduktikarnāmṛita wherein both the terms Vaṅgāla and Vaṅgālī have been used, the latter denoting the people of the former^{111b}. The terms Vaṅga and Vaṅgālī also occur in Bauddha-Gān-Ō-dōhā which refers to Vaṅga (Vaṅgālī-bha-iti). In the medieval Bengali texts, there is a precise description of Vaṅgālī. In the Manik Chandra-rājār gān it is stated : "Bhāṭi haite āila Vāṅgāl lambā lambā dādi", i.e., the Vaṅgālas with their long beards came from Bhāṭi¹¹². In other words, Vaṅgāla and Bhāṭi have been made identical. The term Vaṅgāla is thus used to denote the people of Bhāṭi, i.e., the southernmost region of Vaṅga, who used to bear long beards. It has been further suggested that the Vaṅgālas were at first settled on east of the Brahmaputra and later on invaded and occupied Vaṅga in the 10th - 11th century A.D. Majumdar identifies Vaṅgādeśa with the region round Chittagong district, the original habitat of the Pālas and the Chandras. This view of Majumdar has been, however, challenged by Sircar¹¹³. Instead, Sircar makes Vaṅga identical with Gangaridae of the classical writers¹¹⁴. On the other hand, Ganguly has tried to show that from the 11th - 14th century Vaṅgāla denoted Dacca district which again formed a part of Vaṅga. It appears that Vaṅga and Vaṅgāla denoted the same region and peoples : the former was the most ancient name and the latter, a popular Bengali dialectical form of the early medieval period. One Nepalese inscription, however, refers to

Vaṅgāla in the sense of the whole of Bengal¹¹⁵. The Tarikh-i-Firuz-shāhī similarly applies the term Vaṅgāla to denote the whole of Bengal, and during Akbar's time Bengal was indeed Subāh-Baṅgālāh¹¹⁶.

Evidently, it appears that in ancient times Vaṅga and Vaṅgāla were generally used synonymously, one in the sense of the country and the other, peoples who were inhabitants of East Bengal in general and of its southern parts in particular. But Hemachandra in his Abhidhāna-Chintāmaṇi (of the 12th century A.D.) actually identifies the Vaṅgas with the peoples called Harikelas (Vaṅgāstu-Harikeliyāh, i.e., the Vaṅgas are the Harikeliyas)¹¹⁷.

In the face of all these confusing and conflicting details regarding the location of the Vaṅgas and the identity of the Vaṅga country, it is very difficult to earmark or to draw any sharp line of the territorial limits of the spatial distribution of the Vaṅgas in ancient Bengal. But the fact that emerges is that the term Vaṅga was used both in a wider and narrower sense. In a broader sense, Vaṅga comprised perhaps the whole of Bengal excluding certain parts of West Bengal. In its narrower sense, Vaṅga, however, denoted the entire area of Eastern Bengal including its South-eastern parts. Some have gone to the extent of contending that the Vaṅga country in ancient times was represented by Dacca and Chittagong divisions only¹¹⁸. But in reality, the extent of Vaṅga far exceeded the limits of these two divisions. It has been further suggested that the ancient Vaṅga was bounded on West by the Brahmaputra, on South by the Ganges and the sea, on East by the Meghnā and on North, by the Khāsi hills¹¹⁹.

vii) Language and Culture :

Very little is known about the physical characters and cultural patterns of the Vaṅga people from early literary texts or inscriptions. In the Mañjuśrī-Mūlākāśa it has been stated that in Vaṅga, Harikela and Samatāṭa, the peoples spoke the Asura-speech¹²⁰. This is a clear indication that the Vaṅgas spoke a non-Aryan tongue. The Vaṅga language is, however, said to possess a poetic character. This becomes evident from the Saduktikarnāmrīta which compares it with the flow of the Ganges, i.e., fluent like the current of the Gaṅgā¹²¹. Again, the dialect spoken by the Vaṅgālas possesses a distinct

regional character and is different from the one spoken in West Bengal. Not only that, even there is a reference to Vaṅga-lipi¹²². It implies that even in Vaṅgadeśa, a characteristic alphabet developed. In the Nāṭyaśāstra of Bharata, the Vaṅga country along with other Eastern countries is said to have adopted the local usage called Odramāgadhi¹²³. It has been already stated that the very term Vaṅga may be of foreign origin, either Tibeto-Burman or Austro-Asiatic/Dravidian. The Aryans of Upper India were little conversant with the language of the people of this Eastern area. Their utterances sounded also like those of the birds. This might be one of the reasons of their being described as birds. Accordingly, the Vaṅgas were outside the fold of Aryan speaking zone. It is quite likely that the language spoken by the Vaṅgas were primarily of Austro-Asiatic origins. This will be evident from a linguistic analysis even of the present day Bengali language of the Indo-Aryan affiliation.

The Vaṅgas were expert artisans excelling in weaving textiles. From the account of the manufacture of cotton fabrics as given in the Arthaśāstra, it appears that the Vaṅgas excelled in weaving textiles. It has been stated that the Vaṅga country was very well-known for best cotton fabrics. Kauṭilya has specifically noted that white and soft textiles were manufactured in the Vaṅga country (Vaṅgakaṁ śvetamsnigdham dukūlam)¹²⁴. Again, the cotton fabrics of Vaṅga, Mathurā, Kaliṅga, etc., are said to be of the best quality (Vaṅgakaṁ Kārpāsikaṁ Śreshṭham). Further, as the Vaṅgas lived in the region criss-crossed by rivers and bounded on one side by the sea, it is quite likely that they would turn themselves to become sea-faring peoples. In fact, from very early times, the Vaṅgas have been expert navigators and sailors. The account given by Kālidāsa in his Raghuvamśa reveals that the Vaṅgas fought against the king Raghu from their boats. Mukundarāma in his Chandimangala speaks of the Vaṅgālas as good sailors. In this respect, it may be also noted that even today the people of Chittagong and Noākhāli regions are reputed sailors. The peoples from the Bhāṭi areas, i.e., primarily the Vaṅgālas are even today well-known sailors¹²⁵. In ancient times as well, the Vaṅgas went to far off lands and colonised many places of South-east Asia. Before the spread of Brahmanical religion in the Vaṅga country, the Vaṅgas adopted Buddhism as referred to in the Nāgārjunikoṇḍa inscription of the 3rd century A.D. But

from indeterminable times, Gaṅgāsāgar has been a holy place, and it is because of this Tīrtha-kshetra that the stigma of unholiness of the Vaṅga country and the taboo on paying a visit to this land were considerably modified. Vaṅga is also mentioned as one of the 18 tīrthas as referred to in the Kulārṇava-tantra¹²⁶. Again, the king Śrīchandra is said to have established 8 Maṭhas (temple/cel) in Śrīhatta-maṇḍala. Of these four are called Vaṅgāla meaning thereby that these were located in the Vaṅgāla country¹²⁷. Besides, there are also faint indications that the non-Aryan Vaṅgas were primarily animistic and totemistic peoples as well. The snake worship was very common as it is today. It is not also unlikely that the Vaṅgas were Cherapādas because of their totemic affiliation with the birds. Besides, the Vaṅgas might have been also so called because of their speech which was unintelligible like sounds produced by birds. This implies that the Vaṅgas were speakers of a non-Aryan language which was perhaps of Austro-Asiatic affiliation. Accordingly, their culture and religion appear to have been primarily derived from the same source, i.e., Austro-Asiatic.

viii) Ethnic Affiliation and Identity :

The Vaṅgas as the oldest peoples of Bengal have left behind no trace of their surviving elements to recount the glorious deeds of their ancestors, and as such, it is not possible to identify them with any particular living community of today. The primary reason appears to be that unlike other tribal communities like the Puṇḍras, etc., the Vaṅgas were largely mixed up with all other peoples in such a way as not to leave any trace of their separate existence or identity. This happened in their both ethnic and cultural spheres.

It has not been possible also to determine the ethnic identity of the Vaṅgas. If the people of Eastern Bengal are recognised as the descendants of the ancient Vaṅga people, it may be contended that at present they are distinctly of mixed ethnic origins. That the people of the ancient Vaṅga country are represented today mostly by the people of East Bengal is clearly attested to by the widely used expression Vaṅgāla denoting the people of Vaṅgaśa or Vaṅgāśa as referred to in the Tirumalai inscription of Rājendra Chola

of the 11th century A.D.¹²⁸. There is, however, little doubt that the Vaṅgas were perhaps the most ancient known peoples of Bengal. In that case, they may be affiliated to Austric language-speaking peoples who are to be again ethnically included within the Australoid racial stock and whose surviving remnant are still to be found predominant amongst those who form the bulk of the population of the lower orders of the Bengali people, Hindus and non-Hindus.

ix) Observation :

The Vaṅgas were outside the pale of Brahmanical culture, and their country Vaṅga lay beyond the outlined limits of the Āryāvarta or Brahmavarta. The early texts accordingly branded the Vaṅgas as the Asuras, the Dāsas and the Dasyus, and an injunction was laid down in the Dharmasūtras prohibiting the Aryans from traversing the land of the Vaṅgas branded as impure/despised, and anybody doing so would have to be purified by the performances of purificatory rites. Subsequently, this injunction was modified stating that traversing the Vaṅga country for the purpose of pilgrimage might be tolerated. This implies that even in very early times there were centres of pilgrimage in the Vaṅga country, the sacredness of which was highly recognised in the Aryandome. The earlier injunction thus modified might have facilitated and opened the channel of the infiltration of the Aryans bearing the torch of Brahmanism to the land of the Vaṅgas, and this had again accelerated the process of Brahmanization in this part of the sub-continent. As to the identity of the primary centre of pilgrimage, a particular reference has been already made to the Gaṅgāsāgar-tīrtha in the ancient Vaṅga country, which even today attracts thousands of pilgrims even from the very core centre of the Brahmanical culture. In early times as well, the Vaṅga country had a great potentiality of encouraging settlements by all kinds of peoples belonging to diverse ethnic and cultural groups, and as such, a grand milieu was created which completely wiped out the individual or separate existence of the ancient Vaṅgas and their surviving elements. It is also surprising that the early literary texts furnish little information regarding the physical features and cultural characteristics of the ancient Vaṅgas. The implication is that even in ancient times, the Vaṅgas lost their individuality or separate identity because of their amalgam on a large scale with other peoples. In the absence of any

positive evidence regarding their physical features and cultural patterns it may be, however, presumed that the ancient Vaṅgas might have originally belonged to the Australoid ethnic stock and Austro-Asiatic language family. Subsequently, other peoples belonging to the Mediterranean ethnic stock and Dravidian linguistic family got inextricably mixed up with the primitive Vaṅgas. This process continued through long centuries, and many other peoples joined the milieu. Traces of surviving elements of many linguistic, ethnic and cultural groups may be now detected more particularly amongst those who belong to the lowest orders of the Hindu society. Though the ancient Vaṅgas lost their racial, linguistic or cultural identity, they no doubt made basic contributions by giving their own name to this country now called Bengal and also to the composition of her peoples and culture as a whole.

II. The PUṆDRAS

Next to the Vaṅgas, another important and widely known non-Aryan tribal community of ancient Bengal is the Puṇḍra, and the peoples belonging to this community have been variously called as Puṇḍras, Paṇḍras, Paṇḍrikas, etc.¹²⁹.

(i) Derivation and Meaning :

The word Paṇḍrika in the Rigveda, the Brāhmanas, the Āraṇyakas and the Upanishads denotes blossom of the lotus flower¹³⁰. Puṇḍarisrajā means a wreath of the lotus leaves¹³¹. But the term Paṇḍra actually means sugarcane (ikshu) of a particular species called Puṇri, or Puḍi which in Bengali language is commonly called Ākh, i.e., sugarcane¹³². In the Amarakōsha, Puṇḍra or Paṇḍra is actually referred to as a variety of sugarcane¹³³. From the nomenclature, it appears that this particular tribal community was perhaps named after sugarcane, i.e., a totemistic name. Significantly, the terms Puṇḍraka, Paṇḍrika, Paṇḍra, Puṇḍra, etc., are sometimes used synonymously, more particularly in the Mahābhārata which refers to the name under various forms as : Savaṅgān sa Paṇḍrodrān (11.51.22) ; Āṅgā Vaṅgāścha Puṇḍrāścha Śānavatyā gayāstathā (11.52.16) ; Vaṅgāh Kaliṅgā Magadhāstāmraliptāh Sapuṇḍrakāh (11.52.18) ; Utkalā Mekalāh Paṇḍrāh Kaliṅgāndhrāścha¹³⁴ (VII.4.8). In the Rāmāyaṇa as well a reference has been made to Puṇḍa. But in the

Arthaśāstra the name occurs in the form of Paṇḍra. The Agni-purāṇa also refers to the name as Paṇḍra. Again, in the great Epic and the Purāṇas, the Paṇḍrakas are distinguished from the Puṇḍras¹³⁵. Accordingly, some scholars like Pargiter think that the Puṇḍras and Paṇḍras are two distinct tribes occupying two different territories¹³⁶. But in most of the early literary texts and inscriptions no such distinctions have been drawn between these two designations¹³⁷. Both the terms have been, however, synonymously used to denote one single tribal community and the country inhabited by its members. Puṇḍra was again the name of a prince of the Lunar dynasty and a son of the king Bali, and the people and the country were named after him¹³⁸. Indeed, the Paṇḍras were the peoples of the country called Paṇḍra or Puṇḍra named after them.

(ii) Early References :

The earliest reference to the Puṇḍras as a group of peoples occurs in the Aitareya-Brāhmaṇa along with other peoples like the Āndhras, the Śavaras, the Pulindas and the Mutivas. (Antān vah prajā-bhakṣīṣṭeti ta ētyendhyāḥ Puṇḍrāḥ Śavarāḥ Pulindāḥ Mativāḥ dasyudatyā vahavo bhavanti Vaiśvāmitrā dasyunām bhūyīṣṭhāḥ)¹³⁹. Thus Puṇḍra is the name of a group of peoples who were regarded as outcastes and allied with the Dāsas and the Dasyus in the Aitareya-Brāhmaṇa¹⁴⁰. The same Brāhmaṇa-text also narrates the story of the origins of all these peoples¹⁴¹. In Patañjali's Mahābhāṣya (4.2.52), Puṇḍra is mentioned along with Aṅga, Vaṅga and Suhma (Aṅgānām-Visaye-ṅāḥ Vaṅgāḥ Suhmāḥ Puṇḍrāḥ)¹⁴². The Puṇḍras as allied to the Dāsas and the Dasyus are also mentioned in the later Sūtras, the Dharmasāstras, the Epics and the Purāṇas¹⁴³. The Puṇḍras or Paṇḍrakas are frequently mentioned in the Drona and Aśvamedha parvas (93.44; 29.15-16) of the Mahābhārata. Along with the allied tribes like the Āndhras, the Śavaras, the Pulindas, etc., the Puṇḍras have been also specifically described in the Dharmasāstras as composed mostly of the Dasyus¹⁴⁴. Even the land of the Paṇḍras came to be known after them as Puṇḍradeśa. This has been clearly stated in the Mahābhārata (Ādiparvan) as : Aṅga-Vaṅga-Kaliṅgaścha Puṇḍrah Suhmaścha te sutāḥ/Teshām Deśāḥ Samākyātāḥ svanāmakathitā bhuvi¹⁴⁵.

The Puṇḍras and their city named after them have been also referred to occasionally in both the Buddhist and Jaina texts. In the Jaina (Kalpasūtra,

Gōdāsa (disciple of Bhadravāhu) classified the Jainas of Eastern India into 4 branches, one of which was Pomdavaddhaniya or Punyavardhaniya.¹⁴⁶ Here is a distinct reference to Puṇḍravardhana which might have been a Jaina religious centre as well.¹⁴⁷ In the later Buddhist texts there are also references to the city of the Puṇḍras in the Eastern region. The Divyāvadāna makes a specific reference to Puṇḍravardhana.¹⁴⁸ In the Aśokavadāna and the Divyāvadāna there are also references to the persecution of the Buddhists and the suppression of Buddhism in this part of India.¹⁴⁹ The Āryamañjuśrīmūlakalpa contains an expression : Paundrodrah, i.e., the Puṇḍras and the Odras.¹⁵⁰ According to a Tibetan legend, Nāgarjuna is said to have built Vihāras in Puṇḍravardhana.¹⁵¹ But the veracity of the legend has not yet been fully established. In the Vishnu-purāṇa, the Puṇḍras along with the Aṅgas, the Vaṅgas, the Kliṅgas and others are mentioned as belonging to the tribal communities (Aṅga-Vaṅga Kaliṅga-Suhma Puṇḍrāsyam vāleyan Kshātram ajanyata).¹⁵² Puṇḍravardhana is also mentioned in other Purāṇas like the Bhāgavata (9.30), the Padma, the Matsya, the Skanda, the Mārkaṇḍeya, the Brahmānda and also in the Jñānāṇava Tantra as quoted in the Tantrasāra.¹⁵³ Puṇḍravardhana named after the Puṇḍras was indeed their city par excellence.

(iii) Ascendancy to Power :

From the Brahmanical texts it would be evident that the Puṇḍras along with other allied tribes played an important role in political affairs of Northern India. They also entered into conflicts or alliances with the rulers of Upper India and were found to have been subjugated sometimes by the latter. This role of the Puṇḍras becomes clear from the account given in the Mahābhārata. In the Dronaparvan of the Mahābhārata, Vāsudeva is said to have defeated the Puṇḍras along with other allied peoples.¹⁵⁴ In the Harivaṁśa and Matsya-purāṇa, Vāsudeva has been also described as a sovereign ruling over the Puṇḍras.¹⁵⁵ Not only that, in the Harivaṁśa the Magadhan king Jarāsandha is said to have held his sway over the Puṇḍras and other neighbouring tribes.¹⁵⁶ From different Parvans of the Mahābhārata, it is further learnt that the Pāṇḍavas held sway over the Puṇḍras, and Karṇa is said to have brought troops from Puṇḍra and other neighbouring countries in the battle-field at Kurukshetra.¹⁵⁷

It thus follows that the Puṇḍras had established an independent kingdom and played an important role in the political affairs of Northern India. They appear to have also fought hard to maintain their political integrity. It, however, appears that the Puṇḍras could not succeed to uphold their political sovereignty for a long time, and they might have lost their sovereign authority to the rulers of the neighbouring kingdoms.

(iv) Origins :

Rgarding the origins of the Puṇḍras, a detailed account can be obtained from the Aitareya-Brāhmaṇa.¹⁵⁸ It is said that Viśvāmitra cursed his fifty sons when they refused to agree with his proposal relating to the recognition of Śunaḥśēpa as his son to the effect that they would be relegated to the lowest caste orders of the society. As a result of this curse, the sons of Viśvāmitra became known as Āndhra, Puṇḍra, Śavara, Mutiba, etc., occupying the lowest rank of the society.¹⁵⁹ The same legend is to be found in the Śāṅkhyāyana-Śrauta-Sūtra with the names modified as Andhrāḥ, Puṇḍrāḥ, Śabarāḥ, etc.¹⁶⁰ In most of the literary texts, the Puṇḍras or Puṇḍrakas like the Vaṅgas are again said to have been composed of the Dasyus and the Dāsas. It is stated in the Mahābhārata that Puṇḍra with his brothers became the Dasyus.¹⁶¹ According to another section of the Mahābhārata, he became a Mlechchha as well.¹⁶² It has been also narrated that the Puṇḍras along with the Śakas, the Drāviḍas, the Chīnas and the Khasas were born out of Nandinī's (Vaśiṣṭha's sacred cow) flanks.¹⁶³ Again, it has been further stated in the Mahābhārata that the Puṇḍras, the Ābhiras, the Śavaras, the Drāviḍas, etc., fled to the hills out of fear of Paraśurāma, and thereby they became the Śūdras (Vṛishalas).¹⁶⁴ But in the Manusmṛiti, the Puṇḍrakas, the Drāviḍas, etc., are described to have been originally Kshatriyas and later on became relegated to the position of the Śūdras because of their non-performance of the Vedic Samskāras and of the absence of their contact with the Brāhmaṇas.¹⁶⁵ Manu further states that they are outside the influence of the four Varnas, and they are known as the Dasyus.¹⁶⁶ In the Mahābhārata, the Puṇḍras have been frequently referred to as non-Aryans or Aśiṣṭa peoples.¹⁶⁷ Again, in the Ādiparvan of the Mahābhārata, the Puṇḍras along with their allied peoples have been described as eponymous sons of the king Vali.¹⁶⁸ It is stated that the Puṇḍras were the sons born of Sudeshṇā by the Rishi Dīrghatama.¹⁶⁹ Similarly, from the Matsya-purāṇa it is learnt that Puṇḍra, Aṅga, Vaṅga, Sumah and Kaliṅga

were the five sons of Sudeshnā, the wife of the king Vali by the sage Dīrghatama.¹⁷⁰ In the Vishṇu-purāṇa, it has been stated : Tamāt Valih yasya-
kshetra Dīrghatamasā Aṅga-Vaṅga-Kaliṅga.¹⁷¹ Not only that, the Purāṇas and
 the Dharmaśāstras describe them also as the Dāsas and the Dasyus. Subsequently,
 however, it has been stated in certain texts that the Paṇḍras were originally
 Kshatriyas, but later on relegated to the position of the Śūdras because of
 their non-performance of the Vedic rites. In this connection, a particular
 reference may be made to the Manusmṛitā which includes the Paṇḍrakas,
 the Odras, the Drāvidas, the Śakas, the Pāradas, the Kirātas, the Daradas,
 the Khaśas, the Chīnas, the Pahlavas, etc., as Kshatriyas, but reduced to
 the position of the Śūdras.¹⁷² The commentator Medhātithi while commenting
 on Manu's Śloka remarks that the Paṇḍrakas were Kshatriyas, but reduced
 to the status of the Śūdras.¹⁷³ In the Brahma-Vaivarta-purāṇa, the Paṇḍras
 are said to have originated from a Vaiśya father and a Śaundika (Śuñri) mother.¹⁷⁴

There are also other references in the Epics and the Purāṇas wherein
 the origins of the Paṇḍras have been traced from mythological persons.
 It has been generally stated that the ancestor of the Paṇḍras was the king
 Puṇḍra who is taken to be 23rd in descent from Puru as described in the
Harivaṁśa. Similarly, in the Vishṇu-purāṇa and Śrīmadbhāgavata, Puṇḍra is
 said to be 13th or 14th in descent from Anu. The Agni, the Brahmā and the
Vāyu Purāṇas also tell the same story.¹⁷⁵ All these stories appear to be later
 fabrications. From these confusing details about the origins of the Paṇḍras,
 the fact that emerges is that the Paṇḍras originally belonged to a non-Aryan
 tribal community, and it was only after their Aryanization that diverse attempts
 were made to trace their origins variously, and in all cases they have been
 relegated to a low social position.

(V) Distribution and Settlement :

Regrding the original homeland of the Paṇḍras and their settlement
 in Bengal there are also diverse accounts in the early literary texts. In almost
 all texts, the Paṇḍras have been placed in Eastern India, more particularly
 in Northern Bengal. According to the Divyāvadāna, the Paṇḍras had their
 settlement in Northern Bengal.¹⁷⁶ It is also evident from a perusal
 of the literary references that the Paṇḍras might have migrated
 from West to North Bengal. The Mahābhārata speaks of the Paṇḍras
 and other allied peoples like the Aparāntas, the Khaśas, the Kākas, etc.,
 as the dwellers on the sea-side.¹⁷⁷ At the same time, the Puṇḍra country

In the
 Mahā-
 bhārata

has been placed to the east of Monghyr.¹⁷⁸ Again, in the Ādi-parvan of the Mahābhārata (104.50), Puṇḍra has been stated to be a neighbouring territory of Aṅga, Vaṅga, Kalinga, etc.¹⁷⁹ ("Aṅga Vaṅgaḥ Kalingaścha Puṇḍrah Suhmaścha te sutāḥ Tesām deśāḥ samākhyātāḥ svanāmakathitābhuvī")

An examination of the account given in the Sabhāparvan of the Mahābhārata indicates that the Puṇḍra country was bounded on West by Aṅga and the Kauśiki marshes, on North by the Kirātas, on South-east by the Vaṅgas and on South-west by the Suhmas along with the Tāmraliptas.¹⁸⁰ Again, in the Bhīmaparvan and Vanaparvan of the great Epic, the Puṇḍra country has been specifically located as bounded on East by the river Karatōyā, on West by a stream lying to the east of the Kauśikī, on South by the South-east branch of the Ganges and on North by the jungles, hills and the tract of the Kirātas.¹⁸¹ Moreover, in the Mahābhārata, the Puṇḍras have been often linked with the Vaṅgas, the Kirātas and the Aṅgas.¹⁸² Accordingly, it appears that the Puṇḍras might have occupied an intermediate territory between the lands of the Aṅgas, the Vaṅgas and the Kirātas. The Rāmāyana (Kishkindhyākāṇḍa) refer to Puṇḍra as one of the Eastern kingdoms. In the Arthasāstra, Kautilya refers to the product called Paundrika along with Māgadhi (product of Puṇḍra and Magadha), and the Agni-purāṇa mentions the Puṇḍra country of the South-east.¹⁸³ Again, the Āryamañjuśrī-mūlakalpa combines Puṇḍra with Oḍra (Paundrodṛāḥ). Because of the linkage of the Puṇḍras with these peoples, Chaudhuri holds the opinion that the Puṇḍras lived somewhere to the West or South-east of the Vaṅga country.¹⁸⁴

On the basis of the data supplied by the Mahābhārata and the Mārkaṇḍeya-purāṇa, it has been, however, pointed out by Pargiter that the Puṇḍra territory was perhaps surrounded by Kāśī on North, Aṅga on North-east, Vaṅga and Suhma on East and Oḍra on South-east. This, no doubt, refers to the Chhotanāgpur plateau.¹⁸⁵ But from other accounts relating to the Puṇḍra country it would be evident that the Puṇḍras might have occupied the regions now included in the districts of Maldah, Purnea and parts of Dinājpur and Rājsāhi districts.¹⁸⁶ Besides, that the Puṇḍras were once spread over the districts of the Santal Pargana, Bīrbhūm and Hāzāribāgh is attested to by their linkage with the Oḍras, the Utkalas, the Mekalas, the Kalingas and the Āndhras. This is also supported by the contention of Wilson who after

taking into consideration the Pauranic evidences pointed out that the Puṇḍras might have dwelt in the area covered by the district of Rājsāhi, Dinājpur, Raṅgpur, Nadiā, Bīrbhūm, Burdwan, Mindapur and Jaṅgalmahal.¹⁸⁷

There is, however, a little doubt that the Puṇḍras were primarily peoples of Eastern India. Bharata in his Nāṭyaśāstra includes Puṇḍra in the list of the Eastern countries like Aṅga, Vaṅga, Kāliṅga, etc., wherein the local usage known as Ardha-māgadhī was adopted.¹⁸⁸ This is also supported by both the Rāmāyana and the Mahābhārata as well. In the Kishkindhyākāṇḍa of the Rāmāyana, Puṇḍra has been mentioned specifically as an Eastern kingdom: "Magadhāmscha-mahāgrāman Puṇḍrāmsta sathaiva cha". This contention is also borne out by the Mahābhārata and the Purāṇas. The Epic reference to the location of the Puṇḍra country in the East is confirmed by the account given by Rājasekhara in his Kāvya-mīmāṃsā in the following words¹⁸⁹ : Bārāṇasyāḥ Purataḥ Pūrvadeśaḥ yatra Aṅgakaliṅgakośalatosalotkala/Magadha-Mudgara-Videha-Nepāla-Puṇḍra-Prāgyōtisha-Tāmalīptaka/Mālada Mallavarttika Suhma Brahmōttara Pravṛtayah Janapadāḥ //. It would thus be evident that the Puṇḍra country is to be placed in the East along with Prāgyōtisha and Tāmalīptaka. This becomes evident also from the Buddhist text Divyāvadāna wherein Puṇḍravardhana or the country of the Puṇḍras has been described as the eastern boundary of the Madhyadeśa (Purvenopāli Puṇḍravardhanam nāma placed in East nagaram), and in the Avadānakalpalatā, Puṇḍravardhana is said to have covered 160 Yojanas to the east of Śrāvastī.¹⁹⁰

Besides, there are also a few references to Puṇḍra in the Southern direction as well. In the Rāmāyana (Kishkindhyākāṇḍa) Sugrīva asked Aṅgada and others to enter into the areas of the Puṇḍras, the Keralas, etc., on the Godāvarī : Nadīm Godāvarīchaiva Sarvamevānupasyataḥ/Tathaivāndhrānscha Puṇḍramscha Chōtan Pāṇḍyānschakeralān¹⁹¹ //.

The Vishnu-purāṇa contains also references to the Puṇḍras of the South : Puṇḍrāḥ Kāliṅgā Magadhā Dākshinyātyāścha Sarvvasaḥ.¹⁹² Similarly, the Mārkaṇḍeya-purāṇa refers to the Puṇḍras of South India : Puṇḍrāścha¹⁹³ Keralāśchaiva gōlāṅgulā stathaivacha. In the Mahābhārata (Śāntiparvan 65; Ādi, 176) as well the Puṇḍras have been mentioned along with the Pulindas, the Ramathas, the Kambojas, etc., who were also peoples of South India.¹⁹⁴ This is also partly supported by the Bṛhatsaṃhitā which refers

to the settlement of the Puṇḍras near the Gōlāṅgulā tribe (of the South).^{194a} That the Puṇḍras might have been peoples of the Deccan/South India is also partially corroborated by the epigraphic records. The Kūḍlur plates of Narasiṃha (780 A.D.) refers to the Vaṅga, Puṇḍra, Magadha and Kośala kings.¹⁹⁵ The Puṇḍras have been also referred to in the record of the Rājamālā II (904 A.D.). It also appears that the Hoysala monarch subjugated the Puṇḍras. A record (dated 1169 A.D.) refers to the Puṇḍra and Andhra rulers figuring amongst those who trembled before the monarch Narasiṃha. Such references may or may not, however, indicate the presence of the Puṇḍras in South India. Even the Puṇḍras of Bengal might have been also referred to. At the same time, the possibility of the infiltration of the Puṇḍras from North to South can not be also altogether denied.

It would thus appear that the Puṇḍras might have moved also to South India or they might have dispersed in different parts of Northern India from South. In the opinion of Pargiter, the Puṇḍras had made Bengal their Deductions home and thence moved Southwards as other tribes did in the early centuries of the Christian Era. The first proposition is supported by the supposed infiltration of the Austro-Asiatic peoples from North-east. There is of course another possibility of their migration or movement through South India. All these presumptions are, however, based on the hypothesis that the Puṇḍras were Austric peoples. But the fact appears that the Puṇḍras might have been also peoples of the South, and it is not also quite unlikely that the Pāriyās, the untouchables of today, are the remnants of the ancient Puṇḍras.

From the available materials, it may be, however, contended that the original homeland of the Puṇḍras in the context of their settlement in Bengal may be located in Chhotanāgpur and its neighbouring regions, from where they might have moved in the direction of North-east and gradually established themselves more particularly in North Bengal, and as such, the area came to be known after them as Puṇḍravardhana or Puṇḍra country.

Movements and settle-
ment in
Northern
Bengal The Puṇḍras who settled in North Bengal were again close associates of the Aṅgas, the Vaṅgas, the Suhmas and the Kirātas. It has been pointed out by Sen that the Puṇḍras might have migrated from Chhotanāgpur to the North-east direction and settled in Northern Bengal by about 3rd or 2nd century B.C., when the oldest authentic reference to Pundranagara occurs in the Mahāsthān inscription.¹⁹⁶ From this inscription,

The Puṇḍras originally belonged to a primitive tribal community and naturally so, their religious beliefs and practices were mostly governed by animism, totemism and magic. That they formed a totemic group is evident from the very name Puṇḍra which has been derived from the word 'Punri' or 'Pudi', i.e., sugarcane.²³¹ But with the spread of Buddhism in Eastern India, the Puṇḍra country was greatly affected, and perhaps many peoples were converted into Buddhism. Brahmanism also had a stronghold over the Religion Puṇḍra country. This would be evident from the account of Hiuen Tsang who in the 7th century A.D. observed 20 Buddhist monasteries and above 3000 brethren and 100 Deva-temples.²³² Not only that, even the Digambaras and Nigranthas had their separate establishments. The Chinese traveller has also given a detailed account of the great Po-shi-po monastery.²³³ Again, the Pāhārpur grant (478 A.D.) refers to Puṇḍravardhana as a great seat of the Jaina pontiffs as well.²³⁴ The Kalaikuri Copper plate inscription also contains some references to the inhabitants of the city.²³⁵ It would thus appear that Brahmanism, Buddhism and Jainism flourished side by side in the country of the Puṇḍras.

From the tribal and rural settings the Puṇḍras emerged as urbanized people as well. This would be clear from an account of their capital city Puṇḍranagara and Puṇḍravardhanabhukti as given in both epigraphic and literary documents. In the Mahāsthāngāḍī inscription of the 3rd century B.C., the city of Puṇḍranagara has been specifically mentioned.²³⁶ In the Sāñchi-stūpa Political inscription there is a reference to Punāvadhana.²³⁷ In the Divyāvadāna,²³⁸ the city of Puṇḍravardhana is mentioned, and so also in the Kathā-Sarit-Sāgara.²³⁹ The Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsang has also given a detailed account of the city of Pun-na-fa-tan-na. He says that the city was about 30 li in circuit, and at a distance of 20 li to the west was the great monastery Po-shi-po, the ruins of which have been unearthed.²⁴⁰ The city was populous and flourishing and was adorned with tanks, hospices and flower-groves.

In the Āryamañjuśrīmūlakalpa, the name of Puṇḍravardhana occurs and so also in the Rājatarāṅgī.²⁴¹ During the Gupta period Puṇḍravardhana was not only a city, but also a Bhukti which included the whole of North Bengal, and in the Pāla-Sena period, Puṇḍravardhana had a still wider connotation denoting sometimes the whole of Bengal. Again, in some medieval Sanskrit

texts occur the name of Paundradeśa denoting even the whole of Eastern India.²⁴² Such a claim has ofcourse a little veracity. A glowing account of the capital city of Puṇḍravardhana has been also given by Sandhyākaranandī in his Rāmacharita. He has made a particular reference to the exquisite grandeur and beauty of the city.²⁴³ The Puṇḍras actually rose above the primitive tribal cultural label, and some of them certainly became so much urbanized as they could build wonderful cities and carry on administration most effectively over a wide belt of territory. But it is almost certain that by the time of the Rāmacharita, i.e., about the 11th and 12th century A.D., waves of several tribes had swept over Bengal and the Puṇḍras gradually lost their identity in a grand milieu that had taken place in Bengal.

(vi) Ethnic Affiliation and Identity :

No positive information is, however, obtainable regarding the ethnic characters of the Puṇḍras. It has been already pointed out that they might have migrated from the Chhotanāgpur region to North Bengal.²⁴⁴ If it be so, it is quite likely that they belonged to the same racial stock to which the tribal peoples of Chhotanāgpur were/are affiliated. It may be noted in this connection that the Puṇḍras might have been Austro-Asiatic language speakers as well like other tribal peoples of Chhotanāgpur. If this contention is accepted, it may also be presumed that the Puṇḍras perhaps belonged to Australoid racial stock like other peoples of Eastern India. This presumption would be considerably borne out by a perusal of the physical characters of the surviving remnants of the ancient Puṇḍra people. There are at present some communities living in different parts of Bengal who may be recognised as the surviving remnants of the ancient Puṇḍras. These are the Puṇḍāris or Punros in the districts of Maldah, Rājsāhi, Murśidābād and Bīrbhūm. The Punros of Bīrbhūm are again to be equated with the Pods of 24 Parganās.²⁴⁵ It is very significant to note that the Punros or Pods or Puṇḍārikas claim their descent from Puṇḍra or Paṇḍraka, the son of Bali.²⁴⁶ In fact, Puṇḍārika or Puṇḍarikā is even today a title of the present Pods and the Kaibartas or Jāliyas of Bengal who are all allied peoples.²⁴⁷

Linguistically the term Paṇḍra appears to have been transformed into Prākṛita and local dialect as Pod (Paṇḍra=Paṇḍa=Padma=Padda=Pod). Similarly, Puṇḍo may be also derived from Paṇḍra or Puṇḍra. It has been

recorded in the Census Report of 1901 that the Puṇḍāris or Puros are mainly found in Bīrbhūm, Maldah, Rājsāhi and Murśidābād.²⁴⁸ The name seems to indicate that they are in reality the Pods, but by residing at a distance from the headquarter of the caste, they have gradually lost connection with the parent group, and the Puros of Maldah profess to know nothing of the Pods of the district of 24-Parganās, though they admit that they belong to the same caste as Puros of Bīrbhūm district²⁴⁹.

In the Bengālī social structure, the Puṇḍras do no doubt occupy a very low position. But now-a-days, they claim themselves as descendants of the Kshatriyas. Actually, they call themselves 'Puṇḍra-Kshatriya'²⁵⁰. "The educated members of the caste (Pod) claim for it a mixed descent from a Kāyastha father and a Nāpit mother. Others tell a story regarding the miraculous birth of the first Pod from Revatī, the wife of Balarām".²⁵¹ Such attempts to redesignate the community claiming Kshatriya origin have been done with the main purpose of elevating their social position. But the fact remains that these peoples belong to the lowest order of the Brahmanical society, and they are considered in certain parts of Bengal as untouchables. The Puṇḍras or Pods at present constitute a fishing, cultivating, land-holding and trading caste, and they are served only by the degraded Brāhmaṇas. They are even denied any access to the Hindu temples.

While speaking about the Pods Bankim Chandra Chatterji as quoted in the Census Report of 1872 referred to their "marked approach to the Turanian and aboriginal type" of features, and he identifies them with the Puṇḍras mentioned in the Mahābhārata as one of the five races of Eastern India²⁵². Risley took anthropometric measurements of the Pods of Bengal and described their physical characters as medium stature, mesocephalic head, mesorrhinic nose and dark skin colour²⁵³. The average cephalic and nasal indices and stature of the Pods as given by Risley are 77.7, 76.1, and 1625 respectively²⁵⁴. Thus the Pods or the Punros or the Puṇḍāris are largely mesocephalic and mesorrhine people. It has been, however, pointed out by Gait that both the Chaṇḍālas and the Pods originated from the same stock²⁵⁵. It is not unlikely that the ancient

Paṇḍras were perhaps dolichocephalic and platyrrhine, and in course of time, as a result of admixtures their physical features underwent certain marked changes. The present physical characters of their surviving representatives, i.e., the Pods speak also of their Australoid affiliation.

But the Punros (Puṇḍāris or Puṇḍārikas), however, claim to belong to a higher position than the Pods, and in fact, they claim to be descendants of the Paṇḍras or Puṇḍras. But the Pods also claim their descent from the Paṇḍrakas, a different community.²⁵⁶ This kind of differentiation between these communities can hardly be admitted. Risley and Gait consider both of them as of common origin. Again, both the Pods and the Punros claim to be Kshatriyas, and Gait remarks that "their claim to Kshatriya rank probably arises from a faint resemblance of the days when they were a ruling tribe in that part of the country", i.e., North Bengal²⁵⁷. This is supported by the very fact that some Pods claim today as Padmarājas or Paṇḍrakshatriyas. But it is very difficult to say as to what extent the Pods or Punros are the descendants of the ancient Puṇḍras of hoary antiquity. If any credence is, however, given to the present claim of the Pods or Punros and if the linguistic transformation from Puṇḍra to Pod or Punro is taken into consideration, it may be presumed that the present Pods or Punros are indeed the surviving remnants of the ancient Puṇḍras. This is also supported by ethnic and sociological considerations and also by the present social status enjoyed by them in the Hindu society implying thereby that these peoples originally belonged to an Anārya tribal community, and that it is with the purpose of upgrading their social position that they are now advocating the claim of their Kshatriya origin by calling themselves Paṇḍra-Kshatriyas.

(viii) Observation :

It may be observed that the ancient Paṇḍras or Puṇḍras were perhaps originally Austric speakers belonging to the Australoid ethnic stock. In ancient times, they were widely distributed over different parts of Bengal enjoying a predominant position in all fields of activities. Subsequently, they lost their position and became integrated into the Brahmanical fold, but relegated to a low social position living as serfs. This continued for

several centuries till the establishment of the Muslim hegemony in Bengal. Risley in his Census Report of Bengal (1901) reported that the Namasūdras and the Paṇḍra-Kshatriyas for making themselves free from the bondage of servitude imposed by the Brahmanical society became converts to Islam on a large scale. It is also reported that "the Namasūdras aggregate about 18,61,000 and the Pods nearly half a million : but large numbers have been converted into Moham^medanism and now call themselves Sheik. There are ten and a half millions of Moham^medans in the Dacca and Chittagong divisions, and it has been shown that a great majority of them are the descendants of converts from the ranks of these two castes". There might have been also many such converts of the peoples of identical origins in the Southern districts of the Presidency Division. It would be now safe to say that at least 9 millions of the Moham^medans of Bengal proper belong to this stock. In fact, many low caste Hindus like the Punros/Puṇḍras with the purpose of freeing themselves from the Brahmanical chain of servitude and bondage became converts to Islam on a large scale and thereby proved to be the most potential and forceful components of the Islamic Brotherhood. This happened, however, in medieval period when the Muslim domination in Bengal was fully established. In ancient times as well, the Puṇḍras like other tribal communities mingled with other peoples and integrated themselves within the Brahmanical fold. Despite their absorption like other cognate tribes, the Puṇḍras were relegated to a very low socio-economic position in the Brahmanical hierarchy of Bengal as indicated by the present social status of their modern representatives. It is, however, to be admitted that the Puṇḍras like other tribes by intermingling with any other peoples, high and low, did certainly make veritable contributions in the ethnic and cultural composition of the People of Bengal.

III. The SUHMAS AND The RĀDHĀS

Like the Vaṅgas and the Puṇḍras, the Suhmas, another tribal community of ancient Bengal, figure frequently in the early Indian literary texts. It may be noted at the very outset that the country named after the Suhmas is referred to in all its aspects, but not so much about the peoples living therein and called as such. Accordingly, the present discussion particularly centres round the country of the Suhmas rather than its peoples about whom there are only a few side-references.

Suhma is mentioned under various forms as Sumbha, Subbha, etc., in the Buddhist and Jaina texts. But in the Sanskrit texts, the name occurs in the form of Suhma (Sumabh + anak) or Sauhma or Subhra. The common name is, however, Suhma which is taken to be a Prākṛita form, and in the Vaidik Sanskrit, it is Suhma meaning fierceful, aggressive, etc.

(i) Name :

The Suhma country was perhaps named after Suhma, the son of Bali, as stated in the Mahābhārata, and the Suhmas may be taken as the descendants of Suhma or Bali²⁵⁸. But it would be perhaps wrong to presume that all peoples of the Suhma country were descendants of Suhma. It may rather be said that the Suhmas were the peoples of the country which was conquered by Suhma and thence named after him. This traditional account of the naming of the country after Suhma is not, however, a very ancient one because of the very fact that the word Suhma does not occur either in the Early or Later Vedic texts. It may be accordingly presumed that the Suhma country and its peoples came into prominence only when the people from upper India moved towards Bengal. That the Suhmas were very important peoples of ancient Bengal is, however, borne out by the references to Subharattha (Suhma+rāshṭra), Subhabhūmi, etc. Not only that, even a reference to the king of Suhma country has been made in a work of the 7th century A.D. (Harshacharitam)²⁵⁹. Daṇḍin refers to the story of the Suhmapati Tuṅgadhanvā²⁶⁰.

(ii) Early References :

The earliest reference to the Suhmas and their country is perhaps to be found in the Āchāraṅga-Sūtra of the Jainas belonging to the 6th century B.C.²⁶¹. Almost contemporaneous with this ancient Jaina work is the Saṃyutta-Nikāya which also refers to the Suhmas²⁶². In the Jaina Kalpasūtra, however, there occurs the expression Subhabhūmi, i.e., the land of the Suhmas, which is said to have been visited by the great Jaina saint Mahāvīra²⁶³. Sumbha of the Jātaka story is of course the same as Sumbhabhūmi. The Jaina Bhagavati-sūtra, however, mentions Sumbhuttara, i.e., Northern part of Sumbha (Suhma) as one of the sixteen Mahājanapadas²⁶⁴.

Besides the Jaina and Buddhist works, frequent references to the Suhmas and their country have been made in the Epic and the Puranic texts. It is learnt from the Mahābhārata that the Pāṇḍavas led their victorious army in the Suhma country and defeated the Suhmas²⁶⁵. In the Ādiparvan of the Mahābhārata it is stated that Pāṇḍu defeated the Suhmas²⁶⁶. The Digvijaya section of the same Epic contains an account of the exploits of Bhīma who in course of his eastern campaigns defeated the Vaṅgas and Epics then subjugated the Suhmas along with the Tāmraliptas, Karvaṭas and the peoples inhabiting the coastal region²⁶⁷. (Suhmānām = adhipañchaiva ye cha sāgarānupavāsinaḥ sarbān Mlechchha-gaṇāṁśchaivavijisye). Even Karṇa is said to have defeated Suhma, Vaṅga and Puṇḍra²⁶⁸. Shafer thinks that Karvaṭa (land of the Karvaṭas who have been identified with the Kharwārs of Midnapur) lay between Vaṅga and Tāmralipta on east and Suhma on west or perhaps within the Suhma country. Nilakaṇṭha in his commentary has, however, stated that the Suhmas and the Rādhās are the same peoples (Suhmāh-Rādhāh²⁷⁰). In the Rāmāyaṇa, the Suhmas have been mentioned along with the Videhas, the Kośālas, the Māgadhas, the Vaṅgas, etc.

Pāṇini in his work perhaps refers to Suhma-nagara²⁷¹. In the Mahābhāṣya of Patañjali (2nd century B.C.), a reference has been made to the territory of the Suhmas along with the Puṇḍras and the Vaṅgas, (Vaṅgāh-Suhmāh-Puṇḍrāh)²⁷². The Bṛhatsamhitā simply places the Suhmas in the Eastern Division²⁷³. In this respect, Kālidāsa in his Raghuvamśa has, however, made a specific reference to the Suhma country by stating that Raghu conquered the Suhmas on the seashore dark with palm trees. (tālivana-śyāmanupakaṇṭhammahōdadhēh)²⁷⁴. Bāṇa in his Harshacharita has again made a pointed reference to a king of the Suhmas called Devasena (Sauhmya) who was poisoned to death by his wife Devakī as she was in love with his younger brother (Vishamachūrṇa-chumbitā-makarandena cha kaṇṇendīvareṇa Devakī devar-ānuraktā Devasenām Sauhmyam)²⁷⁵. It would other texts accordingly follow that the Suhmas are to be associated with the sea, and perhaps Tāmralipti was its southernmost region. This is further supported by Daṇḍin who in his Daśakumāracharita has described Dāmalipti (Tāmralipti) as the city of the Suhmas²⁷⁶. The indication is that during the time of Daṇḍin, Tāmralipta might have been included within the Suhma country, though the Mahābhārata separates it from the latter.

In most of the Purāṇas, like the Vishṇu, the Bhāgavata, the Bhaviṣya, the Matsya, the Kalki, the Vāyu, etc., there are frequent references to the Suhmas and their country which has been also included in the list of the independent states²⁷⁷. It would be evident from a perusal of all relevant texts that the Suhmas were allied to the Aṅgas, the Vaṅgas, the Puṇḍras, etc. Dhōyī in his Pavanadūtām refers to the building of an embankment near the Gaṅgā-Yamunā-Sarasvatī confluence in Suhma-deśa implying that the whole region was within the Suhma country²⁷⁸.

(iii) Origins :

Regarding the origins of the Suhmas there are many traditional and mythical stories recorded in the early texts. In the Mahābhārata it is stated that the Suhmas originated from Suhma, the son of Bali²⁷⁹. In the Bhāgavata-purāṇa Suhma is, however, said to have been born of Sudeshṇā (Bali's wife) by Dīrghatama²⁸⁰. In the same way, the Vāyu-purāṇa records the Suhmas as a Balaya-Kshatra (Brahma, a son of Bali²⁸¹). The Mahābhārata relates again that the Suhmas along with the Mlecchhas, the Pulindas, the Khasas, the Yavanas, the Kambojas, the Śavaras, etc., sprang from the body of Veṇa²⁸². This very story has been also repeated in many Purāṇas.

It would follow from the literary accounts about the origins of the Suhmas that like all other peoples of foreign extractions or of indigenous tribal origins the Suhmas have been also ascribed a mythical origin in a subsequent period when they were brought within the fold of Brahmanism. It also appears that the Suhmas might have originated from intermixtures with many other indigenous peoples of the land, and it is only in a later period that their acceptance within the Hindu fold was mythologically traced. The fact that emerges is that the Suhmas originally belonged to a non-Aryan tribal community.

(iv) Settlements :

The Suhmas appear to have been one of the original tribal communities of ancient Bengal, and that they were generally confined within the territory called after them, namely, Suhmadeśa, the identification of which

is indeed a difficult task nor it is possible to precisely determine its boundary-limits which changed from time to time.

In the Jaina Āchāraṅgasūtra and Kalpasūtra, there are references to Vajjabhūmi and Subbabhūmi, the later denoting the Suhma country. Subbabhūmi or Svabhrabhūmi simply means a country of ravines or ditches producing corns, and Vajjabhūmi denotes hard or rocky land. Both are, however, taken to be the component parts of Lāḍa or Rāḍha²⁸³. According to the Kalpasūtra, Subbabhūmi, the pathless country of the Lāḍhas or Suhmas, was visited by Mahāvīra. Jacobi thinks that Vajjabhūmi and Subbabhūmi are identical. He also identified the Suhmas with the Rāḍhas²⁸⁴. Besides these Jaina and Buddhist texts, there are other references to Subbabhūmi and also to its cities and different parts. As for instance, the Jaina Bhagavati-sūtra refers to Sambhuttara indicating perhaps northern portion of the Suhma country²⁸⁵. In the Nikāyas and the Jātaka-stories Deśaka and Śvetaka are mentioned as market-towns or cities of the Suhma country²⁸⁶.

The Mahābhārata in its different Parvas speaks of the Suhma country in such a way as to create some confusions regarding its exact location²⁸⁷. From the account of Bhīma's conquest in the Eastern region, it would appear that the Suhma country was preceded by Tāmralipta and Vaṅga²⁸⁸. The Sabhāparvan of the Mahābhārata, however, presents a clear picture about the location of the Suhma country which appears to have been bounded on west by Magadha, on north by Nepal, on east by the Lauhitya and on south by the Bay of Bengal²⁸⁹. The Mahābhārata actually associates the Suhma country with the Sea (Suhmānām adhipaṇchaiva ye cha ... sāgarānu-pavāsinah²⁹⁰). Again, in the account of Bhīma's Digvijaya it has been narrated that from Videha he came to the country of the Kirātas, and from there, he went to the land of the Suhmas (Kirātānām adhipatīṇaṁ jayat sapta Pāṇḍavah²⁹¹). Here, it is interesting to note that in the Epic there is a reference to Prasuhma which was invaded by Bhīma. This Prasuhma was perhaps western Suhma country. It is also stated that Bhīma defeated all the peoples who lived on the sea shore (Suhmanām adhipaṇchaiva ye cha sāgarānupa vāsinah sarbān Mlechchha ganāśchaiva vijigye²⁹²). Bhīma is also said to have defeated

the ruler of the Suhma country along with those who lived on the sea shore (Suhmānāmadhipaṇchaiva ye cha sāgarā-vāsinah)²⁹³. Thus Suhma was close to the sea and Tāmralipta. And subsequently, Suhma included Tāmralipta which became its capital (Suhmeshu Dāmaliptā hvayasya)²⁹⁴. This is further supported by the account of Digvijaya of Raghu given by Kālidāsa. Raghu's army marched like the Ganges to the Eastern ocean and conquered the Suhmas on the sea-shore dark with the palm trees (tālīvana-syāmaṁ-upakantham mahōdadhēh)²⁹⁵. It would, therefore, follow that the Suhma country definitely extended upto the sea, and that Raghu came to the Vaṅga region after conquering the Suhmas who protected themselves against the invader like the cane plants protecting against the sea waves (ātmā-saṁrakṣita Suhmair vrittir āsr. tya vaitasim)²⁹⁶. In the Mārkaṇḍeya-Purāṇa, the Subhras (Suhmas) have been also placed in the Eastern division²⁹⁷.

In this connection, a side-reference may be made to the account of Fa-hien who visited Eastern India in the 5th century A.D. He has not referred to the Suhma country nor did he pay any visit to it²⁹⁸. Fa-hien had to travel to Tāmralipti bypassing the Suhma country. But unfortunately, Fa-hien has made no reference to the Suhma country. The natural presumption would be that the Suhma country was perhaps at that time integrated in the Gupta empire, and it lost its separate existence. Instead, Tāmralipta came into prominence. It is further to be noted that even in the 7th century A.D. Hiuen Tsang did not refer to the Suhma country, though he visited Chinese accounts Kie(ka)-lo-na-su-fa-la-na (Karṇasuvarṇa) and Tan-mo-li-ti (Tāmralipta)²⁹⁹. Therefore, the Suhma country by the time of Hiuen Tsang appears to have been formed also into the Karṇasuvarṇa kingdom. The indication is that the Suhma country lost its importance as a separate and independent entity by the time of Fa-hien and Hiuen Tsang.

It would be, however, wrong to suppose that the Suhma country has not been referred to in any work anterior or posterior to the 7th century A.D. In fact, even Daṇḍin in his Daśakumāracharita (6th century A.D.) speaks of the inclusion of Dāmaliptā (Tāmralipti) within Suhma country

by stating : Suhmeshu Dāmaliptāḥ svasyasya nagarasya³⁰⁰. Daṇḍin, however, has not failed to refer to Dāmalipta as a great centre of trade and commerce, apparently a port-city of the Suhma country³⁰¹. If this evidence of the Suhma country of Daṇḍin is accepted, the inevitable conclusion would be that Tāmralipta was not an independent country at that time, but only a port-centre of the Suhma country. But with the establishment of the Karnaśuvarṇa kingdom, the Suhma country became perhaps completely merged with it. This explains as to why Hiuen Tsang has not made any reference to the Suhma country as such. It must not, however, be forgotten that a contemporary work of Hiuen Tsang, i.e., Bāṇa's Harashacharita refers to the Suhma country³⁰². Subsequently, the Suhma country might have again come into prominence. In the Brihatsamhitā, Suhma is mentioned as an Eastern country³⁰³. In the Digvijayaprakāśa there is, however, a specific reference to the location of Suhma. It is stated : Gaudasya paśchimē bhāgē viradeśasya purvaṭaḥ Dāmōdarottarē bhāgē Suhmadeśaḥ prakirtitaḥ, i.e., Suhma lying on the northern part of the Dāmōdara, west of Gaudadeśa and east of Vīradeśa³⁰⁴. Rājasekhara in his Kāvyaīmāṃsā (10th century A.D.) places the Suhma country in the Eastern part of the Āryāvarta³⁰⁵. Another work of the same century, namely, Karpūramañjarī, uses the word Rāḍha instead of Suhma, implying thereby that Suhma and Rāḍha became interchangeable terms³⁰⁶. This would be evident also from the Kathā-saritsāgara (11th century A.D) wherein Rāḍha instead of Suhma is mentioned³⁰⁷. Similarly, in the Prabodha-Chandra-daya-nāṭaka, Rāḍha is mentioned instead of Suhma³⁰⁸. All these references certainly point to the fact that the name Suhma was perhaps replaced by Rāḍha or that term became interchangeable. This would be further evident from a perusal of the later literary texts. Dhōyī (12th - 13th century A.D.) in his Pavanadūta, however, refers to the Suhma country lying along the valleys of the Bhāgīrathī or Gaṅgā (Gaṅgāvīchi-plutaparisaṛaḥ Saudhamālā-vatamśō yāsyatuchhaistayi rasōmayō viśmayam Suhmadeśaḥ³⁰⁹).

In this connection, it may be noted that the Matsya-purāṇa refers to Brahmōttara as one of the countries through which the Ganges flowed³¹⁰.

In the Kāvyamīmāṃsā both Suhma and Brahmōttara are mentioned as Eastern countries³¹¹. Alberunī also refers to the Brahmōttara country. It has been also suggested that Brahma was the name of a Janapada in Rāḍha, and Brahmas and Suhmas formed one group of people³¹². It is further stated in the said text that after passing through Suhmadeśa, Vijayapurī, (named Brahma after Vijayasena), the capital of the Suhma country was reached³¹³. But its identification is as yet uncertain. It has been, however, suggested that Vijayapura was not far away from the upper course of the Bhāgīrathī, and it may be the same as Vijayanagar near Deopāṛā where an inscription has been found³¹⁴. Some have suggested that the city is to be located in Huglī district, and others place it near Gaur in Maldah district³¹⁵. Gradually, Suhma was replaced by Rāḍha, a name which became more popular. The Yōginī-Tantra (Pūrva-khaṇḍa) mentions only Rāḍha³¹⁶. In the Tabaqāt-i-Nāsirī (13th century A.D.) a reference has been also made to the Rāḍha country only³¹⁷. In other words Suhma-deśa was replaced by Rāḍha-deśa as Suhma and Rāḍha became identical.

It would thus appear that the Suhmas were perhaps spread over a large territory which included even in ancient times parts of the area covered by the modern districts of Burdwan, Huglī, Midnapur, Nadiā, portions of Murśidābād and also of 24-Parganās, i.e., extending upto the sea. In other words, the land lying on west of the Bhāgīrathī extending upto the sea was included within the territorial jurisdiction of the Suhma country wherein lived the Suhmas. From the account of Raghu's Digvijaya as given by Kālidāsa it appears that the Suhma people lived near the sea-coast or perhaps on a great river with marshes full of canes³¹⁸. Raychaudhuri thinks that Trivenī and Saptagrāma area was the very nerve centre of the Suhma country³¹⁹. In the opinion of Sen, Kapiśā actually formed the boundary line between Suhma and Utkala³²⁰. Here, a particular reference may be made to the Bhāturiyā inscription wherein the Suhmas figure along with others who obeyed the command of the King Rājyapāla³²¹. From this inscription it appears that the Suhma country corresponded more particularly to West Bengal. In that case, the Suhmas were perhaps the people par excellence of West Bengal.

Here, a particular reference may be made to Prasuhma and Brahma or Brahmōttara mentioned along with Suhma. Even in the Āin-i-Akbarī, Brahmōttara is mentioned³²². Some suggest that it would be Suhmōttara, i.e., North Suhma. Both Prasuhma and Suhmōttara can not be correctly located. Both may be synonymous. It may be Vajjabhūmi which is again mentioned as Brahmabhūmi or Brahmōttara in the Pavanadūta and Kāvyamīmāṃsā³²³.

Parasuhma and Brahmōttara That it was a part of Rāḍha becomes evident from Dhōyī's Pavana-dūta wherein Suhma and Brahma are located on west of the Ganges. Prasuhma of Mahābhārata may be made equivalent to Brahmōttara or Brahma which in the Mārkaṇḍeya-purāṇa is equivalent to Suhmōttara, i.e., Northern part of Suhma. This may be again equated with Brahma, Vajra and Uttara-Rāḍha of the inscriptions.

(v) The Rāḍhās :

For a proper understanding of the Suhma peoples of West Bengal and their country, it is necessary to deal with the Rāḍhas who became once almost synonymous with the Suhmas. In fact, the name Suhma came into disuse generally from the 12th century, and perhaps the last reference to Suhmadeśa is found in the Pavanadūta (13th century A.D) as : Gaṅgāvīchi-plutaparisarah ... Suhma-deśah³²⁴.

The Rāḍhas are indeed the peoples of the Rāḍha country which is one of the four traditional territorial divisions of ancient Bengal corresponding roughly to Western, Eastern, Northern and Southern Bengal, named as Rāḍha, Vaṅga, Varendra and Bāgdi respectively. All these four traditional divisions are in vogue even today, and the peoples of these four regions are also known accordingly.

Rāḍha or Rāḍhā as a distinct territorial unit of ancient Bengal is frequently referred to in both literary and epigraphic records under various forms which are indeed local or dialectical variations of a common Prākṛita word. Diverse forms under which Rāḍha appears are Rāḍha, Raḍa, Lāḍha, Lada, Lāta, Lāla, Rāla, Rāḍhā, Rāḍhī, Rārā, Rara, Rāl, etc. Rāḍha or Rārḥā is no doubt a Sanskrit form of the Prākṛita word Lāḍhā. It is, however, very significant to note that the Sanskritized Rāḍha or Rāḍhā does not occur either in the Epics or in any other Sanskrit works earlier than the 10th century A.D.³²⁵. It implies that the Sanskritization

of the original Prākṛita word was made in a later period because the earliest reference to the Prākṛita form of Rāḍha is to be found in a Jaina work attributed to the 6th century B.C. The term Rāḍha means beautifying or lustrous; Rāḍha (ḍha) has also various other meanings such as crude, aggressive, etc.

It is, however, in the Āyāraṅga-sūtra, the earliest sacred book of the Jainas, that the Prākṛita form of Rāḍha, i.e., Lāḍha is specifically mentioned³²⁶. According to this work the great Jaina master Mahāvīra travelled over the pathless countries of the Lāḍhās in Vajjabhūmi and Subbabhūmi wherein he was very badly treated by the wild and barbarous peoples of the land who are stated to have struck the Jaina saint and set their dogs after him³²⁷. It is thus stated in the text : "Mahāvīra travelled in the pathless countries of the Lāḍhas, in Vajjabhūmi and Subbabhūmi ... many natives attacked him. Few people kept off the attacking and biting dogs, striking the monk they cried Khukkhu (= Chucchu) and made the dogs bite him"³²⁸. The Jaina Kalpasūtra relates also the story of the great Jaina Master's sojourn in Subbabhūmi. It has been stated by the commentator that Mahāvīra spent sometimes at Paṇitabhūmi in Vajjabhūmi³²⁹. A perusal of the Jaina texts reveals that Lāḍha comprised two distinct divisions, namely, Vajjabhūmi and Subbabhūmi³³⁰. In the Tāmil work Śilappadhikāram, it is stated that the Chola king received all sorts of presents from the conquered Northern territories, but the ruler of Vajra maintained neutrality³³¹. According to the commentator, this Vajra country was on the bank of the Śōn, near Magadha³³².

As to the identification of the two parts of the Lāḍha country as described in the Jaina texts, Jacobi is inclined to correlate Subbabhūmi with the land of the Suhmas who have been again equated with the Rāḍhās³³³. Regarding Vajjabhūmi, it may be noted that the term appears to occur in Aśoka's edicts in the form of Vachabhūmika and in the Hāthigumphā inscription as Vajra which means hard or mighty or Vīra³³⁴. As such, the term may be equated with Vīrabhūma, i.e., modern Bīrbhūm or Barābhūm. But Barnett doubts the equation of Vajra with Vīra. Vajjabhūmi has been again equated with Vijaya-bhūmi identified with Siṅghbhūm and Mānbhūm.

Others have identified it with Vañjabhūmi, i.e., Mayūrbhañj³³⁵. But generally, it is equated with Vīrabhūmi, i.e., Bīrbhūm³³⁶. Raychaudhuri, however, connects it with Mandāran in south-west Bengal as mentioned in the Āīn-ī-Akbarī, i.e., parts of Bīrbhūm, Burdwan and Hugli districts³³⁷. The word Vīr has been supposed to be a Mundā word meaning jungle, and Bhūm denotes land. Thus Bīrbhūm means jungle land. The names Jhārkhaṇḍ and Jaṅgalmahal also denote jungle areas. In the Śrīchaitanya-Charitāmṛita, there is a vivid account of the Jhārkhaṇḍ areas infested with wild animals, and this Jhārkhaṇḍ territory includes Simbhūm, Mānbhūm, Mallabhūm, Sāmantabhūm and Varāhabhūm, i.e., the periphery areas of West Bengal. In all these places live even today the most primitive peoples like the Bhūmijas and others. It has been further upheld by some that Subbabhūmi and Vajjabhūmi might have corresponded with the southern, western and northern parts of the Rāḍha country³³⁸.

Besides, Lāḍha is also mentioned in the Jaina Upāṅgas. In the 4th Jaina Upāṅga-Pannavanā, i.e., Prajñāpanā, Lāḍha is mentioned as one of the Ārya-Janapadas with Koḍivarisaṃ as its principal city³³⁹. The fifth Upāṅga includes Lāḍha in the list of the sixteen Mahājanapadas³⁴⁰. In this connection, a particular reference may be also made to the commentary of Nilakaṇṭha on the Mahābhārata wherein occurs the expression Suhmāh-Rādhāh, i.e., the two being made identical or synonymous³⁴¹. Rāḍha is again the Sanskritized form of the Prākṛita word Lāṭa or Lāla as mentioned in the Jaina and Buddhist texts³⁴². It is, however, evident from the Jaina texts that Lāḍha or Rāḍha country was in existence even by about the 6th century B.C. with Koḍivarisaṃ as its city. Koḍivarisaṃ appears to be no other than Koṭivarsha which has been referred to as a Vishaya in the Bhukti of Puṇḍravardhana³⁴³. This Koṭivarsha is again to be identified with the modern Bāngarh in the district of Dinājpur. It implies that the Rāḍha country included also a portion of Northern Bengal.

Another significant reference is to be found in the Ceylonese chronicles Dvīpavaṃśa and Mahāvāṃśa wherein the story of the Aryan colonisation of Ceylon by the prince Vijaya of Lāla has been narrated³⁴⁴. The

reference is to Lālarattha, i.e., Lāla or Rāḍharāshtra³⁴⁵. The identification of this Lāla has been a matter of controversy amongst the scholars³⁴⁶. Some have identified Lāla with Lāṭa (Greek form being Larike) in Gujrāt implying thereby that the colonisers of Ceylon went from Western India³⁴⁷. This is attested to by the colonising party's adventure in Suppāra (Sopāra) and Bhārukachcha, i.e., Broach (Barygaza of Ptolemy and the Periplus³⁴⁸). Other scholars, however, identify Lāla with Rāḍha or western Bengal³⁴⁹. In this connection, some related matters regarding the Lāla country as described in the Ceylonese chronicles may be noted. In the Mahāvamśa, it is stated that the land of Lāla was covered with pathless dense forests being the abode of the ferocious wild animals³⁵⁰. It is further stated in the same text that a branch of the royal family of Kalinga established a kingdom in Lāla with Siṃhapura as its capital. This Siṃhapura has been identified with Siṅgur in Burdwan³⁵¹. Again, the stories of Vijaya and Bhaddakacchana as narrated in the Mahāvamśa reveal that Lāla was very close to the ocean³⁵².

All these facts justify the contention that Lāla of the Ceylonese chronicles may be identified on reasonable grounds with the Rāḍha country, i.e., Western part of ancient Bengal. Lāṭa appears to be a variation of Lāla which is undoubtedly a Prākṛita form of Rāḍha. The description of the landscape of the Lāla country as given in the Mahāvamśa also agrees considerably with that of the Jaina Āchāraṅgasūtra. This contention of the identification of Lāla of the Ceylonese chronicles with Lāḍha or Rāḍha is also supported by all other references derived from the Sanskrit texts as well. Further, from the Ceylonese chronicles it appears that Lāla and Vaṅga were very closely connected. It is also learnt that the Vaṅga King's daughter Susīma had connection with Sīho and had two sons, namely, Siḥabāhu and Siḥasīvali who founded Siḥapura, the capital of Lāla, and it was Siḥabāhu's son Vijaya who colonised Ceylon. This gives further support to Lāla's identification with Rāḍha (West Bengal). Again, Lāla is the same as Lāḍha which is the Prākṛita form of Rāḍha. Further, Lāla's equivalent appears to be Rāḍha or Rāra which occurs in an old Mathurā inscription³⁵³. In the Bṛhatsaṃhitā, the Suhma country has been actually placed between Vaṅga and Magadha, i.e., the Western part of Bengal³⁵⁴.

Now, if Suhma is taken to be synonymous with Rāḍha, the Western part of Bengal might have been the veritable Rāḍha country. Further, in the Prabodhachandradaya-nāṭaka (Act.IV) of the 11th century A.D., a specific reference has been made to Rāḍha and Rāḍhaka as countries of the Gauḍa kingdom. (Vārendrā-Gauḍa Rāḍhakāh-Jyotistattva)³⁵⁵. It is further learnt from the same text that the Rāḍha country retained its independence under the kings of the Śūra dynasty from the 9th to the 11th century A.D. This is also confirmed by the Khajurāho inscription which mentions that Rāḍha Rāḍha was conquered by Dhaṅgadeva, the Chandella king of Jejākabhukti (Bundelkhand)³⁵⁶. The earliest epigraphic reference to Rāḍha is, however, to be found in the Mathurā inscription as already referred to. It is stated therein that a native of the Rāra country installed a Jaina image at the request of a Jain saint³⁵⁷. The next reference is to be found in the Khajurāho inscription wherein the queens of Kāñchi, Andhra, Rāḍha and Aṅga are stated to have been imprisoned by Dhaṅgadeva (10th century A.D.)³⁵⁸.

It may be noted that during the Pāla-Sena period, Rāḍha was divided into two distinct parts, namely, Uttara-Rāḍha and Dakshina-Rāḍha, i.e., Northern and Southern Rāḍha. In the Tirumalai Rock inscription of Rājendra Chōla, the Dravidianized forms of Uttara-Rāḍha and Dakshina-Rāḍha are Uttira-Lāḍam and Takkana-Lāḍam. It has been stated in the said inscription that the Chola invader defeated Raṇasūra, the king of Dakshina-Rāḍha and Mahīpāla, the king of Magadha and Uttira-Rāḍha³⁵⁹. Both Uttara-Rāḍha and Dakshina-Rāḍha as two distinct parts of the Rāḍha country have been mentioned in other epigraphic records as well. An earlier reference to Uttira-Lāḍam is also to be found in the Indian Museum plates of the Gaṅga king belonging to the 9th century A.D.³⁶⁰ From the account given in the epigraphic records, it would be possible to indicate the geographical location of these two parts of the Rāḍha country³⁶¹.

In the Naihāṭi Copper plate grant it is stated that Uttara-Rāḍha-maṇḍala was an administrative unit of the Vardhamāna-bhukti. (Śrī-Vardhamāna=bhukty=antahpātinya=Uttara-Rāḍha maṇḍale)³⁶²; so also in the Govindapur plate wherein it is stated : Śrī-Vardhamānabhuktya=antahpāti.

But during the time of Lakshmaṇasena Uttara-Rāḍha appears to have formed southern part of Kaṅkagrāmabhukti³⁶³. The Belava Copper plate refers to a village named Siddhala in Uttara-Rāḍha which was the birth-place of Bhaṭṭabhavadeva. (Uttara-Rāḍhāyām-Siddhala-grāmiya)³⁶⁴. In the Bhuvaneśvara Temple inscription as well the same village has been mentioned as Alaṁkāra of Rāḍhaśrīyah, i.e., an ornament of the goddess of the fortune of Rāḍha³⁶⁵. From the same inscription it is learnt that some parts of Uttara-Rāḍha were forest areas (Rāḍhā-yām-ajatāsu jaṅgalpatha) indicating perhaps the Jhārkhaṇḍ region³⁶⁶. The Siddhala village has been identified with Siddhangrāma in the district of Bīrbhūm, which even today resembles the aforesaid description^{366a}. Besides, in the Naihāṭi inscription of Vallālasena, the villages like Vālahiṭṭhā, Jalosōthī, Khāṇḍayillā, Ambayillā and Mōlādandī have been included in Uttara-Rāḍha. The village Vālahiṭṭhā in Svalpadakṣhiṇa-vīthi of Uttara-Rāḍha-maṇḍala belonging to Vardhamāna-bhukti has been identified with Bālutiya on the northern borders of the district of Burdwan, and other villages are to be placed in the districts of Murśidābād and Burdwan³⁶⁷. Further, the Śaktipur grant of Lakshmaṇasena contains a reference to certain villages of Uttara-Rāḍha which are to be located in the Kāndi subdivision of Murśidābād district³⁶⁸. The villages granted in the aforesaid record are also associated with the river Morā. It shows that Uttara-Rāḍha denoted an area which at least partly included the Mayūrākshī valley flowing through the Bīrbhūm district. Further, the Naihāṭi Copper plate refers to the ancestor of Vallālasena adorning the Rāḍha country, and the Deopārā inscription of Vijayasena contains the information that Sāmantasena, the founder of the Sena dynasty, spent his last days in the hermitage on the bank of the Ganges³⁶⁹. In the Bhaviṣhya-purāṇa, there is a reference to Rāḍha-khaṇḍa-Uttara-Rāḍha containing Vaidyanāth ; Vakreśvara, Bīrbhūm, etc. and also the river Ajay³⁷⁰. From all these references it has been suggested that the Senas might have originally settled in Uttara-Rāḍha which included parts of the districts of Burdwan, Bīrbhūm and Murśidābād. The northernmost limit of Uttara-Rāḍha appears to have included also parts of Northern Bengal as Kōṭivarsha (Bāngarh, Dinājpur district) which has been described as a chief city of the Rāḍha country³⁷¹. This is also partially supported by the Chandraprabhā which refers to a part of Rāḍha lying on the north of the Ganges (Uttara-Gaṅgā Rāḍham)³⁷². Besides, in the Digvijaya-prakāśa, it has been specifically stated : 'Dāmōdarottarabhāgē ... Rāḍhadeśa prakīrtitah'.³⁷³ This corresponds to the northern part of the Rāḍha country

which was also known as Vajjabhūmi. It has been already stated that the Tirumalai inscription makes a positive reference to Uttiralādhām and Takkana-lādhām³⁷⁴. In the 6th - 7th century A.D., Karṇasuvarṇa became the capital city of Northern Rāḍha which became perhaps known also as Karṇasuvarṇa (Kie (ka)-lo-na-su-fa-la-na) kingdom as referred to by Hiuen Tsang³⁷⁵.

As to Dakshina-Rāḍha, it has been suggested that the river Ajay formed the boundary between the northern and southern parts of the Rāḍha country. But Katwa subdivision of Burdwan district was included within Uttara-Rāḍha-maṇḍala. Accordingly, it was not the river Ajay, but rather the river Kharī that actually formed the boundary between the Northern and Southern Rāḍha³⁷⁶. Like Uttara-Rāḍha, Dakshina-Rāḍha is also mentioned in both literary and epigraphic records of the later period. The Prabodhachandra-dayanāṭaka of Kṛṣṇamiśra and the Nyāyakandalī of Śrīdhara-chārya refer to Dakshina-Rāḍha. From the text of Kṛṣṇamiśra (11th century A.D.), it is learnt that a village named Bhūriśreshthika was in Dakshina-Rāḍha country³⁷⁷ (Āśiddakṣiṇarādhāyām dvijānām bhūrikarmānām Bhurīśrīṣṭīrīti grāmō Bhuri-śreshthījanāśrayah). The Nyāyakandalī of Śrīdhara-bhaṭṭa of the 10th century A.D. contains also a reference to the village Bhūriśreshthi which was indeed the very birth place of a great philosopher.³⁷⁸ Bhūriśreshthi is also mentioned along with Dakshina-Rāḍha in certain other inscriptions as well.³⁷⁹ The Nalḥāṭi Copper plate refers also to the village of Bhūriśreshthi.³⁸⁰ A reference to Dakshina-Rāḍha has been already made as occurring in the Tirumalai inscription of Rājendrachola.³⁸¹ In this inscription, the Chola invader is said to have proceeded to Dakshina-Rāḍha from Dandabhukti and from Northern Rāḍha the army moved to Vaṅgāladeśa.³⁸² According to the Irdā Copper plate, Dandabhukti was a Maṇḍala of Vardhamā-nabhukti.³⁸³ Other inscriptions also refer to Dakshina-Rāḍha.³⁸⁴ Bhūriśreshthi or Bhūriśreshthika in Dakshina-Rāḍha has been identified with modern Bhursut and Navagrāma in Howrah and Hugli districts and Dāmuniyā in Burdwan district.³⁸⁵ In the Prabodhachandradaya-nāṭaka, Bhursut is actually placed on the Dāmōdar in the Hugli district belonging to Dakshina-Rāḍha.³⁸⁶ The Chandī of Kavikaṅkaṇa-Mukundarāma refers to Navagrāma and Dāmuniyā in Howrah and Hugli districts.³⁸⁷ It would thus appear that Dakshina-Rāḍha embraced a considerable portion of West Bengal lying between the rivers Ajay and the Dāmōdar, and its southern boundary might have been extended upto the Rūpnārāyaṇa including the Arambagh region of Hugli district.³⁸⁸ Rāḍha comprising its both Northern and Southern parts is, however, more

specifically referred to in the Digvijaya-prakāśa as : Dāmōdaro-ttarebhāgē...
Rādhadeśah prakīrtitah, i.e., Rādhadeśa was confined to the north of the
 river Dāmōdarā.³⁸⁹

(vi) Rādha-varendrī :

In this context, a particular reference may be made to the expression Rādha-Varendrī in the records of the early mediaeval period. In the Brāhmaṇa-sarvasva, Halāyudha has frequently referred to the Rādhiyas and the Vārendras. The use of this expression Rādha-Varendrī also occurs in the Kenduapatna Plates of Narasimhadeva II of the 13th century A.D. The same expression is also to be found in the Tabaqāt-i-Nāsirī wherein it is stated that the territory of Lakhnauti had two wings on both sides of the Ganges.³⁹⁰ The western side has been mentioned as Rāl, i.e., Rārḥ or Rādha to which the city Lakhnūr belonged and the eastern side, as Bārind or Varendra to which belonged the city Deokoṭ or Debikoṭ or Diw-Kot.³⁹¹ Dakshina-Rādha mostly comprised the ancient Shuma country with Bhūriśreshṭhi as its chief city and Tāmrālipti as its great port.³⁹²

(vii) Rādha-Gaṅgārāshṭra :

Here, another expression Rādha-Gaṅgā-rāshṭra may be also referred to. This Gaṅgā-rāshṭra existing before the 5th century B.C. was indeed the ancient Rādha country. Rādha has been very often equated or made synonymous with Gaṅgā-rāshṭra which is hardly to be found mentioned in the Epics, Purāṇas and other works. But the abbreviated form of Gaṅgā-rāshṭra like Gaṅgā, Gaṅga, Gāṅgē, etc., are to be found in the epigraphic records.³⁹³ It has been suggested that Gaṅgā-rāshṭra which was in existence in the 5th century B.C. was a noman's land.³⁹⁴

In the Karhād plate and Deoli plate inscriptions of Kṛishṇa III of the 10th century A.D., Gaṅga denoting Gaṅgā-rāshṭra occurs.³⁹⁵ In those inscriptions, it is stated that the command of Kṛishṇa II was obeyed by Gaṅgā the Aṅgas, the Kaliṅgas, the Gaṅgas and the Māgadhas. Here, the Gaṅga-country of Gaṅgā-rāshṭra has been placed between Kaliṅga and Magadha.³⁹⁶ The Pīṭhapuram pillar inscription of Pṛithvīśvara of the 12th century A.D. refers to the Gaṅga country which is also to be placed just before Kaliṅga.³⁹⁷ Similarly, the Harihara Stone inscription of the 12th

century A.D. refers to the mighty kings of Gaṅga, Kaliṅga, Vaṅga, etc.³⁹⁸. These are also to be found mentioned in the Belur inscription of the 14th century A.D.³⁹⁹

It would appear that the Gaṅgā country or Gaṅgā-rāshtra or Gaṅgā-rādhi was quite well-known in the period from the 10th to the 14th century A.D. Though not referred to in the early literary and epigraphic documents, Gaṅga or Gaṅgā-rāshtra appears to have been in existence even in the 1st century A.D. This would be evident from the account of the Periplus of the Erythraean Sea wherein the 'country of the Ganges', i.e., Gaṅgā or Gaṅgā-rāshtra is mentioned.⁴⁰⁰ Again, the Gaṅgā-rādhis were also known as Calingae at the time of Megasthenes, i.e., 4th century B.C.⁴⁰¹ Cunningham thinks that Gangaridae-Calingae were one of the Tri-Kaliṅgas or three Kaliṅgas. Pliny, (1st century A.D.) has, however, mentioned the Macco-Calingae (or middle Kaliṅgas) and the Gangaridae-Calingae⁴⁰² as separate peoples from Calingae. In this connection, a reference may be also made to the legendary story narrated in the Ceylonese chronicle Mahāvamsā wherein the people of Kaliṅga are said to have established a settlement in Lāla with the capital city at Simhapura or Singur in the Rādha country. These peoples were actually known as Kaliṅgas of Gaṅgā-Rādha or Gangaridae-Calingae. Varāhamihira in the Bṛhatsaṃhitā also equates Rādha with Gaṅgā-rāshtra which is again placed between Vaṅga and Magadha.⁴⁰³ Dey is of opinion that through six hundred years the delta comprising Burdwan and Hugli districts, and the delta thus formed was indeed the Gaṅgā-rāshtra which is identical with the ancient Rādha country.⁴⁰⁴ It appears that Gaṅgā-rāshtra or Gange are identical with the Rādha country.

(viii) Prasii and Gangaridae :

This finding relating to Gaṅga-rāshtra may be further elucidated by making a particular reference to the accounts contained in the classical writings wherein occur the mention of Prasii and Gangaridae, i.e., Pūrvadeśa and Gangetic valley. The Latin poet Ovid (1st century B.C.) referred to Gangetikus or Gangetia (Gaṅgeya). Chatterji thinks that Gangaridai is a Greek transcription of Gaṅgāi (Ganges). The separate mention of Gangaridae from Prasii may point to the cultural differences between the two peoples.⁴⁰⁵ According to Plutarch Gangaridae

and Prasii were under the rule of their respective kings, but the two might have been united against the foreign invader.⁴⁰⁶ Curtius refers to Gangaridae and Prassii as two nations. But he speaks of one king, namely, Agrammes who has been identified with the Nanda king.⁴⁰⁷ It seems that the peoples formed one nation under the Nanda ruler. Diodorus, however, refers to Gangaridae as the greatest of all nations of India. It is quite likely that the king Agrammes or Xandrames united both these peoples under his hegemony. Here a reference may be also made to Pliny who uses the expression Gangaridum-Calingarum implying thereby that there was perhaps an alliance between the Gangaridae and Kalingas as well against the rising power of Magadha.

Regarding the capital city of the Gangaridae, it has been already pointed out that Simhapura was perhaps the earliest one. Subsequently, during the time of Megasthenes (4th century B.C.), Parthalis turned into a capital.⁴⁰⁸ But according to Pliny Parthalis was the royal city of the Calingae.⁴⁰⁹ Parthalis has been supposed to be a transcription or corruption of Pūrvasthalī on the Ganges in the district of Burdwan.⁴¹⁰ The next capital city was perhaps at Gange as described in the Periplus (1st century A.D.) and Ptolemy's geography (2nd century A.D.).⁴¹¹ According to city : Ptolemy, Gange was situated on the third mouth of the Ganges. Parthalis and Gange not far off from Pūrvasthalī. Gange became a great emporium of trade, through which were "brought malabathrum and Gangetic spikenard, pearls and Muslins of the finest sort called Gangetic"⁴¹². It had trade connection with Mouziris (Craganore) and Nelkunda (Kottayam), and all those articles were exported to Egypt and Rome. It is specifically stated in the Periplus : "There is a river near it called the Ganges. On its bank there is a market-town which has the same name as the river"⁴¹³.

Many suggestions have been put forward regarding the identity of Gange with such places as Chittagong, Sonārgāon, Jessor, etc., but none of them appear to be convincing.⁴¹⁴ Recently, it has been suggested that Gange may be identified with Chandraketurah (24 Parganās district) where excavations revealed the existence of an urban settlement with of Gange a massive rampart.⁴¹⁵ But no concrete record has yet been unearthed at the site which would establish its identity with the Gange market-town of the classical writers. On the other hand, Pūrvasthalī or Saptagrāma (Sātgaon in Hugli district) which was situated on the confluence of the Sarasvatī, Yamunā and Gaṅgā, appears to have been the ancient Gange port.⁴¹⁶

Saptagrāma maintained its glorious existence as a great trade centre even up to the medieval period. It may be noted that the town Gaṅgā (Gange) was also called Gaṅgā-Bandar, a name also applied to Saptagrāma. It is not unlikely that this Bandar still persists in its corrupted form in Bandel which formed a part of Saptagrāma along with Trivenī, an early emporium. Saptagrāma declined as a port-town when the Sarasvatī deteriorated and as such, the trade-centre was shifted to Hugli in 1632.⁴¹⁷

As to the composition of the term Gangaridae it may be suggested here that it is perhaps the classical version of Gaṅgā-rādhi, i.e., a combination of Rādha and Gaṅgā indicating the amalgamation of the two peoples or countries. The region was known originally by Gaṅgā in the 4th century B.C. and subsequently, Rādha was added. Significantly, Rādhadeśa comprised the whole area on the western side of the Ganges. From both indigenous and foreign sources it appears that there were several capital cities at different times like Gange, Parthalis (Pūrvasthalī), Simhapura (Singur), etc.

This discussion on the geographical extent of the Rādha country leads one to presume that almost the whole of West Bengal along with parts of southern and northern Bengal as well were included within it. The Rādha country actually comprised the whole of the ancient Suhma region and other neighbouring territories. The ancient Suhma-janapada included the whole of Rādha up to Tāmralipti. But generally speaking, Suhmabhūmi perhaps corresponding more particularly to southern parts of Rādha retains the name Rādha and of Suhma of ancient times. Naturally so, within this wide geographical compass there lived different peoples who from time to time established their political authority quite independent of one another, and as such, there are references to various names singly or conjointly, such as, Gaṅgā-Rādhā, Gaṅgā-Varendra, and Gangaridae of the classical writers. In the later period, this Suhma or Rādha country was fully overwhelmed by the Gaudas who established the Gauda kingdom which in the early medieval period comprised almost the whole of Bengal. It is learnt from the Kārikā of Devīvara-Ghaṭaka that Rādha formed a part of the Gauda kingdom at the time of Ādiśūra.⁴¹⁸ During the rule of the Senas, Rādha was made a province of the Gauda kingdom. It was Vijayasena who

Rādha and
its amalga-
mation

conquered Gauḍa, and thereby Gauḍa and Rāḍha formed one single kingdom.⁴¹⁹ In the Vallālacharita, it is said that Vallālasena made Rāḍha a province of the Sena kingdom (Vallālasenahi Vaṅgāścha-Rāḍha Varendravāgdi).⁴²⁰ Finally, Rāḍha was conquered by the Muslims in the 13th century A.D. But the ancient names Lāḍha, Lādhā and Rāḍha still survive in such village names as Vōlādā, Vāhulādā, velādā, Kulādā, etc., in the district of Bīrbhūm. Even today, Rāḍha is generally equated with the Western region of Bengal.

(ix) **People and Culture :**

It has been already observed that there are very little materials available for describing the physical characteristics of the Suhmas and Rāḍhās from the early literary and epigraphic records excepting certain references to them by name. As to the cultural traits of these peoples, the available materials are also meagre. Yet, an attempt may be made here to collate all available facts to present a picture of the Suhmas and the Rāḍhās.

As already stated that the Suhmas or Rāḍhās occupied a tract of land which was very hard, rocky and jungle-ridden and infested with many wild animals. In the Bhuvaneśvara-Praśasti, Rāḍha is described as a waterless and arid region.⁴²¹ Yet, the region was perhaps full of natural resources, a side reference to which has been also made in the Bhaviṣya-purāṇa wherein it is stated that there were iron and copper mines in this region, and its people from hoary antiquity were acquainted with the techniques of smelting those metals⁴²² : Tribhāgajāṅgalam tatra grāmaśchaivaikabhāgakah / Svalpā bhūmirurvarā cha Vahulā chōsharāmatāh // Rārī (dhī) Khandajāṅgalē cha lauhadhātōh kkachit / Ākarō bhavitā tatra Kalikāle viśeshatah// Even today in the district of Bāṅkurā and Bīrbhūm, there are traces of metals, and peoples are still engaged in smelting copper and iron by traditional method and out of which are made domestic utensils. Jungle products were abundantly available, and the people perhaps had to largely live on wild grains and gathering of forest-products. There was hardly any regular roadway, and as such, the country has been described as 'pathless' in the Jaina text.

It is in these surroundings that the Suhmas or Rāḍhās lived, perhaps in a very primitive condition from indeterminable times. They became

known to others only when in the early historical period the peoples from upper India started infiltrating into the Eastern region and came into direct contact with them. Then only, the Suhmas or Rādhās started figuring in the accounts of those so-called Aryan infiltrators. To those intruders, the Peoples Suhmas or Rādhās were barbarians or uncivilized peoples living in the jungle-ridden areas. In all subsequent literary texts, the Suhmas or Rādhās have been always mentioned along with the Pulindas, the Ābhiras, the Yavanas, the Khasas, etc. In the Bhāgavata-purāṇa, these peoples have been described as Pāpas, and in the Mahābhārata, as Mlechchhas. In the Āryamañjuśrīmūlakalpa, the people of Eastern India spoke Asurabhāshā. Even in many medieval Bengali texts, the Rādhās have been described as very low, bad tempered, envious and untouchables. In the Kavikāṇḍa-Chandī, it is stated : Vyād go himśak rād and Keha nā paraś karē lokē balē rād.⁴²³

From similar references, it is understandable that to the Aryan colonisers of the Eastern region, the Suhmas or Rādhās were very low, barbarous or uncivilized peoples. It is, however, difficult to specifically identify or affiliate the Suhmas or Rādhās to any particular ethnic group because of the non-availability of any materials regarding their physical characters. But the Suhmas and the Rādhās have been equated with such peoples whose ethnic identity is partially known. Taking these factors into consideration, it may be reasonably upheld that the Suhmas or Rādhās were originally Austric peoples belonging to the Australoid ethnic stock. This would be quite evident from an analysis of the detailed account of these peoples as given in the Āchāraṅgasūtra of the Jainas. It is stated that the people of Rāḍha set dogs after the Jaina saint by calling chu, chu, (khu, khu), etc. Even today, the people of Bengal while calling a dog use the expression chu-chu^{or tu} or tu-tu. In South-Asiatic languages like Semang, Monkhmer, Sakai, etc, the dog is Chhke (Khemer), Chhuke, chho or achho, chhu, chhu, chhu^{ua} chuo - chuo, etc.⁴²⁴ There is little doubt that the Bengali words Chu-chu or tu-tu are Austric words denoting dog. It would apparently follow that the Rādhās or Suhmas were speakers of the Austric language, and as such, they might be affiliated to the Australoid ethnic stock. This contention is further supported by a study of manners, customs, etc., or in other words their general cultural patterns.

From the Jaina Āchāraṅgasūtra, it is learnt that the Rāḍhās or Suhmas used to take all sorts of forbidden food articles which were prohibited or disliked by the Jaina imigrants. The implication is that the Rāḍha peoples might have been used to eat all kinds of wild products including meat of hunted games. Even the Jaina saints who traversed the land had to spend days together in Vajjabhūmi by eating impure and bad food. In respect of manners and conduct of the people of the region, the Jaina saints have tried to draw a vivid picture. It is stated that the Rāḍhās attacked the Jaina saints, set dogs after them and also beat them. This shows that the Rāḍha people were very crude, barbarous and cruel, and they did not know how to behave with other peoples, more particularly the saints. This rude behaviour and bad manners of the Suhma or Rāḍhā people have been also echoed in the later Bengali medieval texts. In the work of Mukundarām and Chandīmaṅgal-Kāvya, the Rāḍha people have been described as⁴²⁵ : Akshati himsak rāḍ chaudiḱe paśūr hād/Kritañjali bīr kahe hai go choyād/Loke nā paraś karē sabe bale Rād//.

In the same fashion, Ghanarām has described the Rāḍha people as : Jāte rāḍh āmi re/Karame rāḍh tu//.⁴²⁶ Even in the Prabodha-chandrodaya-nāṭaka, the Rāḍha people have been described as very proud and self-conceited.⁴²⁷ On the other hand, in some other works there are all praises for the Rāḍha country. In the Chaitanya-Bhāgavata, it is stated : Dhanya-rāḍhadeśā, i.e., glory to the Rāḍha country. Even Dhōyī in his Pavanadūta has described the Suhmadeśa as Rasamaya.⁴²⁸

It is thus evident that to the Jaina writers, the Suhmas or Rāḍhās were uncivilized peoples devoid of any good manners and customs. The picture of the Rāḍha people as drawn by the Jaina writers appears to be a motivated one, the purpose being to present the Rāḍhas as very crude and uncivilized peoples. A critical analysis of the Jaina accounts would reveal that the Jaina saint Mahāvīra along with his followers travelled through the pathless country of the Rāḍhās for the propagation of his religion. But unfortunately, the Jaina preachers instead of being accorded a hearty welcome, received stubborn opposition. The Rāḍhās certainly did not favour the idea of interfering into their life-patterns, and anybody doing so were opposed and beaten back. This behaviour pattern of the Rāḍhās certainly enraged the Jaina saints, and as such, the Rāḍhās have

been labelled as rude, mannerless and uncivilized. It would be wrong to accept the Jaina textual testimony as an impartial observation on the behaviour patterns of the Rāḍha people as such. On the other hand, if the Rāḍhās are recognised as Austrics, it may be noted that they appear to have been harmless, peaceful with surrendering tendency, sensuous, thoughtful, gifted with poetic thought, cheerful, irresponsible, idle and uninitiative.

Regarding the degradation and low social position and occupation of the Rāḍhās as described in some medieval Bengali texts, it may be noted that such observations might relate to a particular group or groups of peoples who were not fully brought within the fold of Brahmanism. It must not be forgotten that the Rāḍha country by that time was largely Brahmanized, and there were even sections of pure Brahmins known as Rāḍhiya-Brahmins. The original inhabitants who were brought within the Brahmanical fold were, however, placed in a low social position, and they were indeed the peoples recognised as untouchables pursuing unclean occupations.

In spite of the stubborn opposition given by the Rāḍhās to the Jaina preachers in the 6th century B.C., Jainism got a firm hold in the land and many persons were actually converted into Jainism. It is from the Rāḍha country that Jainism spread to other parts of West Bengal. In the Brhatkathā-Kosha-grantha, Bhadravāhu, the Guru of Chandragupta Maurya, is said to have been a native of Devikoṭ of Puṇḍravardhana. From the Chinese accounts and the Divyāvadāna it is learnt that Aśoka killed many Nigranthas of Eastern India. The Bhagavatisūtra refers to different Jaina Śākhās named after Tāmralipti, Puṇḍravardhana, Koṭivarsha, Karvaṭa, etc. In the 2nd century A.D., an inscription from Mathurā contains information regarding a Jaina Bhikshu from Rāḍha who installed a Jaina image in a temple at Mathurā. All these evidently show that Jainism had spread from Rāḍha country to other parts of Bengal. Even today there are Jaina pockets in Rāḍhadeśa, more particularly in the districts of Burdwan and Bīrbhūm. In the neighbouring areas of West Bengal as well, a large Jaina community, namely, Sarak still survives. Along with Jainism, Buddhism also spread throughout the length and breadth of Rāḍhadeśa. Traditionally speaking, as recorded in the Chinese Travel Accounts, the Buddha himself visited Rāḍhadeśa, and Aśoka is described to have built Stūpas in all places hallowed by the dust of the feet of the great Master. But unfortunately,

as yet no remains of any Aśoka Stūpa could be discovered from any part of West Bengal. With Brahmanization, Rāḍha became a great centre of Brahmanism, and its different sectarian beliefs and practices like those of Vaishnavism, Saktism, Saivism, etc., flourished. It is however, to be noted that Rāḍha was primarily Brahmanism a centre of the Devī or mother cult. In fact, in the Devī-purāṇa, the worship of Vāmachārīdeyī in Rāḍha has been frequently referred to. Further, it is in Rāḍhadeśa that a large number of Śāktapīṭhas are to be located, which indeed speak of the original religious beliefs and practices of the peoples⁴²⁹. Dhōyī in his Pavanadūta has also referred to the Devadāsīs in a temple erected by the Sena king in Suhmadeśa. Besides the popularity of Vaishnavism, Saivism was also quite marked. The present country of the ancient Rāḍhas still retains Primitive some of its old or primitive religious beliefs and practices. In this Cult connection, a particular reference may be made to the Dharma-pūjā which is widely prevalent in the Rāḍha country and which in its essence is primarily a primitive non-Aryan cult. Along with the Dharma-pūjā there are many other prevailing religious practices which also speak of their primitive origins or affiliations. In fact, all extant popular beliefs and practices in Rāḍha, if scientifically examined, would reveal their Austro-Asiatic origins in all essential details.

(x) Identity and Ethnic Affiliations:

Regarding the identity of the ancient Suhmas or Rāḍhās certain observations may be made with reservations. As to the surviving remnants of the ancient Suhmas, it has been suggested that the Bengali people bearing such surnames as Som may be equated with the Suhmas⁴³⁰. But unfortunately, the equation of Som with Suhma does not stand on any valid ground nor the Soms who now form parts and parcels of the larger Hindu community belonging to a particular caste or castes can be recognised as the surviving remnants of the ancient Suhmas. It has been also suggested that the people of Vajjabhūmi who opposed the Jaina Surviving saints were indeed the present Bhūmijas (Bhūmij) of Jhārkhand, Bīrbhūm, remnants Rājmaḥal and Santal-Parganah. It is quite likely that the Bhūmijas who are even now one of the primitive tribes of this region might have been the original inhabitants of Rāḍhadeśa. The Bhūmijas are again closely allied to the Muṇḍās of Chhotānāgpur⁴³¹. They are characterised by short stature, dark to brown skin colour, broad nose, long head and strong build. All these features

are indeed the physical characters of the Australoid ethnic stock as well. Accordingly, if the Bhūmijas are recognised as the surviving remnants of the ancient peoples of Suhma or Rāḍhadeśa, it may be presumed that the Suhmas or Rāḍhās of ancient times may be affiliated to the Australoid ethnic stock.

In this connection, it may be further pointed out that one of the hill tribes of Dhalbhūm, Sīmbhūm and Mayūrbhañj is also known by the name Lodhā. The very name reminds one of the Lodhās/Rāḍhās of ancient times. Again, an important tribal community of Midnapur, Bāñkurā and Bīrbhūm is also called Lodhā branded as a criminal tribe of Midnapur. They are again said to be identical with the Śavaras in many respects⁴³². The name Lodhā might be a derivation from Lōdha (Lodha or La+da = Lodh or Lodā or Lodhā). If this derivation is admitted, the present Lodhās might also be regarded as the surviving remnants of the ancient Rāḍhās or Suhmas. In respect of physical features and cultural behaviour patterns, the Lodhās may be affiliated to the Muṇḍā group of people or in other words to the Australoid ethnic stock. Allied with the Lodhās, another cultivating low caste group of cultivators in the district of Midnapur is called Chuar (Chōyād), the members of which are endowed with rebellious spirit and about whom a somewhat detailed treatment has been already made. The term Chuār in the sense of robbers has been in use as a nickname of the Bhūmij of Jaṅgal-Mahal, and in fact, the name is also used as a title of the Bhūmij⁴³³. Even in Bengali Language, the term Chuār (Chōyād) is used in the sense of a Dasyu or Chandāla or low caste riffraff. It will not be unreasonable to hold the view that the Chuārs are in reality Bhūmijas within the Hindu caste fold. The Chandī-kāyasya indicates that the Rāḍha was regarded as a very low-born man belonging to the Choād caste, unfit to be touched even by the low caste peoples^{433a}. In the face of the above facts, it may be presumed that the present Chuārs (Choāds) of Midnapur may be also recognised as surviving remnants of the ancient Suhmas/Rāḍhās. It will not be also unreasonable to hold the view that the Bengali word Chōr might have been derived from Chuār or Choād, perhaps a word of Austro-Asiatic origin.

(xi) Observation ;

From the above discussions it may be contended that the Suhmas and the Rāḍhās were perhaps originally the Austro-Asiatic language speaking peoples affiliated to the Australoid ethnic stock. It must be, however, noted

that Suhmadeśa or Rāḍhadeśa covered a wide geographical territory, and naturally so, many other peoples might have also lived therein. It has been already pointed out that the Rāḍhās or Suhmas are often mentioned along with many other primitive peoples like the Kirātas, the Pulindas, the Pukkusas, the Ābhiras, the Yavanas, the Khasas, etc. This shows that even peoples belonging to other ethnic stocks also lived in Rāḍhadeśa. Subsequently with the infiltration of the people from upper India and their gradual settlements in the Rāḍha country there took place an amalgam of various peoples belonging to other ethnic stocks as well. As such, the present people of Rāḍhadeśa consist of diverse ethnic elements. Even today all peoples living in Rāḍhadeśa are called Rāḍhiyas or Rāḍis, i.e., the old name of Rāḍha still persists indicating the people of the Western part of Bengal. But the surviving remnants of the ancient Suhmas or Rāḍhās are now to be found amongst the Bhūmijas, Lodhās, etc., who may be regarded as the survivals of the most primitive and indigenous peoples of Rāḍhadeśa. Most of the ancient Suhmas or Rāḍhās were, however, in course of centuries mingled with other peoples including those who came from upper India and became largely absorbed within the Brahmanical fold. They were not, however, given any higher social position in the Brahmanical socio-economic structure. On the other hand, they were relegated to a very low position pursuing also unclean occupations. Others have retained their separate identity as the Bhūmijas, Lodhās and others in spite of their adoption of many traits of the Brahmanical culture. It is, however, to be admitted that the ancient Suhmas or Rāḍhās during the long process of their amalgam made veritable contributions in the composition of the Bengali people and culture.

IV. The GAUDAS AND The GAUDĪYAS

Another well-known ancient tribal community which played an important role in the composition of the Bengali people and culture is very commonly referred to as Gauda-Jana or Gaudīya or Gaudaka or Gaura or Gaur, etc., in both literary and epigraphic records. The geographical territory occupied by these peoples was named after this tribal community, which in course of centuries encompassed the whole of Bengal, and in later period, Bengal and her peoples became almost synonymous with the Gaudas and the Gaudīyas or the Gaudajanas.

(i) Derivation and Meanings :

The term Gauḍa is derived variously. It has been stated that the term Gauḍa along with Koi, Kui, Godu, Gondu, Goāndu, Gānd, Koānd, Kond (Khaṇḍ), etc., is derived from the root Kō and Koorku (mountain or mountaineers), and that its equivalents are Goda and Gonda. The substitution of the letters r and l gives the forms of Gaura and Gaula⁴³⁴. The terms Gaula and Gauḍa may be again derived from Go (cow). But the term Gonda (Goda) has been taken to be a corruption of Gauḍa⁴³⁵. It has been again suggested that the Muslims transformed the term Gauḍa into Gonda. A variant form of Gauḍa is Gor, and the aborigines of Central India call themselves Gor and not Gond. On the other hand, neither in Northern India nor in Bengal, the people called Gauḍas claim to be known as Gond or Gor. The extant peoples of Central India call themselves Koltur and Koitur or Kōtur which is said to be identical with the Māriā-Gond.⁴³⁶

Further, the Sanskrit term Gauḍa has been derived from Go, i.e., cow. But to some, this derivation does not appear to be correct. In Oriyā language, Gauḍa means, however, a milkman and is described as Gokuta in inscriptions. In Canara, Gauḍa or Gavuda means a village headman. The corrupt form of Gauḍa is Gaur and in Muslim terminology, it is the same as Potail, i.e., chief Rāyat of the village, and that the office of Gauḍa is a hereditary one. Again, Gauḍa is the name of a clan in Mysore, and the chief of a village is called Gauḍān bearing a tribal meaning. On the other hand, Gauḍa has been taken to be a Sanskritized form of Gonda.⁴³⁷

Again, it is suggested that the term Gauḍa has been derived from the Bengali word Gur (guda), i.e., molasses or sugar produced from sugarcane. In that respect, Gauḍa appears to be intimately associated with Paṇḍra (Puṇḍra) derived also from sugarcane.⁴³⁸ It appears that the country was so named because of its notoriety for sugar-production. Gauḍa may be thus equated with Puṇḍra. But it is doubtful whether the term Gauḍa or Gaur was actually derived from Gura.⁴³⁹ On the other hand, Gauḍa is supposed to have been transformed into Gonda, which is to be located in Uttara-Kośala. The territorial extent of Gauḍa is proved by the old name of Balarāmpur on the Rāptī which was formerly Rāmgarh Gauḍa.⁴⁴⁰ It has been stated that 'Gonda (Goda) is a large flourishing village ... Thirteen miles from Karwi ... To the east of the village there is a pair of old temples ... known as Mandeli-Mandar or the Chandeli temples as all the old buildings are designated throughout Bundelkhand'.⁴⁴¹

In this context of the derivation of the term Gauḍa, a particular reference may be made to the classical and other writings wherein there are references to the people allied to Gouraios or Gauraians. It has been observed that the name is derived from Ghori, a tribe of Pāñjkorā⁴⁴². It is not quite unlikely that the term Gauḍa may be synonymous with Goarao or Ghori. The term Gauḍa might have also been transformed into Goryaia. Further, the Gauḍas may be the same as the Gaurī people who have been associated with the Suvāstu (Swat river; in the Mahābhārata⁴⁴³). If it be so then the classical writers might have transformed the term Gaurī into Gouraios. Apparently, the later Sanskrit term Gauḍa may be a derivation from Gaurī as well.

The literal meaning of the Sanskrit term Gauḍa (Gud+a) [an] is Gudjāta, i.e., Gud-product or sugar-land or silvery. It seems, however, doubtful whether the term Gauḍa bears any relation with its derivative meaning sugar. On the other hand, Gauḍa may be a Sanskritized form of the term Gaṇḍa, i.e., Gaṇḍār (rhinoceros) and the Gond tribes might have been named after this animal. Further, the term Gaur means bison, and the Gonds of Central India use its horns as head-gear⁴⁴⁴. Even the term Gauḍa does not appear to be an original Sanskrit form. It is common even in popular dialects of both North and South India. But Oppert takes the Gond people as a section of the Gauḍians⁴⁴⁵. There are also references to the Gauḍian tribes.

In fact, Oppert has referred to various divisions of the Gauḍiyan tribes, such as, Kōi, Kōḍu, Gōḍu, Koṇḍa, Chāṇḍa, Chāṇḍāl, Gauḍa, Gauḍāta, Khanda, Chandāla, etc., and the Gauḍa countries as Gauḍa, Khāṇḍava; the Gauḍa mountains like Kuṇḍa, Kuṇḍōḍa and Gauḍa; the Gauḍa streams like Kuṇḍāla; the Gauḍa forests as Gaṇḍavana; the Gauḍa plants as Kuṇḍa and the Gauḍa towns as Gauḍa (Gonḍa), Gaura, Khāṇḍavaprastha, etc.⁴⁴⁶. All these places are to be located in different parts of North India and were perhaps named after the rhinoceros.

The term Gauḍa is used in the sense of a country as well as of its people. In other words, the word Gauḍa denotes primarily a territorial area which was perhaps inhabited by the people called Gauḍas. Whatever may

be its derivation or derivative meanings, the fact remains that the term Gauḍa is widely used in both literary and epigraphic records as a geographical territory, and that there are only side-references to its peoples as the Gauḍas Country or the Gauḍīyas. Again, the term Gauḍa had both narrower and wider geographical connotations. It would be evident from a perusal of the source materials that in a narrow sense Gauḍa was perhaps restricted to parts of Northern and Western Bengal. But in its wider sense, Gauḍa meant the whole of Bengal including parts of some neighbouring states as well, and its peoples, the Gauḍas, in the later period, became synonymous with the people of Bengal as a whole. It has been also stated that the Gauḍa country was named after Gauḍī, the grandson of Māndhātā.

(ii) Early References:

Neither the Gauḍas nor their country have been referred to in the early or later Vedic texts. Even the early Jaina and the Buddhist texts are more or less silent about Gauḍa and its peoples. The earliest reference to Gauḍa as an Eastern country is supposed to occur in the Ashtādhyāyī of Pāṇini wherein it is stated : Arishta-Gauḍapūrvē cha/Arishta-puram Gauḍapuram⁴⁴⁷// Here are references to two cities, namely, Arishtapura and Gauḍapura. Scholars mostly identify Pāṇini's Gauḍapurī with Gauḍa in Bengal. Sen has gone to the extent of pointing out that Pāṇini's Gauḍapura may be Puṇḍanagara⁴⁴⁸. Sircar, however, considers the identification of Pāṇini's Gauḍapura with Gauḍa of Bengal as highly improbable because of the very fact that the rule Pureprāchām immediately precedes Gauḍa-pūrvē and this suggests that both the cities were outside the Eastern part of India and that both are to be located in a region which was more or less Aryanized by the time of Pāṇini (5th-4th century B.C.). Arishtapura was the capital of the Śibi country, and it is to be placed in the Jhang district of Pākistān. Besides, by the time of Pāṇini Bengal was not Aryanized to the extent as to be so much known to the great grāmmarian⁴⁴⁹. Accordingly, Pāṇini's Gauḍapura may be placed in another area, perhaps in the South-eastern part of the Āryāvarta.

Further, if Gauḍa of Bengal was known to Pāṇini, it should have been referred to in the Mahābhāṣya of Patañjali. Though not mentioned in Patañjali's work, Gauḍa and the Gauḍas are, however, frequently referred to in the Arthaśāstra of Kauṭilya who of course belonged to a later period. It appears from the relevant passages of the Arthaśāstra that Kauṭilya was fully acquainted with the Gauḍa country and its products. (Gauḍikam Kāmbukam Chākravālikam cha rūpyam)⁴⁵⁰. Kauṭilya mentions Gauḍa along with Vaṅga and Puṇḍra and their respective products. Gauḍa was also well-known for its silver. The commentator Bhaṭṭasvāmin explains Gauḍikam or Gaulikam as silver from Kāmarūpa (Kāmarūpiyam). But Gauḍa can not be placed in Kāmarūpa, and apparently the commentator was wrong⁴⁵¹.

From the 4th - 5th century A.D., the Gauḍa country and its peoples are found more commonly referred to in the literary texts. In the Bṛhat-saṃhitā, Varāhamihira refers to Gauḍaka instead of the Gauḍas or Gauḍiyas as peoples in the Eastern Division⁴⁵². Kern while translating the expression renders the term Gauḍaka as Gauras and adds a note stating that they are identical with the whites living in Śvetadvīpa which according to the Kathā-Sarit-Sāgara lay near Cocoa-island⁴⁵³. It may be, however, noted that Varāhamihira includes another people named as Guras in the Madhyadeśa⁴⁵⁴. These Guras were no doubt Gauḍas. But the people of Eastern India has been named as Gauḍakas. Parāśara locates Gauḍaka in the East along with Utkala, Puṇḍra, Karvaṭa, Samataṭa and Uḍra⁴⁵⁵. Alberūnī refers also to Gauḍa and makes it equivalent to Thāneśvara. Vātsyāyana appears to have been more thoroughly acquainted with the Gauḍa men and women, particularly in respect of their love affairs and other cultural traits. The expression Gauḍayah has been explained in the commentary as Pūrvadeśa-bhavaḥ, and thereby Gauḍa is to be placed in the Eastern region⁴⁵⁶.

The Harschacharita of Bāṇa refers to Gauḍa as a kingdom whose king was Śaśāṅka who has been variously called Gauḍeśvara, Gauḍadhama, Gauḍabhūjaṅga, etc., and which was subsequently conquered by Harshavardhana of Thāneśvara. In this context, a particular reference may be made to the words of promise made by Harsha as recorded by Bāṇa : Nirgaudān na

karōmi medinīm tata stanunpāti pītasprishi ptaṅga iva pātakī pātyāmyahmātmām.

Bāṇa has also referred to the characteristics of the language of the people of Gauḍa.⁴⁵⁷ The Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsang who visited Bengal in the same century does not, however, mention Gauḍa. Instead, he refers to Karṇasuvārṇa whose king was Śaśāṅka.⁴⁵⁸ It follows accordingly that Gauḍa and Karṇasuvārṇa may be taken to be identical in the 7th century A.D. Daṇḍin in his Kāvyāḍarsa (7th Century A.D.) also refers to the Gauḍīya style of composition.⁴⁵⁹ Again, Bharata in his Nāṭyaśāstra (Chap. XXI. 48) has made a particular reference to the style of the Gauḍa woman.⁴⁶⁰ Rājaśekhara in his Kāvyamīmāṃsā refers to Gauḍāṅgaṇāsu.⁴⁶¹ Vākaptirāja in his Gauḍavāho has given a detailed description of the defeat and killing of the king of the Gauḍa-lord by Yaśovarman of Kanauj. The king of Gauḍa was also the lord of Magadha (Magadhādhīpa) who was possibly a Śaila ruler.⁴⁶² Kalhaṇa in his Rājatarāṅginī has also given a detailed account of Gauḍa and the Gauḍas of Bengal while describing the conquest of Lalitāditya and his grandson Jayāpīḍa and the unparalleled heroism displayed by the Gauḍas in Kāśmīr to avenge the treacherous murder of their king.⁴⁶³ Bilhaṇa in his Vikramāṅkadevacharitam has, however, grouped Gauḍa with Kāmarūpa.⁴⁶⁴

Besides all these references, Gauḍa is also mentioned in a number of Purāṇas like the Matsya (XII.30), the Kūrma (I.29.19), the Līṅga (I.65) and the Vāyu (88.27) Purāṇas.⁴⁶⁵ In all these Purāṇas, it is said that Śrāvastī was founded by Śrāvasta of the solar dynasty in the Gauḍadeśa (Śrāvastir - iti... nirmita yena Śrāvastih Gauḍadeśe mahāpurī) which, according to the Rāmāyaṇa Purāṇas and the Vāyu-purāṇa (88.27) was in Uttara-Kośala, i.e., Oudh.⁴⁶⁶ Again in the Vāyu, the Vishṇu, the Bhāgavata and other Purāṇas the story of the foundation of Śrāvastī has been narrated, without mentioning Gauḍadeśe. Accordingly, it has been presumed that the passages in some Purāṇas referring to Gauḍa might be taken as Sanskritization of the name Goṇḍa.⁴⁶⁷ It is, therefore, upheld that Goṇḍa has been Sanskritized in imitation of Gauḍa in Bengal. Excepting the aforesaid Brahmanical texts, Gauḍa does not figure in any earlier Buddhist texts. It is only in the Āryamañjuśrī-mūlakalpa that there is a positive reference to Gauḍa (Bhavitā Gauḍa-deśosmin Gaṅgātīra Samāshritah).⁴⁶⁸ This passage refers to the king of Gauḍa whose initial was K and who was of Prakāṭāditya's family, i.e., of the imperial Gupta dynasty.⁴⁶⁹

Besides all these textual references, Gauḍa and the Gauḍas are frequently referred to in the epigraphic records from Bengal and outside. The earliest epigraphic reference to the Gauḍas is perhaps to be found in the Haraha inscription of the Maukhari king Išānavarman (554 A.D) who is described to have conquered the Samudrāśrayān Gauḍān, i.e. the Gauḍas living on the sea shore⁴⁷⁰. Another reference to the association of the Gauḍas with the sea is to be found in the inscription of Sūryavarman of the Aśvapati family⁴⁷¹. This is further supported by the Aphaṣṭ inscription of Ādityasena (7th century A.D) which refers to the haughty foes on the sea-shore who are to be identified with the Gauḍas. Further, this inscription furnishes an interesting evidence relating to the fact that the said record was actually engraved by a native of Gauḍa (Śukshma-Śivena Gauḍeṇa Praśastirvikatākshara)⁴⁷². In another inscription, the Gauḍa-lord has been described as lying in the 'watery fort of the sea'⁴⁷³. Some have interpreted all these expressions in the epigraphic records as referring to the Gauḍas having a place of refuge in the sea. Whatever may be the interpretation, the fact remains that the littoral region of Bengal was also the land of the Gauḍas.

In most of the Pāla inscriptions, the Gauḍas have been mentioned along with the Mālavas, the Khaśas, the Hūṇas, the Kulikas, etc. (Gauḍa-Mālava-Khaśa-Hūṇa-Kulika-Karnāṭa-Lāṭa-Sevakādin) as employees of the Pālas, and perhaps all these peoples were employed in the Pāla army as mercenary soldiers.⁴⁷⁴

Pāla and Sena inscriptions By the time of the Pālas, Gauḍa as a centre of political gravity came into prominence, and in fact, the Pāla monarchs assumed such titles as Gauḍendra, Gauḍādhīpa, Gauḍeśvara, etc. Following the Pālas, the Senas also adopted similar titles. Even the Pavanadūta refers to Gauḍendra, Gauḍarāja,^{etc.} It is quite likely that the Pālas and the Senas assumed all these titles when they succeeded in accomplishing the political integration of Bengal called thence under the generic name Gauḍa. In fact, by the time of the Senas or during the early Muslim period the term Gauḍa came to be applied to denote the whole of Bengal over which the Pālas and the Senas ruled.

This contention is clearly borne out even by the Muslim writers and also by the authors of the early and late medieval Bengali works. In the Muslim accounts, Gauḍa has been transformed into Gaura which was later on modified into Gaur. In the Tabaqāt-i Nāsiri, Minhāj-ud-dīn has given an account of

the areas covered by Gauda. According to the chronicle, 'the parts round about the state of Laksh^manāvati were Jājnagar, the countries of Bang, Kamrud and Tirhut and the whole of that territory' appear to have been named Gaur.⁴⁷⁵

Muslim accounts Therefore, it may be said that Gauda in the time of Minhāj-ud-dīn included Tirhut, Bengal, Assam, Utkala and Orissa. Lakhnauti of the Muslim writer was no doubt Laksh^manāvati, the capital city of the Gauda kingdom, named after the Sena king Lakshmanasena. This Gaur of the Muslim writer previously associated with the Pālas and the Senas is to be now located in the present Maldah district where ruins are still visible all around being reminiscence of the ancient capital city of Gauda. It is upon the ruins of this ancient Gauda that the early Muslims built their own political city known as Gaur.⁴⁷⁶

In this context, it may be noted that the Māladas after whom the modern place Māldaha (Maldah) was named perhaps came into prominence by about the 4th and 5th centuries A.D. The Māladas are actually mentioned in the Māladas the Mahābhārata and the Purānas, and the term Mālada appears to be synonymous with the name Molindal as referred to in the account of Megasthenes and Arrian as an Eastern tribe.⁴⁷⁷ It may be accordingly assumed that the Māladas were the indigenous peoples of the present Maldah region, and subsequently, the Gaudas overwhelmed them and established their supremacy.

The ancient Gauda region peopled by the Gaudas and others is today represented by the jungle and swampy areas of the present Maldah with the Ganges flowing on its western side. But the river Ganges at present has retreated several miles. It may not be, however, farfetched to assume that the Ancient Gaudas ancient Gaudas made their early settlements in those very areas and subsequently made extensive inroads over other parts of Bengal in such a way that they became fully integrated with all other peoples, and all these peoples thus mingled came to be known as the Gaudas. Even as late as the 19th century both the terms Gauda and Gaudajana continued to be used to denote the whole country of Bengal and her peoples.

(iii) Movements and Settlements :

The people of Bengal are generally known by the common appellation of Gauda. The primary question of consideration is to decide as to whether the Gaudas were indigenous to the soil of Bengal or that they came from outside and got settled in Bengal and gradually merged themselves with other peoples.

While considering this question of great ethnological import, it is to be noted that the Gaudas are not mentioned in any early Brahmanical, Buddhist or Jaina texts as an indigenous people of Eastern region along with other peoples. Secondly, all references to the Gaudas of Eastern India or of Bengal are only to be found in the works of the post-Christian period, more particularly from the time when perhaps Eastern India including Bengal was being gradually Aryanized by the people from upper India. This very point furnishes an indirect clue as to the possibility of the movement of the Gaudas from the Middle or Upper India to Bengal.

In support of this hypothesis of the coming of the Gaudas into Bengal from outside, a particular reference may be made to the Gaudas who were once widespread over different parts of Northern India including the North-western region. The oldest positive reference in this respect is to be found in the classical writings. Arrian has stated in his account that Alexander in course of his campaigns in India entered Assakenoi in the Punjab after crossing Gauraios flowing in the country of the Gauraians.⁴⁷⁸ The name Gauraian might have been derived from Ghori, a tribe of Pāñjkora on the sides of the Kābul river. Further, Ptolemy also speaks of a territory called Goryaia traversed by the river Gouraios, i.e., modern Ghor.⁴⁷⁹ If the Gauraian or Goryai is taken as a transformed version of Gauda, it may be held that the Gaudas were also settled in North-western India and beyond even by the 4th century B.C.

The Gaudas were and are to be found also widespread over various parts of Northern India. It has been observed by Cunningham long ago that the ancient Gauda was simply a sub-division of Uttara-Kośala.⁴⁸⁰ It is said that the chief town in Uttara-Kośala is Goṇḍa which was corrupted into Gauda by the Muslims. The presence of the Gaudas and of Gauda in upper India is also supported by Alberunī who has equated Thāneśvara with Gauda. Further, Goṇḍa and Gauda have been made synonymous, and the district in Kośala is Goṇḍa or Gauda. This view of the presence of the Gaudas in Northern India finds corroboration in some epigraphic records as well. A reference has been made to an inscription of the Rāshtrakūṭa king Kṛishṇa II who is described as : Gaudānām vinaya-vratarappan-guru.⁴⁸¹ Jackson

thinks that this reference to Gauda must have been to Gauda in Oudh. He also pointed out that the Gaudas humbled by Kṛishṇa II were the worthy rulers of Hindustān.⁴⁸²

Besides, there are also references to Pañcha-Gauda or Pañcha-Gaudīya community, the members of which are to be found well distributed over different parts of Northern India. Pañcha-Gauda is mentioned not only in the Rājataranginī (C. 1150), but an early reference to it is to be found in an inscription dated 926 A.D.⁴⁸³ Here, a reference may be also made to the Pañcha-Gaudas or five classes of North-Indian Brāhmaṇas, such as, Sārasvata, i.e., associated with the Sarasvatī valley of Eastern Pāñjāb, Kānyakubja, Gauda, Maithila and Utkala (Sārasvatāḥ Kānyakubjāḥ Gauda-Maithilā-Utkalāḥ Pañcha-Gaudāḥ iti-khyātāḥ Vidyasyōtarvāsinaḥ)⁴⁸⁴ Thus Gauda mentioned here separately is indeed the one to be placed in Bengal.

Again, the well-known Gaudīya-Brāhmaṇas are said to be the avowed colonists from Kanauj. They are said to have come from West. According to a legendary tale, Janamejaya removed all Brāhmaṇas from Gaur near Delhi or Āgrā which was their original habitat and settled them on West of the Ganges beyond Hastināpur where their descendants are still extant.⁴⁸⁵ Wilson has given a detailed account of the Gaudīya Brāhmaṇas. He refers to "the Brāhmaṇas of the Gaur tribe or caste, one of the five Gaurs, but located them in the upper provinces throughout the Subāḥ of Delhi to the hills. There are many sub-divisions of these Gaur-Brāhmaṇas of Hindustān. These sub-divisions like Ādh-Gaur, Sidh-Gaur, etc., amounting in all to 42 are unknown in Bengal."⁴⁸⁶ Wilson has also referred to Gaur-Rājputs who are numerous in North-Western province, Gaur-taga (of Brahmanical descent in North-west) and Gaur-Thākur, (a Rājput tribe settled in Farakkābād district).

In support of the contention of Gauda denoting Northern India, a reference may be made to a tradition recorded in the Bhōja-pravandha where Gauda and in the Paramāra king Bhoja of the 11th century A.D. is described North India to have ruled over both Gauda and Dakshināpatha for 55 years.⁴⁸⁷ Here, Gauda appears to refer to Northern India. Sircar, however, contends that this is merely a conventional way of saying that Bhoja was a Chakravartin,

and the passage refers to the Chakravartikshetra encompassing the whole of India, North and South.⁴⁸⁸

The existence of Gaudadeśa in Northern India has been also referred to in the Matsya, the Kurma and the Liṅga Purāṇas wherein Śrāvastī is said to have been founded in Gaudadeśa.^{488a} In this connection, it may be noted that some scholars have even made a pointed reference to the Goṇḍa district Gaudadeśa of Uttar-pradesh containing the city of Śrāvastī which was Gaudadeśa. Besides, Kuśāmba, son of Kuśa, is said to be the founder of the city of Kausāmbī. The Hitopadeśa places Kausāmbī in Gaudadeśa (Asti Gaudavishaya Kausāmbī nāma nagarī). This very Gaudavishaya can not be placed in Bengal. Even the Goṇḍ peoples of Central India have been made synonymous with the Gaudas, because Gauda is taken to be a Sanskritized form of Goṇḍa. From all these references it has been contended that the Gaudas were not only peoples of Bengal, but also of Northern India as a whole. It has been also urged that Śrāvastī was the cradle of the Gauda people.⁴⁸⁹

This view has been, however, contradicted by Chakladar.⁴⁹⁰ In the first place, he upholds the view that the reference in the Rāshtrakūṭa record might have been made to Devapāla who was no doubt a king par-excellence of Bengal and not of the Goṇḍa district or of Thāneśvara. It is true that in the Rāshtrakūṭa grant Gaudendra and Vaṅgapati have been separately mentioned, but this does not mean that Gauda is to be located outside Bengal. On the other hand, the said expressions were used to refer to the lords of the two neighbouring kingdoms, namely, Gauda and Vaṅga. Secondly, the view that Gauda is to be located in Bengal is clearly borne out by the Haraha inscription of the 6th century A.D. wherein the Gaudas have been described as living in the sea shore, and as such, they could not have certainly lived in the hills of the Goṇḍa district. Thirdly, this contention is also supported by numerous literary references from the 7th century A.D. onwards. In the Harshacharita of Bāṇa, it has been clearly stated that the king of Thāneśvara (Rājyavardhana) was killed by the Gauda king who has been described by the Chinese pilgrim Hiuen-Tsang as Śaśāṅka, the ruler of Karṇasuvarṇa which was identical with the Gauda kingdom of the 7th century A.D. This Karṇasuvarṇa is to be located in the Mursīdābād district of West Bengal.⁴⁹¹ It implies that the Mursīdābād region was also included within the Gauda Kingdom in the 7th century A.D. This is further supported by Varāhamihira who in his Brhatsamhitā places Gauda

(Gaudaka) not in Madhyadeśa, but in Pūrvadeśa and in the neighbourhood of Puṇḍra, Vaṅga and Kalinga.⁴⁹² Parāśara similarly places Gauḍa or Gaudaka as one of the countries in the East.⁴⁹³ Further, Kauṭilya's reference to Gauḍa can not be interpreted by any stress of imagination as denoting a place in Chakladar's Central India. There may be doubts regarding Pāṇini's reference to Gaudapura as lying in the East; but from the post-Christian period, Gauḍa is to be placed in Eastern region and in Bengal. Vātsyāyana in his Kāma-sūtra refers to Gauḍa and Kośala as two distinct countries.⁴⁹⁴ This will be vividly clear from the graphic account given by Kalhaṇa in his Rājatarāṅginī regarding Lalitāditya, Jayāpīḍa and Jayanta and also from its reference to valour and heroism exhibited by the Gauḍa soldiers in Kāśmīr.⁴⁹⁵ Lastly, a reference may be made to the Purāṇas. It has been already pointed out that in some Purāṇas, Śrāvastī is said to have been founded by Śrāvatsa in the Gauḍadeśa implying that it is to be placed in Goṇḍa district. But Chakladar has made a pointed reference to the corresponding passages of the Vāyu, the Vishṇu and the Bhāgavata Purāṇas wherein Gauḍadeśa is not mentioned.⁴⁹⁶ Accordingly, Śrāvastī can not be unmistakably placed in Gauḍadeśa and Gauḍa in Goṇḍa district. Besides, in a large number of literary texts like the Kāvyādarśa of Bharata and the Kāvyamīmāṃsā of Rājasekhara there are references to Gaudīya style which has been more specifically described as Paurastya.⁴⁹⁷ The Gaudarīti which was prevalent in countries like Aṅga, Vaṅga, Puṇḍra, Suhma, etc., certainly refers to the one existing in Bengal. As to Pañcha-Gauḍa, it may be noted that the expression is very late (12th century) and probably, it is a reminiscence of the Gauḍa empire of Dharmapāla and Devapāla and can not be equated with the ancient Gauḍa.⁴⁹⁸

On the basis of the aforesaid evidences and arguments, Chakladar holds the opinion that Gauḍa denoting a country/people as mentioned and described in the Indian literary documents refer to Bengal alone. It is true that from the post-Christian period onwards Gauḍa and the Gauḍas as a country and peoples figure more particularly as a land and people par-excellance of Bengal. But this does not necessarily prove that the Gauḍas were all indigenous to the soil of Bengal. On the other hand, attention has already been drawn to some almost analogous peoples living in the North-western region and also in the Madhyadeśa or in Northern India. A particular reference may be made here to the classical

writers who have mentioned them as peoples of North-west. In that case, it may be presumed that the Gaudas of later times might have originally penetrated into the interior of India from North-west and gradually moved downwards and became prominent in the Āryāvarta itself. It has been already stated that the Gaudas are to be found even today in different parts of Northern India. These very peoples might have gradually moved towards East and became settled in Bengal. It is quite likely that the movements of the Gaudas into Bengal might be closely associated with the Aryanization of Bengal. Most significantly, the Gaudas as a community establishing political authority became more and more prominent with the acceleration of the process of the Aryanization in Bengal. In fact, in the Epics and the Purāṇas there are references to many peoples and countries of Central India described as Madhyama or Madhyadeśa, and this list of peoples includes a community called Guḍa⁴⁹⁹. Even Varāhamihira includes the Guḍas in Madhyadeśa and not Pūrvadeśa⁵⁰⁰. There is, in fact, a place called Guḍa which was perhaps Thāneśvara and not Oudh, if Alberunī is to be relied upon⁵⁰¹. It may be accordingly presumed that these Guḍas came to be known in Bengal as Gaudas. Further, it has been already explained that the term Gauda might be a transformed version of Goṇḍa. In that case, the Guḍas, the Gaudas and the Goṇḍas become synonymous denoting the same people. The Gonds of today are to be found widespread in Central India, Orissa and neighbouring areas. If Gauda and Goṇḍa are taken to be synonymous, it may be contended that those very Goṇḍa peoples might have migrated into Bengal and carved out a principality of their own. Not only that, in course of time they got mixed up with other peoples and succeeded in raising their social position. These Gaudas coming from West subsequently played such an important role in political and socio-economic affairs of Bengal that the principality carved out by them became branded after their name, i.e., Gauda, which in later period came to be applied to denote whole of Bengal.

It has been already stated that Gauda as the name of a country or principality has a narrower and wider denotation. Originally, the Gaudas might have settled in the southernmost areas of Maldah district including the present district of Murśidābād. This is corroborated by the accounts

of Bāṇa and Hiuen Tsang. According to the former, Rājyavardhana, the king of Thāneśvara, was killed by the lord of Gauḍa who has been variously described as Gauḍādharma, Gauḍabhujāṅga, etc. The Chinese traveller, however, does not mention the name of the Gauḍa kingdom, and instead, he refers to Karṇasuvarṇa whose king was Śaśāṅka. It may be thus assumed that Karṇasuvarṇa and Gauḍa were identical, and at that time, Karṇasuvarṇa was perhaps the capital city of the Gauḍa kingdom. Though the Chinese pilgrim refers to Karṇasuvarṇa as the name of both the kingdom and its capital city, it is generally held that Gauḍa was the general name of the kingdom of Karṇasuvarṇa as referred to by the Chinese Pilgrim. The city of Karṇasuvarṇa is now to be located in Murśidābād district, and its great monastery, namely, Raktamrittikā-vihāra is to be identified with the recently excavated site in the village of Jadupur, six miles south of Berhampur⁵⁰². It is, therefore, clear that Murśidābād was included within the Gauḍa principality in the 7th century A.D. Not only that, even Nadiā, Burdwan and Bīrbhūm districts were also included within the Karṇasuvarṇa kingdom⁵⁰³.

This extent of Gauḍa is also supported by a late Puranic tradition contained in the Bhaviṣya-purāṇa which locates Gauḍadeśa inhabited by the deity Gauḍeśa or Gauḍeśī in the land between the Padmā and Vardhamāna (Burdwan). The same Purāṇa also refers to Gauḍa as one of the seven Deśas forming Pundradeśa. Further, the localities included within the Gauḍa country have been also specifically stated as : Navadvīpa (Nadiā district), Śāntipura (Nadiā district), Maulapattana (Mollai in Hugli district) and Kaṇṭakapattana, i.e., Kātwā in Burdwan district. Again, it may be noted that the principal towns of Gauḍa have been mentioned as Gaureś and Rāmākelī to the north of the Ganges⁵⁰⁴. It follows accordingly that the Gauḍa territory comprised the present Murśidābād district and parts of Nadiā, Burdwan and Hugli districts. Thus, generally speaking, the ancient Rāḍha country comprised the Gauḍa kingdom. The Digvijaya-prakāśa no doubt places Rāḍhadeśa to the west of Gauḍa, and the Managoli inscription distinguishes Lāla from Gaula (Gauḍa)⁵⁰⁵. But in the Prabodha-Chandrodaya, Gauḍa-rāṣṭra is clearly stated to have included Rāḍhāpurī and Bhurīśreshṭhika (Bhursut in Hugli district)⁵⁰⁶. In this context, a very interesting reference to the inclusion of the modern Burdwan city within the Gauḍa country may

be made. In the Vetālapañchaviṃśati, there is a reference to Gaudanagara by the name of Vardhamāna and its king Guṇasēkhara. The Bhaviṣya-Purāṇa also contains the same story : Gaudadeśe Mahārāja Vardhanaṁ nāma vai puram/Guṇasēkhara ākhyāto Bhūpālatastra Dharmavān// (2/10/1-2).

Not only Burdwan, even the whole of Rāḍha was included within the Gauḍa country. This would be clear from the statement of the commentator of the Kāmasūtra^(5/6/41) : Kaliṅgā Gaudavishayād dakṣiṇena, i.e., Kaliṅga on the south of Gauḍa. This is a clear indication that Gauḍa included the whole of Rāḍha up to Kaliṅga. In support of this, a reference may be also made to Pravodha-chandrodaya-nāṭaka^(II Act) : Gaudaṁ rāṣṭramanuttamaṁ Rāḍha nirupamātrāpi Rāḍhā tatō. This is, however, in contradiction of the statement made in the Bṛhatsaṁhitā wherein Vardhamāna, Tāmralipta, Suhma and Utkala have been made separate from Gauḍa. The Digvijayaprakāśa also differentiates Gauḍa from Rāḍha. It appears that with the rise and expansion of the Gauḍa kingdom, Rāḍha and all other regions became integrated within it.

This also happened in the case of Puṇḍra and Varendra as well. North Bengal, i.e., Puṇḍra or Puṇḍradeśa or Varendra was also sometimes included within the realm of Gauḍa as evidenced by the Trikāṇḍaśeṣa-passage (Puṇḍrāḥ syur-Varendrī, Gauḍa-nivṛiti⁵⁰⁷). The Kolagallu and Kuḍatini inscriptions refer to the installation of the god Skanda-Kārttikeya by Gadādhara who has been described as the crest-jewell of the Gauḍa people and illuminator of the Varendrī country⁵⁰⁸. Gadādhara was a native of Taḍā-grāma (village near Dinājpur) in Varendrī which was formed a part of Gauḍa. Here, a reference may be also made to Kulluka's commentary on the Manusāṁhitā wherein the commentator is said to have been a native of a locality in Varendrī within Gauḍa (Gaudē Nandanavāsi-nāṁni sujanair = Vandye Varendryām kulē Śrīmad = Bhatta Divākarasya tanayaḥ kullūka-bhaṭṭo-bhavat⁵⁰⁹). This is a clear testimony that Varendrī also formed a part of Gauḍa country. Further it has been also suggested that Puṇḍra, Gauḍa and Varendrī were once synonymous, and that at one time, Gauḍapurī or Lakṣhmaṇāvati was once its capital, the extensive ruins of which are to be found on the Chhoto-Bhāgīrathī, a few miles below Maldah⁵¹⁰. The Jaina writers of the 13th

and 14th century A.D. state that Lakshmaṇāvatī was included within Gauḍa and during the Muslim times, Lakshmaṇāvatī became synonymous with Gauḍa⁵¹¹. In this connection, a reference may be made to the Hitopadeśa wherein it is stated : Asti Gaudadēśe Kausāmbī nāmanagarī. This Kausāmbī is not, however, to be identified with modern Kośām in U.P. The author of the Hitopadeśa is said to have hailed from Bengal, and as such, it is quite likely that he might have referred to a place in Bengal⁵¹².

Accordingly, it is suggested that Kausāmbī as referred to is to be identified with the modern Kusumba in Rājśāhi district or Kusumbī in Bogrā district. This shows that Rājśāhi and Bogrā districts formed parts of Gauḍa⁵¹³. Besides, Purushottamadeva's Trikāṇḍaśeṣa clearly includes the whole of Varendrī within Gauḍa (Varendrī Gaudadeśah). Further, it is learnt from an inscription dated 967 A.D. that one named Gadādhara, the crest jewel of the Gauḍa country, was born at Taḍā which is to be identified with modern Tara (Dinājpur). According to the Purāṇa-sarvasva, Varendra was included within Gaudadeśa.

As to the inclusion of Southern and Eastern Bengal within Gauḍa, it has been already stated that Vaṅga has been very often differentiated from Gauḍa in many writings. Again, in ancient times, Bengal was also known as Gauḍa-Vaṅga, i.e., both being linked together. This would be evident from Śaktisaṁgama-tantra ^(7th Pāṭala) wherein it is stated : Vaṅgadeśam Samārabhya Bhuvaneśāntagam Śivē/ Gaudadeśah Samākhyātaḥ sarvavidyāviśāradaḥ//. From the time of the Pāla kings who generally called themselves Gauḍeśvara, the whole of Vaṅga appears to have been integrated within the Gauḍa empire. This continued even during the rule of the Senas who had another capital city of their Gauḍa kingdom at Vikramapura-bhāga. Even the successors of Lakshmaṇasena, Viśvarūpasena and Keśavasena who concentrated their power in the Vaṅga country, never gave up their claim to the title of Gauḍeśvara, and as such, the whole of Bengal came to be known as Gauḍa. Again, in the Śakti-Saṁgamatantra, a passage describes the Gauḍa country as lying between Vaṅga and Bhuvaneśvara, i.e., Bhuvaneśvara in Purī district of Orissa, and the Vaṅga country has been described as extending from the sea to the Brahmaputra. It follows accordingly that the eastern half of Bengal was called Vaṅga, and the western half along with some parts of Orissa might have been designated as Gauḍa. This broad

division of Bengal, i.e., East and West represented by Vaṅga and Gauḍa occurs also in the Muslim accounts which refer to Gaur-Vaṅgāla.

During the Muslim rule Lakṣmaṇāvatī was primarily called Gauḍa, and all other parts of Bengal were known as Vāṅgālā or Subā-Vāṅgālā which occurs in many Muslim records. It does not, however, mean that the name Gauḍa was totally given up because in some records the name of Gauḍa denoting the whole of Bengal does occur. As for instance, during Aurangzeb's time, a record refers to Bengal as 'Gauḍa-maṇḍala'⁵¹⁴. The Portuguese and the English traders adopted the name Vāṅgālā or Vāṅglā from the Muslims. Accordingly, the English started using the name Bengal. The people of Bengal did, however, gradually give up the name Gauḍa for Bengal. Yet, even in the 19th century the name of Gauḍa in the sense of Bengal continued to be used in literary records. Rammohan Roy entitled his book on Grammar of the Bengali language as 'Gauḍīya-Vyākaraṇa' (1833). It is also found that the designation Vāṅglā soon replaced Gauḍa to denote Bengal. But even today the traditional name of Gauḍa for Bengal is very often remembered and used to denote the whole of Bengal.

The term Gauḍa has been also used in many writings as a generic name denoting the countries of Eastern India. Dandin in the 7th century A.D. used Gauḍa-style in the sense of Prāchya or Eastern distinguishing it from the Southern style. Even the East Indian alphabet was named after Gauḍa. Alberunī has also referred to the Gauḍī-alphabet used in Pūrvadeśa⁵¹⁵. Besides, the Gauḍī-alphabet, there was also a Gauḍa-language which was current in the Eastern countries. From all these, it may be reasonably presumed that the term Gauḍa was also used in Pūrvadeśa. Besides, the Gauḍī-alphabet, there was also a Gauḍa-language which was current in the Eastern countries. From all these, it may be reasonably presumed that the term Gauḍa was also used in a comprehensive sense encompassing the Eastern region as a whole. In a work of the 8th century A.D., namely, Anargharāghavanāṭaka, Champā is mentioned as the capital of Gauḍa. Some have identified this Champā with Champānagarī in north-west of Burdwan, and others with Champā in Bhāgalpur district of Bihar. If the latter view is accepted, there is no doubt that Bihar was also included within the Gauḍa kingdom⁵¹⁶. This does not, however, necessarily refer to the actual geographical extent of the Gauḍa territory. It may simply

prove the great cultural attainments of the Gauda peoples of Bengal or rather of the Bengali people, which produced great impact over all the neighbouring regions of Eastern India.

In the same way, even the term Gauda was applied in a still wider sense as to include Āryāvarta or Northern India. In this respect, a particular reference may be made to the five classes of the Gaudas or North Indian Brahmins, to which attention has been already drawn. It may be noted that even in the inscriptions of the 10th and 11th century, references to the wide application of the term Gauda to denote North India have also been made. Then again, a reference to Pañcha-Gauda and Pañcha-Gaudeśvara may be made. It has been, however, contended that the title Pañcha-Gaudeśvara is indeed a reminiscence of the Gauda empire of Dharmapāla and Devapāla⁵¹⁷. From all these information, it may at least be presumed that during the early medieval period, the Gaudas became so prominent and influential that the people of Northern India could perhaps boast of being called Gaudas, but not actually applying the name Gauda to their own lands of habitation. This has got, however, nothing to do with the actual territorial extent of the Gauda country of Bengal.

Geographical boundaries of Gauda differed from age to age and from author to author. It has been already observed that Murśidābād district was at the outset included within the Gauda kingdom in the 7th century A.D. In the same century after the death of Śaśāṅka, Jayanāga became the king of Karṇasuvarṇa. It is learnt from his Vappaghoshavāṭa inscription that Audambara-Vishaya (Rājmaḥal and the region on west of the Bhāgīrathī including parts of Bīrbhūm) was included within his kingdom⁵¹⁸. In the Bhavishya-purāṇa (3/4/6/61), Gauda is said to have been situated on the bank of the Ganges (Bhāgīrathī) (Gaudadeśe Gaṅgāyāṇ kulē). Again, it has been stated that Gauda-bhūmi lay on the south of the Padmā, which may be then taken as its northern boundary. Further, North Bengal was included within Gauda. Rāmapāl. founded the city of Rāmāvatī on the north of the Ganges (Ramauti in the Āīn-i-Akbarī), and so also Lakshmaṇasena founded Lakshmaṇāvatī on the north of the Ganges, not far from Rāmāvatī (Laknauti in the Tabaqāt-i-Nāsiri). Both were capital

cities of the Gauḍa kingdom. It is perhaps because of this that Puṇḍra or North Bengal is said to have been included within Gauḍa. It can not be, however, doubted that originally Gauḍa lay on the south of the Gaṅgā or the Padmā and on the bank of the Ganges. On the south, Gauḍa was perhaps extended upto the sea as would be evident from the Harāha and Gurgi inscriptions⁵¹⁹. A reference has been already made to Saptagrāma (Hugli) and the mouth of the Sarasvatī, which was perhaps considered as wide as the sea. In that case, Burdwan and Hugli districts were also included within Gauḍa. This is also supported by the Bṛhatsaṁhitā and the Mārkaṇḍeya-purāṇa. Thus Gauḍa had a very wide territorial extent including not only the whole of Bengal, but also her neighbouring regions.

(iv) Capital Cities of Gauḍa :

For the determination of the spatial limits of Gauḍa, it would be necessary to refer also to the different capital cities of the Gauḍa kingdom. The first capital city of Gauḍa was perhaps at Karṇasuvarṇa founded by Śaśāṅka, a detailed account of which has been given by the Chinese pilgrim in the 7th century A.D.⁵²⁰, and the identification of which has been recently made on unimpeachable archaeological records unearthed at Rājibāḍidāṅgā in the district of Murśidābād⁵²¹. After the death of Śaśāṅka Karṇasuvarṇa was conquered by Bhāskaravarman of Kāmarūpa⁵²². Thereafter, Jayanāga appears to have ruled over Karṇasuvarṇa. Afterwards, very little is known about Karṇasuvarṇa. The last reference to Karṇasuvarṇa is to be found in Rājaśekhara's Karpūramañjarī⁵²³. No information is, however, available as to how the grand old city of Karṇasuvarṇa came to an end.

Next to Karṇasuvarṇa, Champā has been mentioned as the capital of Gauḍa in the Anargharāghava of the poet Murāri (8th century A.D). By that time, the Pāla empire was established, and the Pāla kings might have founded the capital city of Champā which is to be identified with Champā in Bhāgalpur (same as Champānagarī in the Āīn-i-Akbarī) in ancient Aṅga-Magadha country, over which ruled Dharmapāla and Devapāla who assumed the title of Gauḍeśvara. The Pāla king Rāmapāl founded another Gauḍa capital on the north of the Ganges and named it after him as Rāmavati (mentioned as Ramauti in the Āīn-i-Akbarī). Further, the water-fortress

(Jaladurga) mentioned in the Gurgi inscription might have been another Gauḍa-capital. This Jaladurga has been identified with the modern Samudragarh near Navadvīpa. In fact, Navadvīpa or Nadiā (Nudiā) was indeed the capital city of Lakshmaṇasena as stated in the Tabaqāt-i-Nāsiri⁵²⁴. Again, Dhōyī in his Pavanadūta (36) has given a wonderful description of Vijayapura on Champā, the bank of the Ganges as : Skandhāvāraṁ Vijayapuram ityunnatāṁ-
 Rāmāvatī rājadhānīm/ Drishtvā tāvat bhuvanajayinastasya rājñohadhigacheh//
 Jaladurga and This city was founded by Vijayasena of the Sena dynasty, and
 Vijayapura Vijayapura may not be different from Navadvīpa or its neighbourhood as contended by Sen⁵²⁵. It has been further suggested that Vijayapura might have been founded on the very site of the present Samudragarh where was perhaps built the previous capital Jaladurga. In that case, Vijayapura does not appear to have been far away from the present Navadvīpa. Besides Vijayapura, Lakshmaṇasena founded another capital city and named it after him as Lakshmaṇāvatī which became identical with Gauḍa.

The twin capital cities of Rāmāvatī and Lakshmaṇāvatī lay on the Ganges; the former was on the north of the Ganges and the latter, on its south, and both of them were in the neighbourhood of modern Maldah. It has been, however, contended that Lakshmaṇāvatī was actually founded near Rāmāvatī. Though Rāmāvatī considerably lost its prestige and glory on the foundation of Lakshmaṇāvatī yet it was neither forgotten nor deserted altogether. This is proved by the very fact that Rāmāvatī is also mentioned Rāmāvatī by Abul Fazal in the 16th century A.D. At the time of the Muslim
 and conquest, Lakshmaṇāvatī was at the height of its glory, and towards
 Lakshma- the close of the 16th century A.D., a great epidemic brought
 ṇāvatī about the catastrophic oblivion of the grand city of the Senas.

In this connection, it may be also noted that of the several Bhuktis of the Sena kingdom one was Kaṅkagrāma-bhukti, on the south of which lay Vardhamāna-bhukti (Burdwan). This Kaṅkagrāma-bhukti included Northern
 kaṅka- Rāḍha (Brahma), and its centre was at Kaṅkagrāma, the identity
 grāma of which is as yet uncertain. Some have placed it in the Rājmaḥal and others at modern Kāgrām in the district of Murśīdābād. This Kāgrām is not again far away from the ancient site of Karṇasuvarṇa (Rāṅgāmāṭi-Chāndpārā), and as such, it may be said that the former retained to a limited

extent the political gravity of the latter by being transformed into a Bhukti in the Gauḍa kingdom of the Senas.

Besides, another political centre of Lakshmaṇasena is also referred to. The Rājavādī (Bhāwāl) plate was issued from Dhāryyagrāma where Lakshmaṇasena is supposed to have shifted his capital after he lost West Bengal to the Muslim invaders. Bhaṭṭasāli identifies this place with the region round about Rājavādī which lies at a distance of 9¹/₂ miles north-east of Jaydevpur Railway station on the Dacca-Mymensingh Railway line⁵²⁶.

It would follow that the Gauḍas under the Pālas and the Senas had several capital cities, of which some attained great celebrity like Karṇasuvarṇa, Rāmāvatī, Nudiā and Lakshmaṇāvatī. Of these many political centres, only a few could be properly identified. It is only in recent years that Karṇasuvarṇa, the oldest capital city of the Gauḍas, has been located in the district of Murśidābād on the basis of archaeological finds. Here also, only its neighbouring monastery, namely, Raktamṛttikāvihāra has been firmly located⁵²⁷. Following the account of Hiuen Tsang, it has been most logically upheld that the ancient site of Karṇasuvarṇa must be located near about the present location of the ancient monastery. But as yet, no unimpeachable record of Karṇasuvarṇa's exact identity has been found. So also is the case of Nudiā which is generally identified with the present Navadvīpa (Nadiā) on the western bank of the Ganges. On the eastern side of the Ganges there is a mound called Vallāladhipi which is traditionally supposed to have been the palace of the Sena king Vallālasena. But unfortunately, the nature and character of this small mound and its contents do not give any indication to that extent. This mound has been recently excavated and the mystery of the Vallāladhipi has been unveiled. Scrappy press reports of finds unearthed at the site reveal remains of a Buddhist monastery complex. Even at Navadvīpa proper no unimpeachable archaeological record of any kind has been found to prove its identity with Nudiā of the Muslim writers. Lakshmaṇasena had his palaces, etc., at Nadiā (Nudiā), but no remains of any sort have been traced as yet. There are two alternatives : either the Sena capital described by the Muslim historians as Nudiā which was captured by the Muslim invaders might be located at

another place on the bank of the Ganges or the capital city of Nudia might have been completely engulfed by the Ganges. The latter alternative is not beyond any tinge of probability. Yet, it is very difficult to explain the absence of any record whatsoever at the present Navadvīpa regarding the once flourishing capital city of the Senas. It is a cogent argument, and this naturally questions the credibility of the identification of Nudia of the Muslim writers with the modern Navadvīpa.

Similar doubts may be expressed in respect of the identification of Rāmāvatī and Lakshmaṇāvatī. The capital Rāmāvatī (Ramauti of the Muslim writers) named after the Pāla king Rāmapāl or Rāmāvatī-nagara is said to have been situated in the vicinity of the present Gauḍ (Gaur) on the Ganges. Here also, there is no cognisable record by which the identity of Rāmāvatī can be established with certainty. There are, however, some places bearing reminiscences of the ancient Rāmāvatī. In Bihar, there is one Rāmagiri or Rāmtek and Rāmasiddhi-pāṭaka of the Nāya region of the Vaṅga country⁵²⁸. Even these places have not produced any concrete evidences of their identity with Rāmāvatī. The same is the case with Lakshmaṇāvatī (Laknauti of the Muslim writers). From the Muslim and other accounts it is evident that Lakshmaṇāvatī was situated near the present region of Gauḍ, and it has been most cogently upheld that it was on the ruins of the old city of Lakshmaṇāvatī that the Muslim city of Gaur was founded. Yet, it must be said that no authentic records of the former existence of Lakshmaṇāvatī at the place have been detected excepting the recovery of several positive Pāla-Sena sculptural specimens which abound the place. It is, however, to be admitted that the Muslims while constructing the palaces and mosques at Gaur and Pāṇḍuā made abundant use of the old building materials which have been most reasonably supposed to have belonged to the old city of Lakshmaṇāvatī dispoiled/destroyed by the Muslim invaders.

It is really a strange phenomenon that all concrete evidences regarding the aforesaid ancient cities of only 800-1000 years old have been completely effaced beyond any recognition of their former existences. This

might have been due to the activities of both natural and human agencies. The river is the creator as well as destroyer of cities and civilizations.

Reasons for uncertain identification All these cities were actually built on the banks of the Ganges which very often played great havoc carrying away or rather engulfing all that was created on its bank. This might have happened in cases of both Rāmāvatī and Lakshmaṇāvatī. Besides, all these establishments were subjected to complete destruction or ruination by the Muslim invaders who utilized old materials of these dispoiled old cities for their new constructions. This is what happened also in the case of the ancient Gauḍa and the Muslim city of Gaur.

(v) Rise and Fall of Gauḍa and the Gauḍas :

It has been already stated that Gauḍa might have been originally a region in the neighbourhood of the present Maldah, and that this very region was perhaps peopled by the Gauḍas coming from upper India. They might have infiltrated through the Rājmahal hills following the traditional route and named the place where they first settled after their own tribal name. In course of time, they carved out a principality of their own and succeeded even in extending their political supremacy far and wide. The Gauḍas appear to have come into prominence from the 6th century A.D. onwards. The Harāha inscription refers to the conflict between the Gauḍas and the Maukhari ruler Īśānavarman, which might have taken place in the southern part of the Vaṅga kingdom, perhaps of Gopachandra⁵²⁹. Previous to this war, Gauḍa was under the hegemony of the Guptas. It was only after the decline of the Guptas that the Maukharis forcibly established their hold over the Gauḍas who might have made attempts to become free from the yoke of servitude of the Guptas. The conquest of Mahāsena-gupta and Īśānavarman made the Gauḍas confused and disintegrated for the time being. But soon, the Gauḍas integrated themselves under the magnetic personality of one named Śaśāṅka who was perhaps first a Mahāsāmanta under the Later Guptas of Magadha and later on succeeded to establish his overlordship over the Gauḍas. In the 7th century A.D., the Gauḍa kingdom under the leadership of Śaśāṅka received unquestioned

acknowledgement all over Northern India. At that time, the capital city of the Gauḍa kingdom was perhaps at Karṇasuvarṇa as mentioned by Hiuen Tsang.

Disintegrations followed the death of Śaśāṅka, and it has been clearly stated in the Ārya-mañjuśrī-mūla-kalpa that 'after the death of Soma, the Gauḍa political system (Gauḍa-tantra) was reduced to mutual distrust, raised weapons and mutual jealousy-one king for a week; another for a month⁵³⁰' . Internal dissensions in the Gauḍa kingdom were further

Anarchy after Śaśāṅka aggravated by invasions from outside. After the death of Śaśāṅka, Karṇasuvarṇa was conquered by Bhāskaravarman of Kāmarūpa.

Even these outsiders got hold over Gauḍa, and one of its rulers was defeated and killed by Yaśovarman of Kanauj as narrated in the Gauḍa-vāho. Besides, references to inroads made by the kings of Kāśmīr may be also made. Taking the advantage of the prevailing anarchy and confusions, the Pālas succeeded in establishing their absolute control over the Gauḍas.

With the rise of the Pālas, the political picture of Gauḍa changed altogether, and they had probably first established their capital city in the present region of Maldah where the Gauḍas originally settled. The Pālas were perhaps responsible for transferring the capital city from Karṇasuvarṇa to Gauḍa. In fact, all the Jayaskandhāvāras (temporary military resorts or capitals) of the Pāla rulers were founded on the Ganges. Even the city of Rāmāvatī named after the Pāla king Rāmapāl (11th-12th century A.D) was perhaps situated in or near the present Gaur. This Rāmāvatī has been actually referred to by the Muslim writers as Ramauti. When the Senas came to power they established their capital city at Lakshmaṇāvatī named after Lakshmaṇasena (1189-1206 A.D) in the present region of Gaur. This city has been referred to in the Muslim accounts as Lakhnauti.

On the conquest of Bengal by the Muslims, Gauḍa came to hold a marked position. It was perhaps on the ruins of Rāmāvatī and Lakshmaṇāvatī that the Muslim conquerors established their own city of Gaur which became

the residence of several Muslim rulers of Bengal for centuries. Thus long before the establishment of the Muslim capital at Gaur, Gauḍa flourished as a great centre, and the muslim conquerors founded their own cities on its despoiled ruins or in their vicinity and named the same after the old one, i.e., Gauḍa. Even during Chaitanya's time Gauḍīya meant all Bengalis.

It may be noted here that the ancient Gauḍas played a significant role not only in the annals of Bengal, but also of Northern India. Within its spatial area, there lay five capitals, such as, Lakshmaṇāvatī, i.e., Lakshnauti or Gaur of the Muslim times, Pāṇḍuā, i.e., Firozābād, Tāṇḍā, Rājmaḥal, i.e., Āgmahal or Ākbarnagar and Murśidābād, i.e., Makhsushābād. Lakshmaṇāvatī lying on the northern part of Gaur continued to be the capital city even during the Muslim period. The Muslim conquerors adorned the city with palaces, mosques etc. There are also references to the fortress of Basan-kot and an embankment of Diw-kot. Lakshmaṇāvatī with its fort was captured by the Muslims in 1227 A.D. and by 1338 A.D. the capital was transferred to Pāṇḍuā (Firozābād), perhaps because of the changes in the river courses causing the older city unhealthy and uninhabitable. But the capital city was again transferred to Gaur or Lakshmaṇāvatī promoted by the landscape changes. Then again by 1564 A.D. Sulaiman transferred the capital from Gaur to Tāṇḍā. In Todarmal's rent-roll, Gauḍa appears to have comprised 2 Sarkārs, namely, Lakshmaṇāvatī and Audumbara (Tāṇḍā). During the Mughal rule, the political centre was transferred to Dacca and then again to Murśidābād which no doubt formed an integral part of Gauḍa. Henceforth, ancient and medieval Gauḍa as a centre of political and cultural gravity passed into oblivion.

The glory of Gaur or of ancient Gauḍa did not last for a long time. It was actually from the 16th century that the decline of Gaur began. A traveller of the 16th century gives a glowing account of the city of Gaur by stating : "It is situated on the banks of the Ganges, and it is said to be 3 of our leagues in length and to contain 2 lakhs inhabitants. On the one side, it has the river for its defence and on the landward faces a wall

of great height ... streets are thronged with concourse and traffic of people ... that they can not force their way past ... a great part of the houses of this city are stately and well-wrought buildings ...". De Barros calls the city of Gaur after the name of the country. It appears that the old name of Lakhnauti disappeared. Another traveller in 1683, however, could observe the old city in ruins. He says : "We spent three hours in seeing the ruins specially of the palace which has been in my judgement considerably bigger and more beautiful than the Grand Seigneur's Seraglio at Constantinople or any other place that I have seen in Europe"⁵³¹.

The ruins of the Muslim city of Gaur are to be found scattered over a wide area in and around the modern town of Maldah, more particularly at Gaur and Pāṇḍuā. But unfortunately, as yet no distinct traces of ancient Gauda or of Lakshmaṇāvatī could be detected in the Muslim palaces. There is, however, hardly any doubt that the Muslim palaces and mosques were actually founded on the ruins of the ancient city of Lakshmaṇāvatī and its neighbouring temples. It may be also reasonably upheld that the palaces, buildings and temples of Lakshmaṇāvatī were ravaged and demolished by the Muslim conquerors, and those very materials were used for the construction of the Muslim mosques and palaces. There are still extant traces or indications of the wide use of those old despoiled materials in the construction of the Muslim buildings at Gaur and Pāṇḍuā.

It would be thus evident from the above survey that Gauda was originally an insignificant place where the Gaudas first settled, and that it gradually came into prominence and emerged as a great principality having its territorial extent as to cover the whole of western part of Bengal and later on the whole of Bengal. It so happened that the original Gauda people got themselves integrated into the general milieu of the Bengali people and culture in such a way that they emerged so prominently as to be identified with the Bengali people and their country. Accordingly, Bengal came to be known as Gauda and the Bengali people as the Gaudas or Gauda-janas. Even as late as the 19th century, the expression Gauda-jana continued to be used in literature as denoting the Bengali people, and till recently the term Gauda-jana is being used in the same sense.

(vi) Cultural Patterns :

Even if the Gauḍas were of any tribal affiliation, they after their settlement in Bengal and amalgam with many other peoples of the region did develop their cultural patterns in such a way as to be reckoned as quite well-marked and distinct in all aspects of their life and activities. A pointed reference to the living of the Gauḍas on the sea-shore has been already made, and it implies that the Gauḍas, though they might have come from middle and upper India, became perhaps great experts in navigation because of their close association with the sea. In fact, it has been also suggested that the Gauḍas might have their refuge in the seas. Besides, in the Gurgi inscription of the 11th century A.D. it is said that the Gauḍa kings had their Jaladurga where they used to take resort or had their residence. ^{Association with sea} (Jalanidhijaladurgam Gauḍa-rājōhadhiśete)⁵³². This is the same as the Samudrāśraya of the Haraha inscription of the 6th century A.D. As to the identity of the Samudrāśraya or sea-resort it may be noted that even during Abul Fazal's time, the Ganges fell into the sea near Saptagrāma, and in fact, Fredarik in the 16th century saw many ships at Betaḍ (Howrah)⁵³³. Accordingly, Raychaudhuri rightly observed that the wide mouth of the river Sarasvatī was at that time recognised as the Sea. Sen thinks that this sea-resort may be located, as already stated, at modern Samudragāḍ, near Navadvīpa⁵³⁴.

That the Gauḍas excelled in various arts and crafts becomes evident from the Arthaśāstra of Kauṭilya who describes a variety of silver called Gauḍeka which was undoubtedly a product of the Gauḍa country⁵³⁵. ^{Crafts} Kauṭilya says : Gauḍikāmrūpyam. From this, it appears that Gauḍa's silver was famous in countries outside Bengal. Kauṭilya also makes a particular reference to other products of different parts of Bengal including Gauḍa. This shows that the Gauḍa people showed excellence in the manufacture of various crafts.

A detailed account of the dress, customs, etc., of the Gauḍas is to be found in the Kāmasūtra of Vātsyāyana. A particular reference has been made by Vātsyāyana to love intrigues in the king's harems of Vaṅga and Gauḍa. While referring to the Gauḍas he says that love intrigues were

carried out with the help of the Brāhmaṇa relatives and servants who had easy access to the harem⁵³⁶. In other passages, Vātsyāyana has made a particular reference to the beauty of men and softness and delicacy of the women of Gauḍa. Again, while discussing the fashion of dressing nails by men in different parts of India, Vātsyāyana says : 'Large nails which give grace to the hand and attract the heart of women from their appearance are possessed by the Gauḍas' (Dīrghāni hastaśōbhinyālōkēcha yōshitām chittagrāhīni cha Gauḍānām Dress and nakhāni syuh⁵³⁷). Further, while describing the characteristics of charm of the women of various parts of India, Vātsyāyana speaks of the Gauḍa ladies as soft and sweet in their speech, full of love and tender in their body (Mridubhāshinyōhanurāgavatyō mridvaṅgyas̄cha Gaudyāḥ⁵³⁸). From the account of Vātsyāyana, it is also evident that in respect of dress, speech, and general behaviour patterns the Gauḍa men and women were not inferior to the peoples of other parts of India, and that in many respects, they were far superior. In this connection, a reference may be also made to Rājaśekhara's Kāvyaīmāmsā which makes a particular mention of Gauḍāṅganāsu, i.e., Gauḍa lady⁵³⁹. Bharata in his Nāṭyaśāstra (23/64) has also made a special reference to hair-dressing of the Gauḍa women by stating : Gauḍīnāmalakaprāyaṁ Śaśikhāpāśavenikam, i.e., the Gauḍa ladies had curly and a braid or tail of hair hanging like a tuft of hair on the crown of the head as tonsure. As to the dress of the Gauḍa ladies, the Kāvyaīmāmsā furnishes a detailed account^{539a} : Ādrārdrachandanakuch-ārpitāsūtrahārah/ Sīmantachumbisichayah sphuṭabāhumūlah // Dūrvāprakāguruchi-rāsvagurūpabhōgād/ Gauḍāṅganāsu chiramesha chakāstuveshah//

It thus follows that the Gauḍa ladies used to wear necklace of thread and head-cloth up to the hair-periphery, and that they had their arms uncovered, breast bearing sandal-paste and the limbs having Agurucharchā and that their body being dūrvākāguruchi, i.e., dark-blue or Śyāma-varṇa⁵⁴⁰.

Here, a particular reference may be also made to the language, linguistic style, alphabet, etc., that developed amongst the Gauḍas and frequently referred to in some of the early literary texts. Bāṇa in an introductory verse of the Harshacharita (1/7-8) speaks of the fondness for Vākshara-dambaraḥ amongst the people of Gauḍa (Gauḍeśa), i.e., display of sonorous words is said

to be the characteristic of the Gauda people. This is a literary quality which is called Vikataksha-ravandha, i.e., not distorted or deformed. It refers at least to an independent growth of Sanskrit poetry. Daṇḍin and Bhāmaha who flourished in the 7th/8th century A.D. speak of two styles, Dākshinātya and Paurastya. According to Daṇḍin, Paurastya is represented by the Gaudīya style "which favoured alliteration and harsh sound effects, recondite etymologizing phraseology and strength of ten resulting in bombast and affectation". It has been pointed out by Jacobi that the Sanskrit poetry in the East developed the evil effect of old age before the art became current⁵⁴¹.

The Gaudīya-style is characterised by Arthālaṅkāradambārau which is its distinctive feature. Daṇḍin, however, was in favour of Vaidarbha-style. Bhāmaha, however, regarded Gaudī as superior to others⁵⁴². But in the Nāṭya-śāstra, Bharata (earlier than Daṇḍin's Kāvya-darśa) speaks of four styles, i.e., Avanti, Pāñchāla, Madhyama, Dākshinātya and Odra-Māgadhi. Of these again, the last two correspond to Vaidarbhi and Gaudī-styles of Daṇḍi⁵⁴³. That Ardha-māgadhi is identical with Gaudī has been made clear by Rājaśekhara who says that in Aṅga, Varāṅga, Suhma, Brahma, Puṇḍra, etc., Odra-Māgadhi-pravṛitti and Gaudīyarīti were prevalent. It has been, however, pointed out by Keith that this is a strong suggestion that in the time of the Nāṭyaśāstra there had not developed the characteristics of the Gauda-style, and that this emerged gradually with the development of poetry at the courts of the princes of Bengal⁵⁴⁴. Here, the princes of Bengal were no doubt the kings of Gauda who flourished in the 7th century A.D. and that the Gaudīya-style came to the whole of Eastern India.

Besides, Rājaśekhara in his Kāvyamīmāṃsā (X) has also referred to Sanskrit language and its cultivation in Gauda by saying : Gaudādyāḥ Saṁskṛita-sthāḥ parichitarūchayah prākṛitē Lātadeśyāḥ. From this statement, it is clear that Sanskrit language was more cultivated in Gauda than Prākṛita. Not only that, even the pronunciation of the Sanskrit words in the Gauda land was quite up to the mark or good. Thus Rājaśekhara (KM, 7th Adhyāya) says : Paṭhānti Saṁskṛitaṁ Sushṭhu Kunthāḥ Prākṛita Vāchi tē/ Vānārasītaḥ pūrveṇa ye kechin Magadhādayaḥ// Thus the Gaudas earned great reputation in pronunciation of Sanskrit words. But their Prākṛita pronunciation was distasteful. It is further stated in the Kāvyamīmāṃsā (vii) that the Goddess Sarasvatī being disgusted with the Prākṛita-

pronunciation went to Brahmā and said : Brahman Viñāpaṇyāmi tvāṁ Svādhikāra-jihāṣyā/ Gaudastyajatu vā gāthāmanyā vāhastu Sarasvatī// Thus Sarasvatī said to Brahmā that either the Gaudas give up Prākṛita or take resort to another Sarasvatī. Hereafter, Rājaśekhara describes the style of reading of the Gaudas by saying : Nātispashtō na chāślishtō na rukshō nātikōmalah/ Na mandrō nātītārścha pāthī Gaudēshu Vādavaḥ// It follows that the reading of the Gaudīya-Brāhmaṇas was neither very distinct nor indistinct, neither harsh nor soft and neither grave nor sharp; such pronunciations can neither be adored nor reproached. In other words, the Gaudīya-style of Sanskrit-reading was quite up to the mark and commendable. All these show that Gauda was also a great centre of the cultivation of Sanskrit learning. It is also evident that the original language of the Gaudas, i.e., Prākṛita was given up in favour of Sanskrit. This has been all due to the impact of Brahmanization and Sanskritization.

Like the Gaudīya-literary style, the Eastern Indian alphabet was also named after Gauda. In this respect, a particular reference may be made to the observation of Buhler : "Towards the end of the 11th century A.D., the Nāgari inscriptions of Eastern India show such distinct traces of changes leading up to the modern Bengali writing, and this change became so numerous in the 12th century that it is possible to class this alphabet as proto-Bengali"⁵⁴⁵. Bendall and Buhler could also find out the impact of this script on the alphabet used in the Nepalese manuscripts belonging to the period between the 12th and 15th centuries⁵⁴⁶. It is, however, to be noted that as early as the first half of the 11th century, the East Indian script was actually named after Gauda. Alberunī (1030 A.D) has referred to eleven kinds of alphabet current in different parts of India and this list includes Gaudī-alphabet being used in Pūrvadeśa⁵⁴⁷. Accordingly, the proto-Bengali script of Buhler was perhaps Alphabet known at that time as Gauda. Besides, in the Lalitavistara there is a list of 64 alphabets, which includes the mention of Aṅga-lipi, Vaṅga-lipi, Magadha-lipi, Drāvida-lipi, etc.⁵⁴⁸. This suggests that there was a tendency also towards the development of local characteristics in alphabet even in earlier times. But the fact remains that like the literary style there developed a Gaudīya-style of writing which was once prevalent all over Eastern India, and which is perhaps to be reckoned as proto-Bengali script.

Like literary style and alphabet there developed in Gauḍa a language with its own characteristics and peculiarities which were also prevalent all over Eastern India. In this connection, a particular reference may be made to the Charyyāpadas or Charyyā-songs attributed to the 10th and 12th centuries A.D. There is little doubt that this is the language of the Charyyā-songs, the earliest stage of the East Indian dialect emerging from the Apabhraṃśa. As to the closeness of the Charyyā-songs to the respective Languages of Eastern India, Bengali, Assamese, Oriya, Maithili and Eastern Hindi, scholars have expressed diverse opinions. Claims have been put forward to affiliate each one of the modern languages of Eastern India to the Charyyā-songs. Naturally, it follows that the languages of Eastern India have a common origin, and it is also quite likely that when the Charyyā-songs were composed, the differences amongst the languages were not so marked as they are at present. Accordingly, Sircar suggests that the language of the Charyyāpadas should be called Gaudī or East Indian and not purely old Bengali or Assamese or Maithili,⁵⁴⁹ etc.

It would thus follow that the Gauḍas had developed a distinct alphabet, language and literary style which were once current all over Eastern India. All these, however, relate to the development of local alphabets, dialects or languages from the Apabhraṃśas of the Indo-Aryan language, and that Gauḍa was the centre par excellence in the development of this language including its style and alphabet, and the same was named after Gauḍa, i.e., Gaudī. The Gauḍas also made great contributions in different branches of knowledge. The Gaudapāda-kārikā whose author is referred to as Gaudāchārya, i.e., a native scholar of Gauḍa, is a great philosophical work⁵⁵⁰. Besides, a reference may be made to Gaudorviśa-Kulaprasasti perhaps dealing with Vijayasena's career. The people of Gauḍa are also said to be great devotees of learning, and they were always engaged in the pursuit of knowledge. It has been thus said : Gaudadēśah Sarvavidyāviśaradah.

It is, however, to be borne in mind that the Eastern peoples have been described as Asurabhāṣī, i.e., speakers of Asura-language. Rājasekhara thus says : Gaudastcyajatu vā gāthāmcanyā vā^{ka}stu Sarasvatī (Let the Gauḍas

give up composing Gāthās or let them change their Vāṇī). This^{is} an indication that by the time of Rājasekhara, the Gauḍas were not expert in composing Gāthās. But subsequently, they might have acquired great proficiency in Sanskrit learning and showed excellence in literary style and language. This has been all due to the impact of Sanskritization.

The Gauḍas also showed great excellence in the fields of politics and art of warfare. It is to be borne in mind that Gauḍa was originally a small principality which was gradually transformed into a large kingdom. The Gauḍas lived near the sea and had their sea-resorts as narrated in the Harāha and Gurgi inscriptions, the implications of which have been discussed in the foregoing pages. It is stated in the 13th śloka of the said Harāha inscription: Gauḍān samudrāśrayāndhyāśiṣṭa etakṣhītīśacharaṇaḥ ..., i.e., by defeating the Gauḍas who had taken refuge in the sea, the Maukhari king ascended on the throne : Siṅhāsanamadhyāśiṣṭa⁵⁵¹. The natural deduction is that the Gauḍas were great experts in naval warfare like the Vaṅgas. Not only in naval warfare, even in respect of land-fighting the Gauḍas excelled in their skill, manoeuvre and bravery. The political supremacy of the Gauḍas can be traced from the 6th century A.D. onwards, and in the 7th century A.D. under the leadership of Śaśāṅka they created a great stir in the political arena of Northern India. By the middle of the 8th century A.D., the Gauḍas were the overlord of Magadha as indicated by the Gauḍavāho of Vākpatirāja⁵⁵². Not only that, even after the fall of Śaśāṅka, the Pālas and the Senas who became the rulers of Gauḍa could successfully exhibit the valour and heroism of the Gauḍas in Northern India. The mighty prowess of the Gauḍas in their fight against the foreign invaders bears clear testimony to the nature and character of the Gauḍa soldiers. A glowing tribute to the valour and heroism of the Gauḍas has been given^{by} Kalhaṇa in his Rājatarāṅgiṇī. Kalhaṇa narrates the story of the assassination of the Gauḍa king who sought refuge in Kāśmīr., and the Gauḍas in order to avenge the treacherous killing of their master went over to Kashmir and showed wonderful bravery and heroism⁵⁵³. Kalhaṇa says that 'even the creator can not achieve what the Gauḍas did on that occasion, and to this day the world is filled with the fame of the Gauḍa heroes (Vidhāturpyasādhyam tadyad Gaudairvihitam tadā/ Brahmāṇḍam Gauḍa Virāṇām ⁵⁵⁴ Yasasya punah //'. This compliment given by Kalhaṇa speaks

highly of the bravery and heroism of the Gauḍas.

It would be evident from various military raids and campaigns conducted by the Gauḍas under the leadership of their masters over different parts of Northern India extending up to Kāśmīr that some of those Gauḍas who went to far off countries in course of their military campaigns or other activities might not have returned to their homeland in Bengal. Some of them were perhaps left behind, as a result of which many communities all over Northern India as well in the northern hilly tracts became named after Gauḍa or Gauḍīya. It is not at all improbable that all these peoples named as such may be affiliated to the ancient Gauḍas of Bengal who might have traversed those lands in different periods of history.

The Gauḍas did also maintain and nourish social differentiations. The Brāhmaṇas who came from Kolāñcha (Kānyakubja) and settled in Bengal at the invitation of Ādiśūra are recognised as the ancestors of the present Rādhīya and Vārendra Brahmins of Bengal⁵⁵⁵. Similarly, the present noble Kāyasthas of Bengal claim to be descendants of those very Kāyasthas who accompanied the aforesaid Brāhmaṇas coming from Kanauj. Again, the Sūrajā-nacharita's author who perhaps belonged to the 16th century was a Gauḍa-Ambashṭha, i.e., the Vaidyas of Bengal⁵⁵⁶. In fact, the upper caste peoples of Bengal trace their descent from those very peoples who came to Bengal from West. If they were of Gauḍa affiliations, it may be contended that those very Gauḍas preserved their separate identity, and their descendants also retained the hierarchy. In religious matters, the Gauḍas of Bengal were upholders of Brahmanical rites and practices and were perhaps affiliated to different sects. Some of them were devotees of Śiva. One Śiva-āchārya, Viśveśvara, is described as a native of Pūrvagrāma in the Rādhā division of Gauḍa. The Pontiff is also called Gauḍa-chudāmaṇi, i.e., head-jewell of Gauḍa⁵⁵⁷. Besides their original primitive religious ideas, the Gauḍas of Bengal in general were devout followers and propagators of Brahmanism. In social affairs, the Gauḍas appear to have conceived the idea of social discriminations which were given effect to by Vallālasena who introduced Kulinism in the society of Bengal.

(vii) Identity :

It is very difficult to detect or identify the true descendants of the ancient Gaudas of Bengal. The primary reason for not finding out any trace of the direct descendants of the ancient Gaudas bearing the same name appear to lie in the very fact that the Gaudas intermingled with all other peoples of Bengal in such a way as not to leave any trace whatsoever of their distinct identity. In reality, the Gaudas in subsequent periods become synonymous with the Bengali people as a whole. Yet, the name Gaura or Gauriya persists, and many communities among different castes of Bengal are named as such. Thus there is a Gauda sub-caste of the Kāyastha and the Goālās of Bengal. Besides, a reference has been already made to the Gaudīya-Brahmins. It may be, however, noted that all these designations might have been made after territory, i.e., named after the Gauda-land. Besides, a reference has been already made to the Gauda-Brāhmaṇa, Gaur-Kāyastha, Gaur-Rājput, Gaur-tagā, etc., in upper India. It follows that the names of such communities ending or preceding with the appellation of Gaur might be a sort of recognition of their descent from the ancient Gaudas or their close association with them.

Gaur-Tagā The Gaur-Brāhmaṇas of upper India relate also that they came from Bengal. The Gaur Brāhmaṇas of Delhi-Subhā have 22 subdivisions, such as, Ādh, Jugad, Kaithal, Gujar, Sidh-Gaur, etc. Of all these Gaur-Brāhmaṇas, the most important community is, however, the Gaur-Tagā which may be identical with Ta-Gauriā as mentioned by Polybius. This Brahmanical community is traditionally said to have been invited by the king Janamejaya of the Epic story for exterminating snakes by performing the great Snake-sacrifice⁵⁵⁸. The same tradition has been also preserved in Bengal as reported by Buchanan⁵⁵⁹. This story of the performance of the Snake-sacrifice is stated to have been referred to in a Copper plate inscription from Bednor⁵⁶⁰. It is further said that Janamejaya performed the Snake-sacrifice for the destruction of all serpents at the confluence of Tuṅgabhadra and Haridra⁵⁶¹. This story appears to be a reminiscence of the destruction of the Nāga-peoples (Takshakas) who were so-called because they had perhaps serpent as their totem or symbol. These Takshakas have been made identical with the Scythians who swept over the whole of Northern India and established their political hegemony. There is no dearth of the Nāga ruling families and also of names of kings ending in Nāga who

Takshakas
and Nāgas

established political authority in different parts of Northern India. The original name of the Scythian tribe might have been Takshaka, from which perhaps descended the Takkas who appear to have been again associated with the grand old city of Takshaśīlā. In other words, it appears that the Takkas occupied originally the land between the Indus and the Jhelām. Even the name Attock (obstacle) recalls the name of the Takkas. There was perhaps a conflict between the Takshakas who had spread over North-western region and became the founder of the Nāga royal families and the Pāṇḍavas, and the story of Snake-sacrifice might have originated from this conflict.

As to the origins of the prefix Tagā to the Brāhmaṇa, there are also many legends current in different parts of Northern India. According to one legend, Tak and Khatti were two brothers, the former took to drinking and the latter expelled him who became a Tyāgi. It is from Tyāgi that the term Tagā appears to have been derived. The king Janamejaya is also said to have invited the Brāhmaṇas from Gaur to officiate at the great Snake-sacrifice, and that after the sacrifice, those Brāhmaṇas were offered land and remuneration. Some of the Brāhmaṇas refused this offer. As these Brāhmaṇas consented to Tyāga, they were called Togās, and they continued to live in places near Hastināpur⁵⁶².

It is, however, very difficult to explain as to how this legend of bringing the Brāhmaṇas from Gaur in Bengal originated. There appears to be hardly any relationship between these Brāhmaṇas of upper India with those of Bengal. In Bengal, the tradition is otherwise. From the Kulajī-texts, it is learnt that the king Ādisūra invited the Brāhmaṇas from Kanauj to perform the Vedic sacrifices in Bengal⁵⁶³. Therefore, the story of the invitation of the Brāhmaṇas from Bengal to perform the Snake-sacrifice in upper India appears to bear a little credibility. This is attested to by the claim of those very Brāhmaṇas that they came from Hariāna (Hariyānā) and not from Gaur (Bengal). In other words, they were perhaps originally settled in Hariānā and not in Gaudā. These Tagās are also to be found in the upper Doab and in Delhi region, and the so-called Gaur-Brāhmaṇas and the Tagās intermarry. It has been already stated that the so-called Gaur-Brāhmaṇas in Bengal were in all probability imported from West, and that they did not move from East to West. There is another possibility. It is learnt from the Kulajī-texts that when these Brāhmaṇas who came to Bengal at

Gaur-
Brāhmaṇas
of upper
India : an
explanation

the invitation of Ādisūra for performing sacrifices returned to their native places, their kins refused to accept them in their society as they visited an impure country. At this, some of them came back and settled down in Bengal. But those who did not come back to Bengal and stayed on at their respective native places became perhaps known as Gaur-Brāhmaṇas as they came from the impure country of Bengal which was thence known as Gauḍa.

Besides the Gaur-Brāhmaṇas of upper India, there are also Gaur-Kāyasthas. There are again two primary divisions of the Gaur-Kāyeths, namely, Kharri and Nizamabādi, the latter are now mostly Śikhs. Even in Western India, there are many Gaur-Kāyeths who are stated to have been transported there about 800 years before to work as Kanungas (revenue officer or record-keeper). This is not a very old tradition and can be taken as an explanation for their presence in upper India. On the other hand, it is learnt from the Gaur-Kāyeths Kulajī-texts that along with the Brāhmaṇas came the Kāyasthas from Kanauj to Bengal at the invitation of the king Ādisūra, and they all might have settled in Bengal. It is not also unlikely that these Kāyasthas from Bengal also went to upper India in search of jobs. But all these happened only in a very late period. Originally, these Kāyeths of upper India appear to have little to do with the Gauḍas in Bengal. There may be also another possibility. Along with the Brāhmaṇas some Kāyeths also might have returned to their respective native places in upper India after performing sacrifices in Bengal, and those very peoples who were socially degraded by their kins came to be known as the Gaur-Kāyeth since they returned from the Gauḍa country.

Further, there are also Gaur-Rājputs spread over different parts of Northern India. There are Chhattiskula or 36 Kulas (clans) of the Rājputs. According to Tod, the ancient kings of Bengal belong to one of these communities⁵⁶⁴. Many of these peoples are to be found as Zamindars at Gorakpur, Bādāon, Shājāhānpur and Morādābād. In Oudh, a considerable number of these peoples are found. They are divided into three groups : Bhāt-Gaur, Bāman-Gaur and Chāmār-Gaur. All these groups appear to have originated from intermixtures with the Bhāts, Brāhmaṇas and Chāmārs. Then again, Kāyeth-Gaur, another community, is said to be an occupational group (carpentry). The Chāmār-Gaurs

are again divided into Rājās and Rāis. It is said that one of their ladies took refuge in a Chāmār-house, and her child came to be called by that name.

Gaur-Rājputs They occupy a low social position, and in order to heighten their
Gaur-Kāyeth. degraded position, they now claim that they originated from one
Gaur-Thākurs, Chauhān king. They also call themselves Chiman-Gaur, i.e., originating
etc. of from Chiman-muni (Saint), and they now disdain all relationship
upper India with the Chāmār⁵⁶⁵. The Gaur-Rājputs, Gaur-Kshatriyas and Gaur-Brāhmaṇas
are to be found in many parts of Uttar Pradesh and Bihār. Besides, there are
also peoples called Gaur and Gaur-Thākurs in Mathurā and Kānpur. Even
amongst the Āhirs, there is a community called Gaurā⁵⁶⁶.

In fact, several communities of upper India bearing the appellation Gaur are to be found widespread. It may be reasonably presumed that all these peoples having appellation of Gaur may be recognised as the direct descendants of the ancient Gauḍas or their close associates. Taking into consideration their wide distribution all over upper India and their numerous divisions and subdivisions, it would be preposterous to uphold the view that all these peoples migrated from Gauḍa in Bengal or that they were all originally Gauḍas of Bengal. On the other hand, the inevitable deduction would be that the ancient Gauḍas of Bengal were those very peoples bearing the same name who came to Bengal from upper India.

As to how, why and when these Gauḍas infiltrated into Bengal, many legendary tales have been recorded in Kulajī-texts of Bengal^{566a}. Though the historicity of the contents of the Kulajī-texts has been questioned on valid grounds, it can not be denied at the same time that there is a grain of truth in those legends. It is said that the king Ādisūra of Gauḍa brought Brāhmaṇas who were also accompanied by the Kāyasthas from Kanauj for the performance of the Vedic rites in Bengal which was thence considered as an impure land not to be trodden by the Āryas of the Āryāvarta or Madhyadeśa. At first, the king of Kanauj refused to comply with the request of Ādisūra to send the Brāhmaṇas to Bengal. At this, Ādisūra declared war against the king of Kanauj and sent 700 Brāhmaṇas of Bengal riding on the bulls in the battle field. The king failing to kill those Brāhmaṇas as that would mean killing of the bulls made an approachment and agreed to send the Brāhmaṇas to Bengal as desired by Ādisūra. After the perfor-

mance of the religious rites in Bengal, those very Brāhmaṇas returned to their respective native places, but their kins refused to accept them because they visited an impure country and performed the Vedic sacrifices there. At this, many of those peoples might have to come back to Bengal and informed the king of their helpless condition. The king treated them kindly and made liberal grants of lands for their settlements in Bengal. This is how the Brāhmaṇas came and settled in Bengal permanently, and this is how the Brāhmaṇas had established their firm foothold in Bengal. It would be, however, unreasonable to uphold that all the Brāhmaṇas and their followers returned to Bengal en masse. Some of them might have stayed on at their respective native places and they became socially degraded.

Ādiśūra might or might not have been a historical person. But the existence of the Śūra dynasty ruling in some parts of Bengal bears historical credence⁵⁶⁷. If there was a king of the name of Ādiśūra belonging to that ruling dynasty, he might have flourished before the 8th century A.D. or by about 1030 A.D.⁵⁶⁸. There was in fact a king named Ādiśūra who was a petty chieftain in North Bihar in the 9th-10th century A.D.⁵⁶⁹. All these legends might have centered round this very king or the one bearing the same name at a little earlier period.

Whatever may be the historicity of Ādiśūra, the legendary tales relate that all the noble Brāhmaṇas of Bengal are the descendants of the five Brāhmaṇas coming from Kanauj, and that the king of Bengal also sent Brāhmaṇas to fight against the king of Kanauj. Now, the possibilities are that the Gaur-Brāhmaṇas in upper India might be also the descendants of those very Brāhmaṇas who were sent by Ādiśūra to fight against the king of Kanauj or they might be regarded as natives of those places. The latter supposition appears to bear historical credence, and as such, those native Brāhmaṇas bearing the name Gauḍa might have actually migrated to Bengal subsequently and became the progenitors of the Brāhmaṇas of Bengal. Not only that, even the Kāyasthas who accompanied those Brāhmaṇas to Bengal became the progenitors of the noble Kāyasthas of Bengal.

(viii) Ethnic Affiliations:

As to the ethnic affiliation of the Brāhmaṇas of upper India, Risley has referred to his Indo-Aryan racial group characterised by tall stature, fair complexion, dark eyes, long head, narrow and prominent nose^{569a}. While speaking about the ethnic composition of the people of Bengal, he also refers to the infiltration of Indo-Aryan element into Bengal. In this connection, he made a particular reference to the Brāhmaṇas and Kāyasthas coming from Kanauj at the invitation of the king Ādiśūra. He has, however, admitted that even among the descendants of these Indo-Aryan migrants indications "are not wanting Brāhmaṇas of occasional intermixture with Dravidians". Risley has also referred and Kāyasthas to their physical degeneration caused by environs⁵⁷⁰. This view of Risley has been challenged by Chanda who from his study of India and Bengal the genealogical tables of the Kāyasthas and Brāhmaṇas and also from their anthropometric measurements has arrived at the conclusion that the Brāhmaṇas and Kāyasthas of Bengal have little kinship with those of upper India⁵⁷¹. (This problem has been discussed in the following Chapters).

Further, it has been found out that the Gaur communities of upper India belonging to various caste categories and social positions having intermixed with other peoples lost their original ethnic features. If the hypothesis of the existence of the Gauḍas in North-west is accepted and if their affiliation with the Turks and their infiltration into India are admitted, it may be presumed that they were originally Mongoloid peoples who in inner India became inextricably mixed up with other existing peoples belonging to the Australoid and Mediterranean ethnic stocks. If therefore the Gauḍas of Bengal came from West, they were already mixed peoples. This was so in the case of both the Gauḍa-Brāhmaṇas and other peoples infiltrating from West into Bengal wherein they further intermingled with other diverse peoples and became totally lost in the milieu of the Bengali people as a whole. Again, there is no extant community in Bengal, the members of which may be identified as direct descendants of the ancient Gauḍas, and as such, it is hardly possible to determine the ethnic identity of the Gauḍas of ancient Bengal.

Despite this indetermination of the ethnic identity of the ancient Gaudas of Bengal as would follow from the above, some early Indian texts contain some references to their physical characters. Bharata in his Nāṭyaśāstra has referred to the skin-colour of the various peoples of India including those of Bengal. But Bharata has not made any specific mention of the skin-colour of the Gaudas in particular, but of the Aṅgas, Vaṅgas, Kaliṅgas, etc. It is stated : Aṅga-Vaṅga-Kaliṅgāstu śyāmāḥ kāryāstu varṇataḥ śyāma, i.e., dark-blue skin-colour of the Aṅgas, Vaṅgas and Kaliṅgas. It may usually be contended that the skin-colour of the Gaudas was not perhaps different from those peoples whose complexion has been specifically mentioned by Bharata. Rājaśekhara in his Kāvyaīmāmsā has become more specific in this regard. While speaking about the eastern peoples, it has been stated : Paurastyānām śyāmō varṇaḥ, i.e., dark blue colour of the easterners.⁵⁷² Again, while dealing with Paurastya, śyāmatā Rājaśekhara has referred to Gaurāṅganā as : Śyāmēshvaṅgeshu Gaudīnām.⁵⁷³ Further, he refers to the Gauda ladies as Dūrvākāguruchi, i.e., their bodies being śyāma-varṇa. In another place, Rājaśekhara says : Viśēshastu Pūrvadēśē rājaputryādīnām Gaurāḥ pāṇḍurvā varṇaḥ. It means that the persons of royal blood or of the nobles had their skin-colour pale or yellowish white. These references to the skin-colour of the Gauda people are very significant. The implication is that the general Gauda peoples were perhaps dark blue, but the complexion of the nobles or persons of royal blood was plausibly pale or yellowish white. It may be accordingly presumed that the Gauda nobles were perhaps those who came from upper India, and their complexion was pale or yellowish white, but the general mass of the Gauda peoples were perhaps dark-blue. Here, a particular, reference may be also made to the Bengali word Gaur which also means Gaur-varṇa, i.e., fair or yellowish. In that case, it may be also contended that the Gaudas were so-called because of their complexion or skin colouration.

This discussion on the skin-colour of the Gaudas does not lead us to any firm conclusion regarding their ethnic identity excepting an indication regarding the presence of the Mongoloid element which is characterised by yellow or yellowish skin-colour. The contention of the Mongoloid affinity will be borne out to a certain extent by other considerations as well.

The Gauḍas of all these categories bearing diverse ethnic elements infiltrated into Bengal in various waves and at different times under varied capacities or pretexts.

(ix) Observations :

Most significantly, the Gauḍas might have come to Bengal even as mercenary soldiers of the then ruling monarchs along with other foreign peoples. A poignant reference to this extent has been made in the Nālandā Plate of Dharmapāla, the Pāla king of Bengal, which speaks of the Gauḍas as mercenaries along with the Mālavas, the Khasas, the Kulikas and the Hunas.⁵⁸³

Movement to and settlement of the Gauḍas in Bengal The Gauḍas also came to Bengal as torch-bearers of the Brahmanical culture as well. This is attested to by the Ādiśūra legend of the Kulajī-texts. That the Brāhmaṇas came from West and settled in Bengal is also clearly borne out by an epigraphic record. The Chinchani plates refer to an endowment for offering Naivedya to the

Goddess Daśamī (Durgā) and the feeding of Pañcha-Gauḍīya-Mahāparśad of Saṃyāna. This refers to the community of Gauḍīya-Brāhmaṇa at Saṃyāna.⁵⁸⁴

These Brāhmaṇas from upper India were again accompanied by the Kāyasthas who might have been originally scribes. All immigrant Brāhmaṇas and Kāyasthas are considered even today as the progenitors of the noble Brāhmaṇas and Kāyasthas of Bengal. It has been already stated that the Gauḍas could also establish their political supremacy to such an extent that they could seize political authority as well like the Karṇāṭakas of South India. This was no mean achievement on their part, and this is how the Gauḍas coming from West got hold of Bengal, and became parts and parcels of the Bengali people and culture as a whole.

The Gauḍas were very ancient peoples. They perhaps came from outside and got themselves firmly settled in different parts and many places where they settled became also named after them. Even amongst the Brāhmaṇa, Rājput, Kāyastha and Gauḍa-tagā societies, many members of the Gauḍa community had entered and formed different sections within these castes.

Gauḍas of Bengal It is, however, to be borne in mind that of all the settlers of this Gauḍa tribal community, the Gauḍas of Bengal outshone all of them in view of their great attainments and excellence, and as such, many Gauḍas of other parts of India tried to establish some sorts of connection or identity with

the Gauḍas of Bengal. Accordingly, any claim of any kind of connection with the Gauḍas of Bengal by the peoples of other parts of India does not necessarily imply that those very peoples came from the Gauḍa community of Bengal.

On the other hand, if the Gauḍas are taken to be a tribal community allied or identical with the Gonds (Gondas), it is to be admitted that though originally belonging to a tribal community, many of the Gauḍas could elevate themselves by assimilating the Indo-Aryan language and culture to the extent of becoming the very torch-bearers of the Brahmanical religion and culture. Others have been, however, continuing as they were in the past residing in the hills and forests and leading even today the same old tribal life-patterns. The Gonds who are allied to the Gauḍas have assimilated both Dravidian and Brahmanical culture, and in Bengal, they made no less contributions in the development of the Bengali culture. Ethnically also, these Gauḍas contributed Mediterranean, Mongoloid and Indo-Aryan speaking Alpinoid racial elements in the composition of the Bengali people.

In Bengal, the Gauḍas, next to the Vaṅgas, made basic contributions in respect of heightening the fundamental norms of the Bengali culture in the fields of writing and language and also in general behaviour patterns including setting the social hierarchy in the caste groups of Bengal. In this respect, the contributions of the Gauḍas stand unparalleled. Their contributions to the totality of the Bengali people and culture was so fundamental that both the Bengali people and culture came to be designated by the very name Gauḍa. Not only that, even the very name of the country became apparented to Gauḍa. Thus Vaṅga denoting once the whole of Bengal became Gauḍa in geographical, political and cultural sense. In reality, the Gauḍas became so inextricably mixed up and attained so much celebrity in all fields that the Bengali people and culture as a whole came to be earmarked as Gauḍa-Jana and Gauḍa-Saṁskṛiti.

V. GENERAL OBSERVATION

The discourse made in the preceding pages on the 'Ancient Peoples' of Bengal as referred to and described in the early literary and epigraphic records reveals certain fundamental issues and their possible solutions relating

to diverse ethnic and culture components of the Bengali people as a whole. Altogether five communities of the 'Ancient peoples of Bengal', namely, the Vaṅgas, the Suhmas, the Rādhās, the Puṇḍras and the Gauḍas have been delineated with all available and relevant details in regard to the derivations of their respective names, origins, original locii, movements, cultural features, racial characteristics, identity, etc. A resume of all that has been already set forth may be made here for proper appreciation and evaluation.

Most interestingly, these communities of the ancient peoples represented the four well-marked quarters of ancient Bengal, namely, eastern and southern, western, northern plus western parts. All these quarters of ancient Bengal were named after those very ancient peoples as Vaṅga, Rāḍha, Puṇḍra and Gauḍa. But the spatial horizon of the political and cultural impact of Bengal and these peoples very often surpassed the traditional or original geographical boundary limits of their respective territorial regions named after them. Of the five communities of the ancient peoples at least two, namely, the Vaṅgas and the Gauḍas, played the most significant roles in the historical, ethnic and cultural settings of ancient Bengal in such a way that the whole country of Bengal came to be called after them. It has been shown that the anglicised nomenclature, Bengal, has been actually derived from the ancient word Vaṅga meaning the people and the land occupied by them. The original term Vaṅga denoting a particular region has been, however, retained through its various transformations and transliterations made by the foreigners at different times.

In course of time, the name Vaṅga came to be applied to denote the whole of Bengal. Similarly, the term Gauḍa, the original land of the Gauḍas in Bengal, was also used to connote the whole territorial region that came to be called Bengal later on. In a wider sense, both Vaṅga and Gauḍa denote the whole of Bengal in certain periods of her history, and it is only in their narrower senses that these two appellations were used to denote only the southern plus eastern and northern plus western parts of the present Bengal. Of these two peoples again, the Vaṅgas were the oldest settlers in Bengal and they yielded such a power and influence that the whole region as such came to be known after them. It is only in a later period that the Gauḍas came into such a prominence that the whole country including its peoples with their cultural attainments came to be earmarked after them as Gaudadeśa,

Gaudajana and Gauda-saṁskṛiti, and the Vaṅgas passed ^{gradually} into insignificance and became confined to the present territorial regions of East and South Bengal. But the name Vaṅga retained its currency and the foreigners who came into contact with them transformed the name into its diverse forms, and ultimately the anglicised one prevailed as the name par-excellence of the geographical horizon of the present Bengal.

Two other names, Rāḍha and Puṇḍra, though sometimes included territories beyond their respective limits, were generally confined to western and northern parts of Bengal, and these two regions came to be known also after their original inhabitants, namely, the Rāḍhās and the Puṇḍras. These two geographical regions, Rāḍha and Puṇḍra, are still current in Bengal. Of these two again, Rāḍha was the first region in Bengal that faced the infiltrating Aryans heralding Jaina, Buddhist and Brahmanical culture from upper India. In a subsequent period, the land of the Puṇḍras, i.e., North Bengal, came to be known as Varendra. But the name of Western Bengal as Rāḍha continued. Even the high class Brāhmaṇas and others coming from upper India and settling in these two regions came to be designated after the ancient names of Rāḍha and Varendra, such as, the Rāḍhī-Brāhmaṇas and the Vārendra-Brāhmaṇas. When the Brahmanical influence got hold of Gauda, the Brāhmaṇas settling there came to be called after it as Gaudīya-Brāhmaṇas. Similarly, the people bearing the Brahmanical culture and settling in Eastern and Southern Bengal came to be known as Vaṅgajās. These territorial divisions named after the ancient peoples became so distinct that even the people claiming descent from those stocks formed into distinct territorial endogamous groups with their respective regional cultural characteristics.

Another interesting point that emerges from the discourse on the ancient peoples of Bengal is that all of them belonged originally to the primitive tribal communities, and that it is only after their coming and settlement in Bengal that they had succeeded in raising their cultural status by their own attainments. Attempts have been made to show that all these ancient peoples of Bengal may be affiliated to one or other of the primitive tribal communities extant at present in various parts of the Northern, Central and Southern India. As for instance, the Gaudas may be affiliated to the Gond tribal community and the Suhmas and the Rāḍhās to the primitive tribal communities of Chhotanāḡpur like the Muṇḍās, the Bhūmijās, etc. Similarly, the Puṇḍras

may be affiliated to the tribal communities of Chhotanāgpur. As to the Vaṅgas, the most ancient peoples of Bengal as referred to in the Vedic texts, no definite clues could be, however, traced regarding their affiliation to any extant primitive tribal communities. It is not also wholly possible to ascertain the identity of the ancient Vaṅgas with any known extant community of Bengal today. There is, however, little doubt that the Vaṅgas were the oldest people of the land. That the Vaṅgas like other ancient peoples did originally belong to a non-Aryan tribal community becomes evident from the account given in the Vedic and other texts. It appears that their speech was perhaps unintelligible to the Aryans, and that they seem to have belonged to a totemistic primitive

Tribal affiliations community. This contention is also partly supported by the derivation of the word Vaṅga as discussed in the preceding pages. This naturally raised an issue as to how the Vaṅgas lost their complete identity. Since the Vaṅgas were the oldest people known to the early Indian texts, it was quite but natural that they were the first people to become inextricably mixed up with all other peoples who subsequently came to Bengal. The intermingling of the Vaṅgas with other peoples took place in such a way that they lost their own identity completely and formed themselves into different groups or sections of the Bengali people bearing varied names. Further, the process of intermingling of the Vaṅgas with other peoples was largely accelerated with the infiltration of the people from upper India and Brahmanization. In spite of the mingling of the Vaṅgas with other peoples on a large scale, the name Vaṅga has been most zealously retained all throughout history, and the appellations Vaṅga and Vāṅgālī became generic names for the country and its people as a whole.

Most unfortunately, both the early and later literary records hardly furnish any positive information regarding the physical characters of the ancient peoples of Bengal, and accordingly, their ethnic affiliation can not be also firmly determined. But with the help of the available data regarding the

Ethnic affiliations physical characters of their surviving remnants or their supposed ancestors, it may be possible to partially ascertain their racial origins. As for instance, the modern Pods and the Puṇḍras of Bengal are recognised as the descendants of the ancient Puṇḍras. The ethnic characters of the Pods and the Puṇḍras portray certain features which may be affiliated to the Australoid ethnic stock. As to the Rādhās and the Suhmas it may be said that their supposed ancestors may be traced amongst the Bhūmijas and

other cognate tribes. The Bhūmijas and their allied peoples possess physical features which also largely indicate their affiliation with the Australoid ethnic stock. Despite the absence of any surviving remnants of the ancient Vaṅgas, a study of their other characteristic features reveals that this most ancient people of Bengal might have also belonged to the Australoid racial group. Like the Vaṅgas, the Gaḍas also appear to have belonged to a heterogeneous ethnic group. But if the Gaḍas are supposed to have come to Bengal from upper India and if they are to be allied with the Gonds of Central India, their affiliation to the Australoid ethnic stock appears to bear credibility. On the whole, all the aforesaid four or five groups of the ancient peoples of Bengal figuring in the early documents may be admitted to have originally belonged to the Australoid ethnic stock.

The above contention is also borne out by a study of the cultural set-up and behaviour patterns of the 'Ancient Peoples' of Bengal. It has been pointed out that the Vaṅgas belonged perhaps to a totemistic community as is evidenced by the very fact that they have been branded as Pakshīs or birds in the Vedic and other texts. Besides, the Vaṅgas appear to have used a language which was unintelligible to the people of the Madhyadeśa. Not only that, it has been also stated in the Āryamañjuśrī-mūlakaipa that they spoke in Asura language. Accordingly, it may be urged that the Vaṅgas used to speak a non-Aryan tongue which again appears to have belonged to the Austro-Asiatic linguistic family. Like the Austric people, the Vaṅgas excelled in agriculture, arts and crafts and also in navigation. Further, the Austric religious beliefs and practices like totemism, animism, magic, etc., were all well-marked amongst the Vaṅgas. From the available information it may be said that the cultural and religious framework of the Vaṅgas appears to have been largely derived from the Austro-Asiatic source. Since it has not yet been possible to establish the identity of the ancient Vaṅgas with any presently known community of Bengal, the ancient Vaṅgas appear to have intermingled with many other peoples and constituted different social groups or communities, high and low, under varied names in the socio-economic hierarchy of Bengal. All these groups or sections gradually became integral parts of the Brahmanical social fabric. The process of integration of the Vaṅgas was completed under the direct and deeply penetrating Brahmanism in such a way that a very little trace of their identity was left. It, however, appears that both the ethnic and cultural setting of the Vaṅgas was of Australoid and Austro-Asiatic origins.

Like the Vaṅgas, the cultural and religious behaviour patterns of the Puṇḍras may be also affiliated to the Austro-Asiatic source. It has been expounded that the Puṇḍras were also primarily agricultural people. But they excelled in various arts and crafts as well which were highly acclaimed as excellent. It is quite likely that the Puṇḍras were also totemistic peoples as their very name may be taken to be a derivation from the word Punri or Pudi, i.e., Puṇḍras sugarcane. Most significantly, the Puṇḍra tribe was perhaps named after its totem, i.e., sugarcane. Their other religious beliefs and practices also centered round animism and magic which are of Austric derivations. The surviving remnants of the ancient Puṇḍras are plausibly to be found amongst some low caste peoples of Bengal like the Pods or Puṇḍras or Puṇḍra-rikās who occupy the lowerst stratum of the present Hindu society of Bengal. In the very beginning, the Puṇḍras were not given any social recognition in the Brahmanical society, and they were simply recognised as the Śūdras. But the Puṇḍras after their direct and intimate contact with the Brahmanical culture succeeded in raising their social position and due recognition was accorded to them as integral segments of the Brahmanical society by tracing their origins from mythological figures or from the Pratilōma-unions. The Puṇḍras no doubt mingled largely with many other peoples, and several of them achieved great excellence in both political and cultural attainments. Some Puṇḍras carved out a separate principality of their own and actively participated in all-India affairs. Not only that, some of them also raised their social and economic status to a great excellence by the dint of their achievements in diverse fields. All others have, however, continued through centuries as socially and economically backward peoples who are no doubt the Pods or Puṇḍras of today. The Pods or Paṇḍrakas are today included within the scheduled caste category and placed at the bottom of the Brahmanical society. But now they have also started claiming a higher social position by calling themselves Puṇḍra-Kshatriyas. The conclusion that may be drawn is that the Puṇḍras like the Vaṅgas were also originally Austric peoples in respect of their both ethnic and cultural setting.

Similarly, the Rāḍhās and the Suhmas appear to have belonged to the Austric ethnic and cultural group. It has been set forth that the linguistic and cultural behaviour patterns of the Rāḍhās as reflected in the early Jaina works reveal their association with the Austro-Asiatic peoples. Not only that, attempts have been also made to trace their surviving remnants amongst

the Bhūmij and other allied tribes in Bengal and Chhotanāgpur. Most significantly, the aboriginal peoples who may be counted as their ancestors are also to be affiliated to the Australoid and Austric stock in respect of their both ethnic and cultural framework. To the people of upper India, the Rāḍhās and the Suhmas appear to have been barbarous and uncivilized peoples as indicated by their language, food-articles and other behaviour patterns. Not only that, even the Rāḍhās have not been favourably treated in the medieval Bengali texts. But this branding of the Rāḍhās as barbarous or uncivilized peoples by the Jaina and the Brahmanical writers might have been directed against those very sections of the Rāḍhās who failed to elevate their cultural status by dint of their cultural attainments and continued to live in their original primitive ways of life. The implication is that some of the original Rāḍhās and Suhmas continued to retain their primitive position while others made considerable advancements in such a way as to be wholly integrated into the Brahmanical social fabric. Further, the account in the Jaina work might have been prompted by the dislike and contempt towards the Rāḍhās who were the sustainers of another culture which was inconsistent or contrary to the one borne by the propagators of Jainism. Moreover, the original affiliation of the Rāḍhās and the Suhmas to the Austro-Asiatic stock is also largely supported by a consideration of their religious behaviour patterns as well. Even today in West Bengal, the land par excellence of the Rāḍhās, survivals of the Austric religious beliefs and practices like the worship of the mother goddess or Śakti, Dharmapūjā, etc., are most glaring and wide spread amongst all sections of the people. A consideration of other cultural aspects would also indicate the affiliation of the Rāḍhās or Suhmas with the Austro-Asiatic language and culture. It is, however, to be noted that the Rāḍhās had experienced the first thrust and impact of the infiltration of the people from upper India, particularly those bearing the Brahmanical culture. Accordingly, both Brahmanism and other religions like Buddhism and Jainism had swept over the entire area peopled by the ancient Rāḍhās or Suhmas. As a result, the Rāḍhās or Suhmas were perhaps the first people in Bengal to be brought within the fold of Jainism, Buddhism and Brahmanism, though the latter had an upper hand. This resulted in an integration of the Rāḍhās/Suhmas on a large scale within the Brahmanical Society. Consequently, the Rāḍhās/Suhmas could elevate their position to such an extent that they could be highly placed in the Brahmanical social hierarchy. Some of them, however, continued to persist in their original primitive condition in the hills and forests, and the remnants of others are to be found amongst several scheduled castes of Bengal.

In the same way, the Gauḍas also appear to have originally belonged to a primitive tribal community. The exposition on the Gauḍas in the preceding pages shows that they might have come either from North-west or Central India. Attempts have been also made to equate the Gauḍas with the Gonds on the basis of linguistic and other considerations. If it be so, this contention of the original tribal affiliation of the Gauḍas becomes credible. In that case the Gauḍas appear also to have been originally totemistic like the Gonds as the very name is equivalent to the words denoting bison and rhinoceros. Further, if the word Gauḍa is derived from Gud, a product from sugarcane-juice, totemistic relationship with the sugarcane becomes evident. Besides, there are references to mountains, streams, forests, plants, etc., named after Gauḍa. It is, however, to be stated that the Gauḍas, though of tribal origins, elevated themselves to a higher cultural position even before their coming to Bengal. This would be evident from all sorts of accounts regarding their crafts, dress and ornaments, behaviour patterns, languages and style, alphabet, etc. Originally, they were perhaps speakers of the Asura speech, i.e., a non-Aryan language which appears Gauḍas to have been of Austro-Asiatic affiliation. In Bengal, the Gauḍas were largely assimilated within the Brahmanical socio-religious framework. Accordingly, the integrated Gauḍas occupied a higher social and cultural position in the Brahmanical fold. The surviving elements of the ancient Gauḍas may be found in certain modern caste names. Not only that, because of the magnificent achievements of the Gauḍas in different fields of activities, the word Gauḍa was prefixed to the names of a number of high and low caste groups like the Brāhmaṇa, Kāyastha, Vaidya, etc. In all such castes, the addition of the prefix Gauḍa is an indication of the honour and the prestige associated with the name Gauḍa. The Gauḍas no doubt possessed certain physical characters which may speak of the presence of the Mongoloid element, but basically they appear to have belonged to the Australoid ethnic stock. So also, in their original cultural settings the Gauḍas might be associated with the Austro-Asiatic culture.

From the discussion made in the foregoing pages it appears that the communities described as 'Ancient Peoples' of Bengal, though originally Australoid and Austro-Asiatic in their ethnic and cultural framework, became in course of time the most heterogeneous peoples because of their intermingling with many other incoming peoples from outside into Bengal. Both culturally

and ethnically, the contributions of these ancient peoples in the making and moulding of the Bengali people and culture as a whole have been most substantial and lasting. It may be said that the ethnic and cultural base of the Bengali people was laid by the 'Aborigines' and the 'Indigenes' as expounded in the immediately preceding two Chapters, and that it is on this very base the 'Ancient Peoples' as discussed above built up a grand and monumental cultural edifice in Bengal. The integral components of this cultural structure are even today well-marked amongst all sections of the Bengali people. Ethnically the Australoid racial elements preponderate among all caste groups, more particularly amongst those who now form the bulk of the lower strata of the Brahmanical society. Culturally as well, the Austric elements in modern Bengali language, manners and customs, thoughts, beliefs and practices are found quite glaring. This is so, more particularly amongst the lower sections of the Bengali people. In fact, the popular Hinduism and the general cultural patterns of the Bengali people have been found to be largely impregnated with the Austric cultural elements. Along with the 'Aborigines' and the 'Indigenes' the 'Ancient peoples' were largely responsible for building up the ethnic and cultural super structure of Bengal in such a way as to heighten and brighten the cultural accomplishments of Bengal to the extent of not only giving their respective names to the different quarters of Bengal originally occupied by them, but also to the entire geographical and cultural entity of Bengal as is known today. Both ethnic and cultural complexes and patterns as formed and brought into being by these peoples were so inconsistent and contrary to those prevailing in the Madhyadeśa/Āryāvarta, that Bengal came to be branded as an unholy/impure land by the Dharmasūtra-writers who imposed an injunction to the effect that anybody traversing the land would have to be purified by the performance of purificatory rites. This injunction was, however, subsequently vacated with the gradual Brahmanization of Bengal. The impact of Brahmanization was so deep and firm that those ancient peoples of Austric origins became gradually integral organs of the Brahmanical society.

The grand cultural edifice built up by the ancient peoples of Bengal was further replenished and augmented by a host of other peoples of diverse ethnic and cultural origins who infiltrated and settled in Bengal at different periods of her history. This would be evident from the discourse made in the following pages on the 'Extra-Indian' and 'Intra-Indian' tribal and non-tribal communities coming and settling down in Bengal from both determinable and indeterminable times.

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CHAPTER - SEVEN

EXTRA-INDIAN TRIBAL COMMUNITIES

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Besides the 'Ancient Peoples of Bengal' as delineated in the previous Chapter, many other tribal communities penetrated also into the plains and high lands of Bengal from different quarters of India and outside. These tribal communities started infiltrating into Bengal from very early times under various circumstances, and the process of their incoming continued unabated through centuries. Since the movements and settlements of most of these tribal peoples in Bengal had taken place during the historical periods, they have been generally referred to and described in various early and late documents which furnish relevant materials for their ethno-historical reconstruction. All these tribal communities have been categorised under two broad heads : (a) Extra-Indian and (b) Intra-Indian tribal communities. The former category is represented by the extraneous tribal groups, i.e., the tribal peoples of foreign origins who infiltrated into Bengal from outside the frontiers of the Indian sub-continent and the latter, by those who moved from different quarters of India and settled in Bengal. In other words, all these tribal communities came to Bengal both from in and outside India. Of these two categories of the tribal communities, those belonging to the Intra-Indian category were in one or other way closely associated or allied with the tribal communities treated in the preceding Chapters. But the Extra-Indian category consisting of the extraneous tribal peoples of foreign origins was primarily alien or unassociated with the other known Indian primitive tribal communities. Instead of zealously retaining their respective extraneous character, most of these foreign tribal communities intermixed freely with the existing peoples with whom they lived and thereby made persisting contributions in the composition of the Bengali people and culture. Most of the foreign elements, ethnic and cultural, forming integral parts of the composite Bengali people and culture are indeed the veritable gifts of the extraneous tribal communities, many of whom in course of time became fully merged with the people of Bengal. It is, however, to be noted that some of these extraneous tribal communities who had taken refuge in secluded areas have indeed succeeded

to a certain extent in preserving their respective ethnic and cultural characteristics. But the generating process of gradual amalgamation and acculturation has been going on through centuries, and as a result, even many of them have been brought under the Brahmanical influence.

It is because of these facts of great significance that the extraneous tribal communities whose number in Bengal is quite considerable require a separate analytical treatment with all available details, more particularly those tribal communities whose contributions in the general composition of the Bengali people and culture have been found glaring and persisting. Accordingly, the Extra-Indian and the Intra-Indian tribal communities have been treated in two separate Chapters. The present Chapter is solely devoted to treating the extraneous tribal communities. The major extraneous tribal communities have been more elaborately and critically examined with all relevant details than the minor ones who have been simply dealt with succinctly for the primary purpose of projecting them as extant integrants of the composite Bengali people and also of assessing their respective contributions in the making of the Bengali people and Culture.

A host of tribal communities of extra-Indian origins poured into India at different times, and most of them became merged with the Indian people. Both literary and epigraphic records contain numerous references to these tribal communities of foreign extractions and also indications as to how these peoples were assimilated or integrated within the Hindu fold. Some of them have been also transformed into distinct caste orders within the Brahmanical social framework retaining their original names, and others have been fully assimilated by losing their original identity. In the later case, it is even difficult to determine their foreign extractions because those peoples have been absorbed under modified caste names. Generally speaking, all these assimilated foreign peoples have been relegated to a very low social position in the Brahmanical hierarchy. It is only in a few cases that they have been attributed a high caste status, but degraded. All the foreign tribal communities infiltrated into India from different directions under various pretexts and circumstances : (i) primarily through passes of North-western and North-eastern India and also straight from North into the plains of India. Besides, some tribal communities had also infiltrated into India through the South-eastern mountainous region following the coast of the Bay of Bengal. The foreign tribal communities entered into India through all

these openings and in course of time spread over different parts of the sub-continent.

While discussing about the extra-Indian tribal communities in Bengal, it may be noted that a large number of them entered into Bengal from West, North-east, North and South-east. Most of these extraneous tribal communities have been partly or fully absorbed within the Brahmanical fold, and they have formed parts and parcels of the Bengali People and Culture. Besides the tribes coming from Northern, North-eastern and South-eastern directions as already discussed in Chapters IV and V there are many other tribal communities entering into the plains of Bengal from North, North-east and North-west of India. Some of the extraneous peoples coming from North-eastern and North-western directions played significant roles in the composition of the Bengali people and culture. Since these extraneous peoples were numerous, a selected number of tribes coming from North-eastern and North-western directions has been treated in the present Chapter.

A. EXTRANEOUS TRIBAL COMMUNITIES FROM NORTH-EAST

The extraneous tribal communities infiltrating into the plains of Bengal from the North-eastern direction are too numerous to be discussed in details. Taking into consideration the vital part played by them in historical and cultural settings of Bengal a selection of four tribal communities has been made for treatment under this section. These selected tribal communities are the Kirātas, the Kambojas, the Kōch, the Mech and the Rājvaṁśīs. Of these again, the last three are cognate tribal communities.

I. THE KIRĀTAS

Of all tribes infiltrating into the plains of Bengal from North-east and forming the very base of the Bengali people and culture, the Kirāta tribal community is the most ancient, widely distributed and well described in all early literary texts, excepting of course the Rigveda.

(i) Meanings and Derivations :

The term Kirāta is derived from Kira+āt meaning thereby a person who goes to places of refuse or moves about with rippling sounds. Scholars have given various explanations of the word Kirāta. The interpretation given by Ronnow is, however, very interesting to note. He explains the Kirātas by stating that they are those very peoples who move along the mountain sides (Kiram atati yah : qui habite les frontiers¹). But Chatterji could not accept this explanation. He thinks that the term Kirāta is of Sino-Tibetan origin and subsequently Sanskritised. There is no doubt that certain words current in the New Indo-Aryan languages are related to the term Kirāta². As for instance, in Bengali the word Kirāt/Kirēt refers to a miserly person or close-fisted or cruel or heartless one. Again, Kirād is the name of a caste in Uttar Pradesh, Rājputanā, etc., the vocation of which is that of a merchant. The term Kirād derived also from Kirāta+ta denotes a forester, robber, etc., and is generally applied by the Muslims of the Derivation Pāñjāb to refer to the Hindus in general^{2a}. The Sanskrit word Kitāta- and tikta is a bitter plant used for medicinal purposes³. In Prākṛit the meanings word is Chilāa-itta or Chirāa-itta⁴. The term is also found in Old Bengali of the 12th century A.D. as Chirāyita. In modern Bengali language, it is Chirāta or Chirētā⁵ (Chiretta). The same is a corrupted form of the term Kirāta, and the plant is also called Anārya-tikta growing in plenty in the lower Himalayas, the region occupied by the Kirāta descendants called Kirāntis^{5a}. This term Chirētā may perhaps denote also a drug obtained from the Kirātas or a drug which is 'bitter or vile like a Kirāta⁶. In fact, Grierson equates Chitāda with Kirāta. The word Kirāta has not, however, been always used for contempt. The modern Tibeto-Burman people living in Nepal and neighbouring places are known as Kirāntis, and the term Kirānti appears to have been derived from Kirāta^{6a}. In Bengali, the word Kirāta or Kirēt means a man who is cruel or heartless, a miser or a close-fisted one or a Vyādha (hunter) or a forest-dweller Mlechchha. Thus the common meaning of the term Kirāta appears to be a contemptuous one bearing the implication of a cruel and heartless hunter.

Here, a reference may be made to other forms of the name of Kirāta and their derivations^{occurring} in both indigenous and foreign literary texts and other forms also in inscriptions. These are Scyrites, Cirradii, Kirrhadaei, Chilata, Kira, etc. The English word silk appears to have been derived from the Mongolian term Sirkek, Korean, Sir, Chinese, Ssi, Greek, Ser and Latin, Sericum. The term

Sāri is derived from Ser, and the dealer in silk is called Seres or Scyrites. From these equations it would appear that the Greek/Roman terms for Kirāta bear affiliations to silk and silk-trader. In that case, the Kirāta peoples may be closely associated with silk-weaving and silk-trade as well.

(ii) Early References :

The name Kirāta is mentioned for the first time in the Yajurveda (Śukla-Yajurveda⁷). The Atharvaveda refers to a Kirāta girl (Kairātikā) who digs a herbal-remedy on the ridges of the mountain⁸. Thus the Atharvaveda probably speaks of the Kirātas as the people of the Himalayas⁹. In the Vājasaneyī-Saṁhitā, the Kirātas have been grouped with the Kim̐purusha (an ugly man, wild or ape) who were the dwellers of the mountainous region of the Himalayas and have been referred to as the victims of the Purushamedha or man-offering sacrifice¹⁰. According to the Taittirīya-Brāhmaṇa and the Vājasaneyī-Saṁhitā, Later Vedic the name Kirāta is generally applied to peoples living in the caves and other texts (guhā) of the mountain¹¹. But it seems that the name Kirāta may be applied as well to any aboriginal hill folk¹². The Kirātas are also mentioned in the Tāṇḍya-Brāhmaṇa¹³. Besides the Vedas and the Brāhmaṇas, the Kirātas are also referred to in diverse texts like the Epics, the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata and in the works of Kālidāsa, Bāṇabhaṭṭa, Daṇḍin and others and also in the Purāṇas, the Bṛhatsaṁhitā, the Amarakōsha (Sūdravarga), Dharmaśāstras and so on. In all these texts detailed accounts about the Kirātas are available.

(iii) Origins :

Regarding the Origins of the Kirātas a story narrated in the Rāmāyaṇa may be noted. According to this story, it is from the roar of the Kāmadhenu (Śavalā) of Vaśiṣṭha that there came into being the Kambojas, from her anus, the Śakas, and from different parts of her body and skin originated the Yavanas and the barbarians like the Haritas and the Kirātas^{13a}. It is thus evident from this story that the Kirātas like some other tribes, such as, the Kambojas, the Śakas, the Yavanas, etc., originated from Vaśiṣṭha's cow when Viśvāmitra made attempts to capture and carry her away. The Kirātas and all other tribes thus sprung forth were indeed the non-Aryan foreigners.

(iv) Original Habitat and Settlement in Bengal :

From the information derived from all the aforesaid texts it would be possible to determine the abode or habitat and life-patterns of the Kirātas. As the people of the Himalayas and mountain-dwellers the Kirātas have been referred to in the Atharvaveda, Vājasaneyī-Saṁhitā, Taittirīya-Brāhmaṇa, etc.¹⁴. From the Sabhāparva of the Mahābhārata it is known that Bhīma during his conquering tour met the Kirātas in the East after leaving the Videha country (Vaidēhasthas tu Kāuntēya Indra-parvatam antikāt : Kirātādhīpatīn sapta vyajayat tatra Pāṇḍavaḥ)¹⁵. Here, Bhīma is said to have defeated seven Kirāta-rulers.

The Sabhāparvan further refers to the Kirātas along with the Pulindas, the Suhmas, the Puṇḍras and the Vaṅgas¹⁶. It is also said in the same Parvan that Bhagadatta, the king of Kāmarūpa, along with the Kirātas, the Chīnas and other dwellers on the sea-coast fought with Arjuna for eight days. (Sa-Kirātaischa chīnaischa vṛtaḥ...sāgarānupa vāsiniḥ...)¹⁷. From the account of Nakula's conquests described in the same Parvan, it appears that the Kirātas were present also in North-west and dispersed towards South¹⁸. (Pahlavān varuvrāṁśchaiva Kirātān, Yavanān Śakān). A similar account is to be found in the Aśvamedha-parvan of the Mahābhārata¹⁹. Besides, in the topographical list of the Bhīshma-parvan of the Mahābhārata, the Kirātas have been specifically placed in the East and North²⁰. The Aśvamedha-parvan shows that Arjuna met the Kirātas, the Yavanas and the Mlechchhas while proceeding to the North with the sacrificial horse²¹. It is, however, in the Kirāta-section of Vanaparvan of the Mahābhārata that there occurs the narration of the famous story of Śiva who in the guise of a Kirāta being accompanied by Umā as a Śavari or Kirāta-woman met Arjuna in the Himalayan region. Arjuna by his severe austerity and prowess propitiated Śiva and adopted the Kirāta-ways of life with the purpose of acquiring proficiency in archery from the great Lord Śiva who is the deity par-excellence of the Kirātas²². It may be noted here that the great work Kirātārjuneya was written by Bhāravi by drawing materials from this story of the Mahābhārata^{22a}.

Another interesting point to be noted is that the Himalayan deities, Umā and Gaṅgā, bear also the nickname Kirātī. It may be accordingly supposed that both of them might have been the daughters of the Kirāta chieftain of the Himalayan region, and that they were married to the great God Śiva^{22b}. It would thus appear that the Mahābhārata places the Kirātas in the Himalayas (Himāvaddurga nilayāḥ Kirātā (vii. 4.7), more particularly in the mountains of the Kailāsa, Mandara and Haima, i.e., Lake Mānasa^{22c}).

Manu also speaks of the Kirātas along with the Suhmas, the Vaṅgas, the Puṇḍras and the Śavaras. (Paṇḍra-Kāśchāudrapavidāh Kāmbōjā Yavanāh Śakāh Pāradāh Pallavāschīnāh Kirātā Daradāh Khasāh²³). Not only Manu, even the authors of the Purāṇas like the Vishṇu, the Bhāgavata, the Mārkaṇḍeya, the Matsya and others have also mentioned the Kirātas along with the Suhmas, the Puṇḍras and the Pulindas on the one hand and the Manu and Yavanas and the Hūṇas on the other²⁴. From the Vishṇu-purāṇa ^{other texts} it is learnt that on the East of Bhārata, the Kirātas settled, and Purāṇas on the West, the Yavanas²⁵. The Mārkaṇḍeya-purāṇa confirms the statement of the Vishṇu-purāṇa regarding the eastern habitat of the Kirātas²⁶. The Matsya-purāṇa also furnishes that the Kirātas settled in the East²⁷. Details regarding the exact location of the kingdom of the Kirātas have been also given in a later passage of the Purāṇa wherein it is said that the Janapadas of the Kirātas and the Pulindas were watered by the Ganges running eastward into the sea after passing through the countries of the Nishādas, the Kirātas and others²⁸. In one passage of the Vishṇu-purāṇa, the Kirātas are also mentioned along with the Puṇḍras, the Bhargavas, etc²⁹. The Agnipurāṇa also places the Kirātas in the Eastern region³⁰. The Kirātas along with the Pulindas are also referred to in the Matsya-purāṇa³¹. The Mārkaṇḍeya-purāṇa, however, states that the Kirātas probably settled on the southern part of the Ārāvalli hills and around the regions of the Vindhyan forest³². It is also stated in the Mārkaṇḍeya-purāṇa that the Kirātas along with the Pulindas had their abodes in the Himalayas^{32a}. This is also confirmed by the Matsya-purāṇa which narrates that in the Madhyadeśa or central region were the Janapadas of the Kirātas and other tribes³³. Besides the Purāṇas, Kālidāsa places the Kirātas on the Himalayas³⁴. The Bṛhatsaṃhitā locates the Kirātas in South-west as well as in the North-eastern division and refers also to the Kirāta prince (Kirāta-bhartri pāṛthiva³⁵).

The classical writings also refer to the Kirātas and their habitas. Megasthenes speaks of Kiratai who were perhaps the Kirātas as living beyond India³⁶. According to Ptolemy, Kirrhadae or Airrhadoi, i.e., the Kirātas ^{Classical writings} were spread widely not only over the Gangetic India, but also over countries further East³⁷. Besides, the Periplus of the Erythraean Sea refers to Cirrhadae (Kirahadae), i.e., the Kirāda or Kirāta people, and also to their country as lying on west from the mouth of the Ganges and in the region to the North-east of Daśarna or Orissa³⁸. This suggests that

the Kirātas were also settled in West Bengal. Nonnos, a Greek writer of the 5th century A.D., speaks of the two sons of an expert navigator of Cirrdioi race³⁹. Even Pliny refers to the Kirātas. He calls them Scyrites or the Syrites tribe⁴⁰.

In a few inscriptions as well the Kirātas are mentioned under various forms, and their settlements have been also referred to. The Nāgārjunikoṇḍa inscription of the 1st - 2nd century A.D. contains a reference to Chirāta which is no doubt Kirāta⁴¹. The Sāñchi inscription refers to Cirātiya⁴². In the Bhāturiā (Rājsāhi district) inscription there is a list of peoples wherein inscriptions the names of the Kirātas and the Chīnas occur⁴³. The inscription of Khāravela also refers to the Kirātas and the Chīnas⁴⁴. In the Dāmodarpur inscription, occurs the name of Cirātadatta, i.e., Kirātadatta. The name Kirāta perhaps appears to indicate the Kirātamūrti of Śiva as suggested⁴⁵. Accordingly it has been contended that the Kirātārjuna episode was quite well-known in Bengal as early as the 5th century A.D.⁴⁶. The term Kirāta has been used also in respect of personal names as well. It is not unlikely that the term Kirāta in all these cases refers to the Kirāta tribe implying thereby that the Kirāta peoples were quite well-known in Bengal from hoary antiquity.

It would be thus evident from the early texts like the Mahābhārata and the Purāṇas that the eastern zone was the habitat par-excellence of the Kirātas, and that they lived along with other tribal communities like the Puṇḍras, the Suhmas, the Pulindas, etc., who were the most ancient inhabitants of Bengal⁴⁷. The Kirātas have been also referred to as mountain-dwellers, and the original homeland of the Kirātas appears to have been in the Himalayas as described in the Vedic texts, and some of their groups might have migrated eastwards along the foothills of the Himalayas towards Prāgyōtisha (Assam) during the Epic and the Puranic periods. Some of these peoples had also moved towards Orissa through northern and western Bengal⁴⁸. It may be accordingly presumed that North Bengal was an important habitat of the Kirātas who lived there along with the Puṇḍras and others. Again, from Orissa some of them might have moved further South and settled in the delta between the Mahānadī and the Godāvarī and thence proceeded Dispersals to the Vindhyan ranges in the Puranic period⁴⁹. From the Sabhāparvan of the Mahābhārata and also from the Rāmāyana it is quite evident that Prāgyōtisha or Assam was surrounded by the Kirātas and the Chīnas (Chinese)⁵⁰.

In fact, the Rājmalā refers to the ancient name of Tripurā as Kirāta. Sylvain Levi has pointed out that the Kirātas were mostly associated with the foreign peoples like the Yavanas, the Śakas and the Pallavas on West and with the Chīnas or the Chinese on the East⁵¹. That the peoples of the Eastern Himalayan region were mostly of the Kirāta affiliation is also attested to by some medieval works. The Rājmalā, a chronicle of the Tripurā kings, speaks also of the Kirāta affiliation of the royal dynasty. Even some Tantras refer to the Kirāta-religion of the eastern region⁵².

From the time of the Yajurveda onwards there are sufficient literary references to envisage that the Eastern Himalayan region or the places around Lauhitya in the Himalayas, i.e., Assam and Nepal may be earmarked as the original abode of the Kirātas in India⁵³. That the Kirātas were the peoples par-excellence of the East has been also specifically stated in the Purāṇas as Pūrvē-Kirāta. In the Vishnu-purāṇa it has been specifically said that on East of Bhārata 'dwell the Kirātas'⁵⁴. This statement is also corroborated by the Mārkaṇḍeya and the Garuda Purāṇas⁵⁵.

Kālidāsa in his Raghuvamśa has furnished a positive information regarding the location of the Kirātas. Raghu during his march eastwards met the Kirātas in the range of the Himalayas^{55a}. It has been narrated that after defeating the Kirātas and others Raghu descended from the Himalayas and reached Prāgyōtisha (Kāmarūpa) indicating thereby that they were mostly settled in the Himalayas of the North-eastern region^{55b}. That the 'eastern countries' were peopled by the Kirātas is clearly borne out by Kālidāsa. It would appear from his account of Raghu's conquests that the eastern countries referred to by him included Suhma, Vaṅga, Utkala and Kalinga^{55c}. Bāṇa in his Kādambarī while describing the conquest of Chandrapīḍa refers in Bengal to the Kirātas who dwelt near Kailāsa⁵⁶. In this context, a reference may be made to an account of Kirāta-vijayojaya (Kirātadeśa) which contained 1½ lakhs grāmas^{56a}. The figure is undoubtedly a fictitious one. Besides, in the Shatpañchāśaddesa-vibhāga "the Kirāta country is described as extending from Tapta-kunda to Rāmakshetra and as lying on the Vindhya", i.e., from Rājgīr (Bihār) to Rāmtek^{56b}. Here the reference is certainly made to the Kirātas of that region only or the term Kirāta might have been used to denote the hill tribes in general. In that case as well, it may be said

that the Kirātas might have spread over the region from Bengal where they swept down from the Himalayas. In the Kālikā-purāṇa Naraka is stated to have driven out the Kirāta inhabitants of the country from 'the area between Karatōyā in the West and the Dikkaravāsini' and Lalita-Kāntā in the East for settling the twice-born, while the Kirātas were rehabilitated in the east-coast extending from Lalita-kāntā in the east^{56c}. It is thus evident that even in the late historical period, the Kirātas were spread over Assam and North Bengal, and they were settled in the coastal areas of Bengal as well.

It may be accordingly presumed that the Kirātas moved down the Himalayan foothills in the plains of Eastern India at a very early period. Any firm date-line in this respect can, however, be hardly fixed. By the time of the Later Vedic period, the Kirātas were simply cave-dwellers engaged in supplying roots, herbs and soma-plants to the so-called Vedic Aryans. ^{Assam, Bengal and Orissa} But when the two Epics were compiled and the classical authors wrote about the people of India, the Kirātas were widely distributed all over the southern tracts of the Himalayas and also over the plains of Assam, Bengal and Orissa spreading even up to the river valleys of the Ganges and the Padmā and the sea⁵⁷. Not only that, even the Kirātas spread over North Bihar and established independent Kingdoms. The powerful Lichchhavis have been also supposed to be Indo-Mongoloid or of Kirāta affiliation. Similarly, in Assam, Manipur, Tripurā, etc., the Kirātas could firmly establish their political hegemony and cultural domination. Nepal was perhaps predominantly occupied by the Kirātas and in fact, the Nepalese usage still ascribes the name Kirāta to the country between the Dudh-Kōśī and the Arun⁵⁸. On the whole, it may be said that the Kirātas were well-distributed over different parts of Bengal and her neighbouring regions. Not only that, the Kirātas are also to be found widely distributed over other parts of India, and it may be upheld that they spread over different parts of India from the eastern region itself.

(v) Life patterns :

Living in the hills and mountains, the Kirātas were hunters par-excellence, more particularly excelling in hunting deer⁵⁹. In Bengali language, the term Kirāta has been always made identical with the Vyādha or hunter, a fowler or bird-catcher. According to the Rāmāyana, the Kirātas were

very ferocious and flesh-eaters⁶⁰. In the Mahābhārata also, they have been described as fierce and renowned fighters⁶¹. There is a graphic account of the resources of the Kirātas in the Mahābhārata wherein the Kirāta-tributes to the king Yudhishtīra consisted of sandal wood, aloe, black aloe, heaps upon heaps of valuable skin, gold and various sorts of perfumes, ten thousand serving girls of their own race, many beautiful animals and birds of remote countries and much gold of great splendour⁶². It is also learnt that the Kirātas came armed with deadly weapons from the slopes of the Himavat and the region of Kārusha on the sea-coast and from both sides of the Lohitya mountains⁶³. In the Mahābhārata, there are again detailed descriptions of the Kirāta army and the fierce fighting of the Kirātas riding on elephants and very difficult to be defeated⁶⁴.

The Kirātas ate fruits and roots and wore skin-dress with their hair dressed in a pointed top-knot. They were fierce with their weapons and cruel in their deeds. The Kirātas were indeed a pleasant looking people, but terrible with their weapons and cruel in war⁶⁵. They, however, lived a very simple life. The Kirātas were also experts in the art of weaving cotton textile as well as woollen fabrics. This will be evident from the account given in the Sabhāparvan of the Mahābhārata⁶⁶. The descendants of the Kirātas are also said to have been experts in weaving various sorts of cloth, which were very much in demand amongst the so-called advanced peoples of the country⁶⁷. At present, the Kirātas are simple cultivators and their main food-article is rice.

The Kirātas carried on their trade and commerce on gems of various sorts, sandal wood, agallochum, clothes, blankets, gold, silver and very hard lapis-lazuli⁶⁸. From the Periplus of the Erythraean Sea it is learnt that the Cirrahadae (Kirahadai), i.e., the Kirātas and their neighbours of the same stock, were engaged in silk-trade which was carried on between Trade and China and India through Yun-nan, North Burma and Assam by Commerce about the first century A.D.⁶⁹. The Kirātas have been also supposed to be rich in gold, silver and gems which they obtained from the mountains⁷⁰. They supplied also medicinal drugs, herbs and soma-plants, which they obtained from the mountains and jungles⁷¹. Again, the Kirāta women particularly supplied roots and herbs which were used for charms and medicine⁷². Most significantly, the name of the medicinal Chirretta-plant is indeed a corruption

of Kirāta. It is also a well-known fact that Chirretta (Sanskrit word) grows wild in the lower range of the Himalayas, i.e., the country of the modern Kirātas⁷³. Besides, it is learnt from Daṇḍin that the Kirātas sold tiger skins and leather-bags⁷⁴. The Kirāta women were also perhaps employed in the palace. Kālidāsa in his Raghuvamśa has furnished a vivid account as to how the kings during Jalavihāra or Vāriviḥāra used to be attended by the Kirātis^{74a}. Besides, the Kirātas of ancient India appear to have been great fighters as well. The Mudrārākṣha of Śūdraka refers to the army of Chandragupta as composed of the Śakas, Yavanas, Kirātas and others (Act. II^{74b}).

(vi) Religion :

As regards the religion of the Kirātas, the Mahābhārata speaks of Śiva as the deity par-excellence of the Kirātas. Śiva is actually described as a wild and jovial Kirāta addicted to hunting and drinking and also as very fond of dancing. It is also interesting to note that the Kirātas and other cognate tribes worshipped Chandikā who is no other than Durgā in the fierce form assumed by her while killing the demon Mahisha⁷⁵. Even Vindhya-vāsinī, the wife of Śiva, who is worshipped by the primitive tribes is addressed as Kirāntī in the Varāha-purāṇa (28,34), and in Hemachandra's Aṇḍhāna-Chintāmani-parīśiṣṭa, she is called Kirāntī^{75a}. It is thus evident that Vindhya-vāsinī, a deity par-excellence of the Śavaras, was also worshipped by the Kirātas. The account of Durgā or Chandī as given in the Devīmāhātmya of the Mārkaṇḍeya-purāṇa also relates her origins in the region of the Kirātas⁷⁶. Chandī or Tārā is intrinsically a Kirāta deity, and there is hardly any doubt about it. The Buddhist deity Tārā was also a contribution of the Kirātas. Thus the cult of the female energy as well as of Śiva prevailed amongst the Kirātas. A clear indication to this extent will be found in the Yoginī-tantra (post 16th century A.D.) which bears an expressive statement : Siddhēśī Yōginī - pīṭhē dharmah Kairātajō mataḥ, i.e., 'O Queen of all Siddhas (Umā). In the holy shrine of the Yōginī (Kāmarūpa), the dharma (ritual) is considered to be of Kirāta origin⁷⁷. In the same Tantra, there is an account of the Śākta holy places and rituals to be performed at Kāmarūpa and the Kāmākhyā temple, and the Tantric rituals are indeed the veritable contributions of the Kirātas. This implies that the Tantric rituals and worship of the Mother Goddess impregnated with magic are to be closely associated with the Kirātas. In this connection, it may be noted that most of the religious life-patterns

and ritual observances in Bengal have been also from indeterminable times modelled and practised after the Tantric fashion.

(vii) Physical Features and Ethnic Affiliation :

Regarding the physical features of the Kirātas it may be noted that the Rāmāyana makes a specific reference to the golden colour and other characteristics of the Kirātas as : Kirātāścha tīkshna-chūdāścha hēmābhāh priya-darśanāh, antar-jala-charā ghōrā naravyāghrā iti śrūtāh⁷⁸. (The Kirātas, with their hair done in pointed top-knot, pleasant to look upon, shining like gold, able to move under water, terrible, veritable tiger-men, so are they famed⁷⁹). In the Kirāta-section of the Vanaparvan of the Mahābhārata, the Kirātas are also described as gold like, i.e., yellow in colour and not dark or black like the Dāsas, the Dasyus, the Nishādas and other pre-Aryan peoples of the plains (... kāñchana-druma-sannibham⁸⁰). Again, in the Mahābhārata, the Chīna and the Kirāta soldiers are described to have appeared in gold having the appearance of a forest of Karnikāras (with yellow flowers) : "Chīnaih Kirātāścha Kāñchanair iva samvritam ... Karnikāra-vanam yathā⁸¹". Not only that, even Śiva in his Kirāta form has been also described as one shining like gold.

According to the statement of Megasthenes, the Kirātas were flat nosed or snub-nosed, i.e., sthūlanāsikā⁸². In the Periplus of the Erythraean Sea of the 1st century A.D. the Kirrhadaī or the Kirāda (Kirāta) peoples are described as a race of men with flattened nose and very savage⁸³. Daṇḍin in his Daśakumāra-charita refers to the Kirātas as Dārunābhijana, i.e., strongly built peoples⁸⁴. A more specific account of the physical characters of the Kirātas has been, however, given in the Kālikāpurāna as : "short stature, golden colour, shaven head and rough skin, and that they are addicted to meat and drink⁸⁵". Other peoples living to the north of the region of the Kirātas have been also described as 'horse-faced or long faced. They were all allied peoples, and it is not unlikely that the Kirātas might have been also Hayamukhas^{85a}. In the early Jaina texts and the Vara-Samhitā-purāna there are also references to Hayamukha and Aśvavadana applied to the peoples of North-east, perhaps referring to the Kirātas in particular^{85b}.

Thus, the Kirātas with their characteristic features like flat/broad nose, i.e., platyrrhine, medium stature, perhaps brachycephalic head, stout and strongly built body and gold like yellow skin-colour may be affiliated to the Mongoloid racial stock of the sub-Himalayan region⁸⁶. It is equally significant to note in this connection that Śiva, the deity par-excellence of the Kirātas, with his residence in the Kailāsa, had also braided hair, oblique eyes and great proclivity for smoking. The reputed author of the Tantric nasal monosyllabic Mantras appears also to be of Mongoloid rather than of an Aryan affiliation⁸⁷.

The physical features of the Mongoloid race are characterised by yellow or yellow-brown skin colour, narrow or slant eyes, epicanthic fold, brachycephalic head, high cheek bones, flat nose and paucity of facial hair⁸⁸. The Mongoloid racial affinities of the Kirātas were suggested by Sylvain Levi who first took up the question in his work on Nepal and indicated similarities of the Kirātas with the peoples of the Mongoloid racial stock⁸⁹. Ronnow Mongoloid published a long monograph on the Kirātas in which he has also pointed out the Mongoloid affinities of the Kirātas⁹⁰. In fact, the Moingoloid peoples of Eastern India were indeed designated by the Aryans of upper India as Kirātas. Chatterji suggests that the Kirātas may be ethnically or culturally described as Indo-Mongoloid. In his opinion, all the Sino-Tibetan speaking peoples of Eastern India like the Bodos, the Nāgās, the Kuki-Chins, the Āhōms, etc., are to be designated by the term Indo-Mongoloid⁹¹. Chatterji has also referred to the very fact as to how the Indo-Mongoloids were influenced by the Austric and Dravidian speech. The classical example is indeed afforded by the Khāsis of North-eastern India and the Kirāntīs of eastern Nepal⁹². The presence of the Kirātas in Orissa is also afforded by all evidences at our disposal. The Periplus also refers to the Kirātas in North Orissa⁹³. Hutton has noted the presence of the Kirāta or Mongoloid element amongst the Gonds and the Marias of Central India as well. He has also referred to the contact between the Austric and Dravidian tribes of Central India and of the Mongoloids (Kirātas) of Assam⁹⁴.

The very fact that the Kirātas were outside the Aryan fold becomes clearly evident from a passage in the Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam⁹⁵. It is stated that the Kirātas along with the Hūṇas, the Āndhras, the Pulindas, the Ābhīras,

the Suhmas, the Yavanas, the Khasas and other impure tribes purified themselves by offering their allegiance to Śrī Kṛishṇa. In the Amarakōsha (Śūdravarga), the Kirātas along with other castes have been also referred to as outcastes⁹⁶. According to the Manusamhitā, the Kirātas along with the Puṇḍras were Outside the indeed reduced to Sudrahood or degraded Kshatriyas⁹⁷. According Aryan told to Manu, the Puṇḍras, the Oḍras, the Drāviḍas, the Kāmbojas, the Yavanas, the Śakas, the Pāradas, the Pallavas, the Chīnas, the Kirātas, the Dāradas and the Khasas were all originally Kshatriyas and became subsequently degraded⁹⁸. In the Mahābhārata as well it has been stated that they were reduced to Sudrahood⁹⁹. When any non-Aryan or foreign people is described in an early Indian text as being of degraded Kshatriya origin, there is an implication that they were to some extent at least advanced in cultural attainments, particularly in military skill and organisation, and as such, they could not be dismissed simply as barbarians¹⁰⁰.

(viii) Identity :

Regarding the identity of the Kirātas, a particular reference may be made to the opinion of McCrindle who identified them with the Chirotsagi (Chosiotosagi) of Megasthenes, the Scyrites of Pliny and the Kirrhadaï of the Periplus¹⁰¹. But Gerini objected to the identification of the Kirātas with the Airrhadoi of Ptolemy, and in his opinion, the peoples of Tipperah, Kaca and Sylhet were the Kirātas¹⁰².

In the Indian literary texts, the Kirātas have been mostly placed in the Himalayan belt, and the peoples of the region are mostly affiliated to the Kirāta stock. This is borne out by Kālidāsa whose account of the Kirātas reveals their identity with the Tibetans or Tibeto-Burmese peoples of Ladak, Zaskar and Rupsiu. It appears from a perusal of the early Indian texts that the term Kirāta was used in a generic sense to mean all peoples of the Himalayan belt.

As to any firm or positive identification of the ancient Kirātas with any present day living people, it would be very interesting to note here that they may be identified with the modern Kirātis and the Limbus who are again a branch of the people called Kirāntī or Kirāti¹⁰³. The Kirāntis once reigned over a large portion of Nepal^{103a}. The Kirāntis or Limbus are also to be found in Dinajpur, Sikkim & Nepal. Chatterji has made a particular reference to a people bearing this name in Moungh, west of Sikkim^{103b}.

Campbell has stated that the Limbus include the Kirāntis, the Eakas (Yakshas) Kirāntis and the Rais who are all alike in physical characters and general and life-patterns¹⁰⁴. The Kirāntis are again divided into a number of sub-tribes like the Wallo Kirānt/Hither Kirānt, the Mangh or middle Kirānt and the Pallo or Further-Kirānt. From an analysis of the physical features of the Kirāntis and the Mongoloid people it becomes evident that the Kirāntis belonged also to the Mongoloid racial stock. The physical characters of the present Kirāntis have also been measured by Waddell. From the anthropometric measurements of eleven Kirāntis of Eastern Nepal he could find that their average cephalic and nasal indices are 82.3 and 85.7 respectively, and their stature is 1586¹⁰⁵. Thus the Kirāntis are of medium stature, brachycephalic head and platyrrhine nose. The ancient Kirātas, according to the evidences furnished by the literary texts, possessed also a strongly built body, flat nose, i.e., platyrrhine and gold-like yellow complexion. These are more or less characteristic features of the brachycephalic Mongoloid peoples. Thus, the affinity in physical features of the ancient Kirātas and the present Kirāntis, both being brachycephalic and platyrrhine people, undoubtedly speaks of their affiliation to the Mongoloid racial stock.

Again, while describing the physical characters of the Limbus, Campbell expressed the opinion that they belong to the Mongolian family, but because of considerable admixtures with the Lepchās, they are as less Mongolian than that tribe¹⁰⁶. The Limbus got mixed up with the Lepchās and the former are, however, a little taller than the latter. The Limbus are again fair in complexion and beardless¹⁰⁷. Campbell has also made a comparative study of the physical characters of the Limbus and the Lepchās. It has been stated that "the Limbu is a little taller than the Lepchā, somewhat less fleshy and more wiry in the limbs, as fair in complexion, and as beardless. He is scarcely ever ruddy as the Lepchās are, his eyes are if anything smaller, and placed more to the front than those of the Lepchās, and his nose, though somewhat smaller, is somewhat higher in bridge than that of the Lepchās¹⁰⁸". Hodgson has also given a description of these individuals of the tribe stating that "all these men have a depth of colour and defect of bone and muscle assimilating them to the highlanders"... and the Bontawa 'has a head and face carrying on resemblance with the low land Turanians, which I believe so frequent amongst the Kirāntis¹⁰⁹...

In respect of physical traits, differences and similarities have been no doubt pointed out, but the fact stands out that the Kirāntis, the Limbus and other allied tribes are mostly alike in physical characters which are not essentially different from those of the peoples of the Mongoloid ethnic stock.

In regard to language of the Kirāntis, it has been pointed out that the "complex pronominalization, Kirāntī verb points to a special connection with the Muṇḍā". Not only that, even analogies have been drawn between the Dravidian and the Kirānti languages¹¹⁰. It appears that the Kirāntis and the allied tribes were all originally Austric speakers. In this context, Language a reference may be made to the Khāsis of North-east India who belong to a branch of the Austro-Asiatic linguistic family. Like other primitive tribes, the Limbus and the Kirāntis practise a primitive form of agriculture called Jhum-cultivation on the slopes of the hills and thereby produce maize, wheat, rice and cotton. They are expert artisans in spinning, weaving and dying cloth for their own use.

In terms of the religion of the Limbus or the Kirāntis, it may be stated that they like the Kols adhere to the primitive paganism¹¹¹. They believe in the existence of a supreme God who is called Sham-Mung, the God of the Universe and worship many other deities¹¹². They do not, however, build any temple or make images of their gods. But they propitiate them Religion by sacrificing animals, i.e., killing an animal in the name of the God they intend to propitiate¹¹³. The places set apart for sacrifices are marked by the erection of bamboo poles with rags attached. Even priests are engaged. They are either Bijowas or Phedangkos. The Bijowas are mendicants wandering about in the garb of the Buddhist priests. The Kirāntī priest is, however, called Nakchong¹¹⁴. They observe also several festivals after harvesting and on the occasion of marriage. After the death of a person, they perform also certain funeral rites and build tombs with stones. In general, it may be said that the Kirāntis or the Limbus practise all kinds of sorcery or witchcraft, magic¹¹⁵, etc.

In this context, a particular reference may be made to the Kirārs of Uttar-pradeś (Shekoabad) who claim to be a branch of the Yādava-Thākurs. Wilson describes the Kirārs as a "low tribe whose occupation is to sell grass

and exercise horses and identifies them with the Kirātas of ancient times¹¹⁶.

Kirāts In that case, it may be presumed that the ancient Kirātas might have also spread over the plains of upper India. Again, in the Pāñjāb there is a place named as Kirātpur which was perhaps once associated with the Kirātas¹¹⁷. Besides, Grierson has also referred to the Kirāta settlements in Garwal and Kumaon¹¹⁸. It shows as to how the ancient Kirātas in different parts of India got assimilated under various forms and names.

(ix) Observation :

It is thus sufficiently clear that the ancient Kirātas are represented today not only by the Kirāntis and other allied tribes, but also by some other peoples like the Lepchās, the Lichchavis, the Newars, the Kochs, the Kāchāris, the Tiprās, the Bodos, the Āhoms, the Jaintiās and others who may be affiliated to the Kirāta group. The physical characters of the Kirātas as described in the literary records evidently refer to their affiliation with the Mongoloid peoples. Undoubtedly, the Kirātas swept downwards from the hills and spread over different parts of Bengal and made veritable contributions towards the ethnic and cultural milieu of the Bengali people as discussed in the subsequent Chapters. In fact, many of the Kirātas have been assimilated within the fold of the Bengali people in such a way as to be hardly differentiated at present, and the Kirāta subscription to the composition of the Bengali people and culture is no doubt substantial.

II. THE KAMBOJAS

Next to the Kirātas, another tribal community of ancient Bengal coming from the North-eastern hilly regions is the Kamboja.

(i) Derivations and Meanings :

The term Kamboja (Kamboja+a) denotes the indigenous or traditional peoples of Kambojadesā. The word Kamboja originated from the root Bhuj in Sanskrit, and it appears to be a Sanskritised form of a Tibeto-Burmese word¹¹⁹. Some have tried to connect Kamboja with the Persian word Kambujiya¹²⁰. Part of the name of Kamboja, i.e., Kambi represents the Sanskrit Sthala, i.e., place or district meaning thereby dwellers in Kāmba, and accordingly,

the term Kamboja may be explained as denoting those persons who were natives of the Kamba country¹²¹. As to the etymological bearings of the word Kamboja, it would be profitable to refer to the famous passage of the Nirukta (II.1.4) where Yāska mentions the use of the verb "Śay in the sense of going amongst the Kamboja", and interprets the name as : Śavatir gatikarmā Kambojeshveva bhāshyate Kambojāḥ Kambala-bhojāḥ Kamanīya-bhojāḥ vā Kambalah Kamanīyo bhavati¹²² ... The Kamboja, these are 'Bhojas with the mantle of wool (Kambala)' or 'the Kamboja as Kamanīya (desirable)'; the desirable (for them), is a mantle of wool". Levi holds the view that Yāska has given this etymology in order to clarify the position of the Kambojas in "relation to the Āryas, whose linguistic usage he opposes to that of the Kambojas" by stating : "Kamt+boja", as they are a branch of Bhoja, "do not form a part of the Ārya¹²³". Thus, Levi concludes that the name Kamboja has been analysed by the grammarian into Kam+bhoja, and Yāska admits his difficulty in explaining by Sanskrit the element Kam placed at the head of the name¹²⁴.

That Kamboja is a non-Aryan word is also attested to by an analysis of the term as has been done by the ancient grammarians. Pāṇini has devoted a special Sūtra to Kamboja-Kambojāl luk¹²⁵. Kshemendra in his Mañjarī refers to Āratṭa, Bālhi Kāmbōja¹²⁶. The Singhalese and the Tibetans have derived Kamboja from Kam+vuja, a transcribed form of San-fō-tsi (=Sam-bu-jay) in Chinese and Semboja in Javanese¹²⁷. Schlegel had already referred to the relationship between Kamboja and Semboja in which he found the Malayan name of Plumeria acutifolia¹²⁸. Again, Ptolemy places Tambyzoi which may be equivalent of Kamboja to the South of the Oxus¹²⁹. Further, Ptolemy names one of the mouths of the Ganges as Kambuson¹³⁰. From all these references it would be evident that the term Kamboja is a Sanskritised form of a foreign word perhaps of Tibeto-Chinese origins. This also explains the extra-Indian origins of the Kambojas.

The Kambojas are frequently mentioned in the early Indian literary texts as well as in certain inscriptions of the early and later periods, from which it may be possible to draw a picture of the Kambojas of ancient Bengal with particular reference to their origins, habitat, identity, general life-patterns and ethnic affiliations.

(ii) Origins :

Regarding the origins of the Kambojas there are very few side references in the early literary texts which do not, however, serve any meaningful purpose in the sense that those accounts mostly appear to be fictitious. As for instance, in the Rāmāyaṇa it is said that the Pahlavas, the Yavanas, the Śakas and the Kambojas were created from different parts of the body of the venerable cow Kāmadhenu Śavalā of Vaśiṣṭha¹³¹. It has been also specifically stated that the Kambojas came out of the roar of the Kāmadhenu¹³²: Tasya humvāravājjātāh Kāmbojā ravisannibhāh. It is very difficult to determine the implication of this fictitious legendary tale. Perhaps, this legendary story relates to the close kinship of the Kambojas to pastoral economy of the people of the foothills of the Himalayas and also to their subsequent assimilation within the fold of Brahmanism.

(iii) Habitat and Dispersals :

The early literary references, however, furnish certain positive indications regarding the settlements or habitats of the Kamboja people. According to the Nirukta (11.2), the Kamboja country was outside the limit of the Āryāvarta. Generally speaking, the Kambojas have been described as peoples of the Uttarāpatha, i.e., of Northern India, meaning thereby perhaps the northernmost regions, and very often they have been also associated with the Gandhāras¹³³. The earliest authentic reference to the Kamboja is to be found in the inscriptions of Aśoka. The Kambojas have been mentioned along with the Yonas and others, and the Aramaic version of Aśoka's edict at Shar.-i-Kuna (Kāndāhār) was perhaps meant for the Yavanas and the Kambojas¹³⁴. In the Rājatarāṅginī, the Kambojas are mentioned along with the Tukhāras (Oxus valley), and their country has been placed in the north of Kāśmīr. In the Mahābhārata, the Kamboja peoples are again associated with the Chīnas living near the Oxus in Bokhārā¹³⁵. Not only that, the Mahābhārata also mentions the Kambojas along with the Śakas and the Yavanas indicating thereby their whereabouts or locations in the North-west of India¹³⁶. Further, in the Mahābhārata, the Kambojas, the Yavanas, the Chīnas, etc., have been described as Mlechchha-Jātis living in the Udīchya-deśa¹³⁷. Again, the Kamboja king Sudakṣiṇa is stated to have marshalled the Yavana and the Śaka forces at the great battle at Kurukshetra¹³⁸. But a distinct clue regarding the location of Kambojadesa

has been also furnished by the Mahābhārata in its account of the expedition of Karna as : Karna Rājapuraṁ gatvā Kāmbojā nirjitā stvayā, i.e., Karna having gone to Rājapura vanquished the Kambojas¹³⁹. Here, if Rājapura can be located properly, the exact location of the habitat of the Kambojas can be also determined. The Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsang has referred to the territory of Ho-lo-she-pu-lo (Rājapura which lay to the south and south-east of Pan-nu-tso (Punch or Punach)¹⁴⁰. Rājapura has been accordingly identified with Rajaori lying on the south of Kāśmīr. It becomes further clear from the Jātaka story and the Epics that the Kambojas had their metropolis perhaps at Rājapura¹⁴¹. In Luder's inscriptions Nos. 176 and 472, Nandinagara has been mentioned as a city of the Kambojas¹⁴². From these references, Raychaudhuri has located the Kambojas in North-western India, i.e., close to Gandhāra¹⁴³. Wilford, is however, of opinion that the Kambojas were peoples of Arachosia. Some again have placed the Kambojas in Khāshgarh, i.e., modern Kafiristan or in the Hindukush region or in Afghanistan¹⁴⁴. Others have gone to the extent of pointing out that the Kambojas were originally Iranians.

In this context, a particular reference may be made to the term 'Kambojeshu' occurring in the Monghyr Copper plate of Devapāla¹⁴⁵. A reference may also be made to Kamboja-janapada which has been identified with Kāśmīr and eastern Afghanistan. But this identification has not been accepted by all¹⁴⁶. Rhys Davids suggests Dvārakā as the capital of the Kambojas, which has been identified with Darwaz in the Pāmīr Badakshan region by Motichandra¹⁴⁷. This refers to the upper Oxus basin. Besides the territories around modern Shāhbāzgarhi and Mansehra, i.e., Peshwar and Hazara districts, the veritable find-spots of Aśoka's edicts, have been also described as the habitat of the Yonas, the Kambojas and the Gandhāras. Here, it may be noted that the earliest authentic reference to the Kambojas is to be found in the Rock Edict XIII of the emperor Aśoka, wherein it is stated: "Among the Yonas, Kambojas, etc."¹⁴⁸. It follows accordingly that the Kambojas along with the Yonas were primarily located in the North-western region in the 3rd century B.C. This is also supported by the information derived from Mudrārākshasa wherein it is stated that Chandragupta Maurya raised his army consisting of soldiers belonging to various groups of peoples

including the Kambojas¹⁴⁹. Besides, it is learnt from the Raghuvaṃśa that Raghu while proceeding towards the North conquered the Kambojas¹⁵⁰. The Bṛhatsaṃhitā of Varāhamihira also refers to the Kambojas along with the Śakas and the Yavanas¹⁵¹.

All these references undoubtedly point out or locate the settlements of the Kamboja in North-western India and beyond. Sircar holds the view that the Kambojas had several settlements in modern Afghanistan and Pakistan, and the most important of them was the one in Kāndāhār¹⁵². But it would be wholly wrong to presume that the Kambojas were strictly confined to North-western frontier region alone. On the other hand, there are distinct indications in various records to the effect that the Kambojas were also firmly settled in the interior and North-eastern hilly regions of India as well.

As to the Kambojas in the interior of India a reference may be made to Yāska. During the time of Yāska, the Kambojas have been regarded as peoples quite distinct from the Aryans speaking a different dialect altogether. The Purāṇas like the Mārkaṇḍeya (57.53), the Vāyu (45,132) and the Matsya (113,52) place the Kambojas amongst the peoples of the Vindhya. The Skanda-purāṇa furnishes an interesting list of 72 countries along with the number of villages contained in each¹⁵³. The list includes the name of Kambojadesa having 10 lakhs villages. This figure of villages given appear to be a fictitious one. From the Garuda and the Agni Purāṇas, it is further learnt that the Kambojas even moved towards Dākṣiṇātya in the 9th or 10th century A.D.¹⁵⁴. They might have also moved along the foothills of the Himalayas up to the North-eastern region and subsequently swept downwards in the plains of Bengal.

It will be now seen that the Kambojas were also very important peoples of North-eastern region as well and got themselves settled over the plains of Bengal during historical periods. As to the settlement of the Kambojas in Bengal, there are two alternatives : either the Kambojas dispersed in different directions from their original locale in North-western

region or another branch of the Kambojas settled in the North-eastern hilly tracts might have moved downwards into Bengal. Accepting the first alternative Raychaudhuri has pointed out that the Kambojas perhaps came to Bengal in the train of the Gurjara-Pratihāra army from the North-west¹⁵⁵. But the latter alternative is also amply borne out by certain facts as revealed from the available records.

That the Kambojas were settled in Bengal in large numbers and played an important role in cultural and political activities of ancient times is also testified to by both literary and epigraphic records of the Pāla period. Even before that, the Kambojas as peoples of Eastern India have been referred to by Varāhamihira in his *Bṛhatsaṃhitā* wherein they have been grouped together with the Vaṅgas, the Suhmas, the Māgadhas, the Śavaras, etc.¹⁵⁶. In the Nālandā Copper plate of Devapāla, it is stated that the Pāla king fought against the Kāmbojas, the Utkalas, the Kāmarūpas, etc.¹⁵⁷. But in the Monghyr plate, Devapāla's cavalry is described to have roamed the Kamboja country (*Kāmbōjeshucha yasya vāji-yuvabhir-dhvāst-ānyarājaujasō*¹⁵⁸). Here of course, the reference might have been made to the Kambojas of North-western India because of their mention in association with the Gandhāras. But a positive reference to the Kambojas in ancient Bengal is to be found in verse 12 of the Bāṅgaḍ grant of Mahīpāla I, son of Vighrahapāla. It is stated in this inscription that Mahīpāla recovered his paternal kingdom (*Vāhu darpādanadhikṛita hatasa (phala) vipakshāḥ saṃgare viluptaṃ rājyamāsādyā Śrī Mahīpāladeva*) which was snatched away through pride or prowess by the people who have no claim to it¹⁵⁹. This very information is also obtained from verse 10 of the Manahali grant of Madanapāla (*Kritaviluptaṃ rājyamāsādyā ...*) and the Āmgāchhigrant of Vighrahapāla (*Vāhu-darpā danadhikṛta viluptaṃ rājyamāsādyā pitryaṃ*)¹⁶⁰.

Regarding the identity of the enemies referred to in these inscriptions, attention may be drawn to the Bāṅgarh (Dinājpur) pillar inscription dated C. 966 A.D. in connection with erection of a Śiva temple by a Gauḍa king of the Kamboja family (*Kāmbōjānvayaja-Gaudapati*¹⁶¹). It is very significant to note in this context that from the time of the Pāla king Nārāyaṇapāla to Mahīpāla I, no Pāla inscription has been, however, found in North-Bengal,

which indicates that the Pālas must have lost that area to some other peoples from whom Mahīpāla I recovered his paternal kingdom. In all likelihood, those peoples appear to have been the Kambojas as referred to in the Bāngad pillar and other inscriptions. As to the identity of the Gaudapati of the Kamboja family, a reference may be made to the Irdā Copper plate which records : Kāmvo(mbo)javarṣātilakā-Rājyapāla, i.e., Rājyapāla was the crest-jewel of the Kambojavarṣā¹⁶². The Kamboja princes as referred to in the records might have seized North Bengal and perhaps also some other parts from the Pāla kings, and Mahīpāla succeeded in recovering his paternal kingdom^{162a}. This identification of the Pāla enemies has not been, however, accepted by Sen on the ground that Rājyapāla was a Buddhist whereas Gaudapati of the aforesaid inscription was a Śaiva¹⁶³. In the Dinājpur pillar inscription the relevant expression runs as : "Kāmbojānvayajena Gaudāpatinā ten-endumaulerayam prāsādo niramāyi Kuñjara-ghaṭā-varshena-bhū-bhūṣanaḥ"¹⁶⁴. Here Kuñjaraghaṭā-varshena, etc., has been differently interpreted. Some suggest that the expression refers to a date, i.e., Śaka 888. Bhandarkar contends that it refers to : "he who pours forth an array of elephants"¹⁶⁵. But Majumdar takes it to be a biruda of the Gaudapati of the Kamboja family. Further, it is not possible also to accept his identification with Sāhilladeva of Chambā who is called Karivarsha in a Copper plate inscription, because the latter is called therein Paushana-varṣa-bhūṣana and not Kāmbojānvayaja. Besides, the Chambā inscription refers to Trigarta, Kulūta, Durgara, Kīra, etc., but not Kamboja¹⁶⁶. Sen suggests that the aforesaid expression, i.e., Kuñjaghaṭā-varsha was a Kāmboja Gaudapati who was perhaps a vassal of the Pāla king issuing Irdā grant from Priyaṅgu or that he succeeded Nayapāla of the Irdā grant and was followed in turn by Dharmapāla¹⁶⁷.

It would thus appear that the Kambojas became master not only of North Bengal, but also of South-western Bengal, as testified to by the Irdā Copper plate¹⁶⁸. The stronghold of the Kambojas in this part of Bengal was, however, considerably weakened by the invasion of the Chandella king Dhaṅga, and in North Bengal they were ousted by the Pālas. The last mantle of the Kamboja rule was perhaps upheld by Dharmapāla who succumbed to the inroads of the Chola army in the 11th century A.D.¹⁶⁹. These Kambojas might have infiltrated into Bengal from North and North-eastern hilly region.

Establish-
ment of
supremacy

In this connection, it would be profitable to refer to the findings of Foucher that the Kambojadesā might have been Tibet and Kambojabhāshā, Tibetan, as borne out by the Nepalese tradition¹⁷⁰. Basing on this finding of Foucher, Chanda holds the view that the Gaudapati of the Kāmboja family as referred to in the Bāngaḍ pillar inscription might have come from Tibet or Bhutan or some other Himalayan countries at the head of a Mongolian horde, who are now represented by the Kōch and the Paliyas of North Bengal, also known as the Rājbarīs^{170a}. Taking into consideration all available facts, Ray has pointed out that "there was a Gandhāra and possibly also a Kamboja as well on the North-eastern frontier of India, near the regions now known as Yunnan and Szechwan, and it is not unlikely that the conquerors of Northern Bengal may have come from that direction¹⁷¹". Besides, in the Tibetan work Pang-Sam-Jon-Zang there are references to the Kāmbojas of both North-western and North-eastern regions, and the eastern one is identified with the Lushai Hill tracts between Burma and Bengal¹⁷². Against this evidence, it has been pointed out that the aforesaid work belongs to a later period, and there is nothing to show that the Kāmbojas of North-eastern India were in existence as early as 10th century A.D. But it must not be forgotten that the aforesaid work contains the recording of an early tradition which may not be dispensed with so cursorily. In fact, there were several Infiltration tribal inroads into the Brahmaputra valley by the Mongoloid tribes from Tibet of North-eastern frontier region, and it is quite likely that the & North-east Kāmbojas had moved towards West as well beyond the river Karatōyā. An Assamese conquest of North Bengal is clearly borne out by the Nidhānpur inscription of Bhāskaravarma¹⁷³. Even after the middle of the 7th century A.D., there had taken place several Tibetan incursions in the plains of Northern India through Assam and Bengal, and the Kāmbojas appear to have been one of those peoples who in the 10th century A.D. succeeded in wielding considerable political authority as is clearly borne out by the Bāngaḍ Pillar inscription¹⁷⁴. It may be thus accordingly held that the Kāmbojas of ancient Bengal were of Tibeto-Chinese origins belonging to North-eastern India before their settlement in Bengal where they became a marked composing element in her ethnic and cultural milieu. It also appears that the Kāmbojas had also entered into matrimonial relationship with the Pāla kings, and the kinship was so deep that even the Kāmboja king's names ended in Pālas.

This is how the Kāmbojas got themselves merged with other peoples of Bengal. In this context, a reference may be made to the Kamboja country (Cambodia) of South-east Asia and its peoples who played an important role in that whole region¹⁷⁵. It is not all unlikely that the Kāmbojas were originally affiliated to the Kambojas of South-east Asia, and subsequently, they made a stronghold in North-eastern India.

(iv) General Life-Patterns and Culture :

Like many other hill peoples, the Kāmbojas also appear to have been originally engaged in pastoral activities along with hunting and gathering and a form of incipient agricultural operation. From Yāska's Nirukta, it is learnt that the Kāmbojas entertained a great love for Kambala or blanket implying thereby that they were inhabitants of the regions having cold climate¹⁷⁶. Further, the Kambojas like the Kirātas had also carried on trading with other peoples as well¹⁷⁷. The Kāmbojas have been described as well-known horse-breeders, and as such, their country had earned great reputation in regard to horses. The heroes of the Kambojadesā have been occasionally referred to in the Mahābhārata and the Buddhist texts¹⁷⁸. In the Purāṇas like the Vishnu, the Brahmānda and the Vāyu, the Kāmbojas have been described as famous for their horses¹⁷⁹. The Kāmbojas were also great traders in horses. The Pāla king Devapāla is said to have in his possession Kamboja-horses as attested to by the Monghyr and Nālandā Copper plate inscriptions^{179a}. It has been generally supposed that these horses in Bengal were brought from Kambojadesā in North-west, and in such a case, any infiltration of Industry the Kāmbojas from that direction appears to be quite possible. and trade But an attempt has been made in the foregoing pages to show that the Kāmbojas in Bengal might have come primarily from the North-eastern region. As to their dress and ornaments, it is stated in the Rāmāyana that they 'are covered with golden lotuses'¹⁸⁰. The expression perhaps refers to Dress their ornaments or embellishment of their dress. This proves that the Kāmbojas were in the habit of using ornaments of gold.

It would, however, appear that in spite of the wandering habits of the Kāmbojas, they were well organised peoples adhering to both monarchical and non-monarchical forms of government. In the Mahābhārata, there are references to the Kāmboja kings by names as Chandravarman and Sudakṣiṇa¹⁸¹.

The Kamboja inscriptions of Bengal refer also to the Kamboja kings. At the same time, the Epic also refers to 'Kambojanañcha ye gaṇāḥ' meaning thereby that the Kāmbojas had Gaṇa or a republican type of government as well¹⁸². This has been more clearly expressed by Kautilya in his Arthasāstra wherein the Kāmbojas have been described as a Vārtāśāstropajīvin Saṅgha¹⁸³. Thus, the Kāmbojas constituted the Gaṇa or Saṅgha form of government as well. But in ancient Bengal the Kāmbojas were perhaps under the hegemony of a chieftain or a king as is indicated by the expression Gaudapati of the Kamboja family in the Bāgaḍ pillar inscription¹⁸⁴,

In religious matters, the Kāmbojas were devoted to Śiva as is proved by the epigraphic records¹⁸⁵. Perhaps, they became converts to Brahmanical religion after they came into prominence in Bengal. In regard to their general manners and customs including language, it is evident from all sources at our disposal that the Kāmbojas were quite distinct from those of the Aryans, and as such, they have been sometimes branded as barbarians.

(v) Physical Characters and Ethnic Affiliation :

Very little information can be obtained from the available sources about the physical characters of the Kāmbojas. In the Vālakāṇḍa of the Rāmāyana, the Kāmbojas have been described as 'Rabisannibhāḥ', i.e., having the colour of the rays of the sun¹⁸⁶. In the Harivaṁśa, it is said that "at the command of the king Sagara, the Yavanas shaved their heads entirely, the Śakas the upper half of the head, the Pāradas wore their hair long and the Pahlavas let their beards grow and so also the Kāmbojas¹⁸⁷". (Ardham Śakānām Śrasō-mundam kritvavyasarjayat : Yavanānām śiraḥ sarvaṁ Kambojānāmtathaiva-cha). In the Kavikaṅkaṇa-Chandī (85) a similar expression has been made in the passage : Dharayē Kambōja veśa māthe (head) nāhi rākhe keś (hair)¹⁸⁸. Here, it appears that a reference has been perhaps made to the very short and straight hair on the head appearing as if shaved.

Since no textual information about any distinct physical characters of the Kāmbojas is available, it may not be, however, unjustified to hold the view that they perhaps possessed ethnic features akin to those of the Śakas, the Hūnas, the Kirātas, i.e., the people living along the foothills of

the Himalayas. In that case, it may be presumed that the Kāmbojas might have possessed those very physical features which are the characteristics of the people of the Himalayan belt like the Tibetan, the Nepalese, the Bhūṭiyās, the Lepchās, etc. If so, it may be held that the Kāmbojas were characterised by yellowish skin colour, short stature, broad face, flat nose, small eyes, straight hair and strong body built. As most of the peoples with whom the Kāmbojas have been associated belonged to the Mongoloid ethnic stock, it may accordingly be reasonably contended that the Kāmbojas of Mongoloid ancient times, who infiltrated and settled in Bengal, might have also belonged to the same racial stock, i.e., Mongoloid. Lastly, it may be noted that the Kāmbojas may be recognised as the ancestors of the modern Kōch (Rājbaṅśī), the Mech and other allied peoples. The physical characters and ethnic affiliation of the Koch and the Mech peoples have been discussed in the following pages. If the Koch and the Mech are affiliated to the Mongoloid stock, their ancestors may also be rightly attributed to the same ethnic group.

(vi) Identity :

Regarding the identification of the ancient Kāmbojas with their surviving groups of people in different parts of India we are at a loss. But some positive suggestions may be put forward in this regard. In general, the Kāmbojas are taken to be autochthones of Afghanistan¹⁸⁹. But in Kafiristan and its neighbouring areas Elphinstone found tribes like the Caumogees or Camoze or Camoje whose names certainly remind one of the Kāmboja¹⁹⁰ kinship. Some have even found traces of the name of the Kāmboja in Cambistholi as mentioned by Arrian¹⁹¹. In this context, a reference may be made to the account of Hiuen Tsang regarding the personal appearance and physical characters of the people of Rājapura and the adjoining countries which were indeed the great habitat of the ancient Kāmbojas. Hiuen Tsang states that 'from Lampa to Rājapura, the inhabitants are coarse and plain in personal appearance, of rude, violent disposition ... they do not belong to India proper, but are inferior peoples of frontier, i.e., barbarian stock'¹⁹². Again, the present cultivating and landowning class known as Kāmboh has been supposed to be the representative of the ancient

Kāmbojas. The modern Kāmboh peoples are to be found all over Uttarpradeś, more particularly in the regions round Mathurā. They are said to have been originally Kshatriyas.

So far as the survivals of the ancient Kāmbojas in Bengal, it has not been possible to trace any caste or tribal name bearing semblance to the Kāmbojas. But the Koch or the Rājbañśi of Coochbihar are generally said to be of Kamboja origins, but no distinct clues are obtainable in this respect. It is quite likely that the Koch might have been a branch of Mongoloid Kāmbojas or vice versa. In Darjeeling area, there are two significant sept-names of the Limbus : Kāmbāhāṅ and Kāmbāṅ¹⁹³. These two names certainly remind one of their affiliation to the Kambojas. Besides, amongst the Jugis (caste) in Bengal, there is a functional group called Kāmbule which may be a reminiscence of the ancient Kāmbojas. It appears that most of the Mongoloid Kāmbojas were perhaps driven out from the plains of Bengal, and they had to take refuge in the frontiers of Northern Bengal, and others remaining as leftouts became wholly mingled with many other peoples in such a fashion that it has now become hardly possible to firmly determine their surviving elements bearing any distinct semblance of name, physical features and general cultural patterns.

(vii) Conclusion :

That the Kāmbojas along with the Kirātas, the Śakas, the Chīnas and others were of Mongoloid affiliation can hardly be doubted. Again, that the Kāmbojas were distinctly non-Aryans in their language, manners and customs becomes evident from the discussions made above. As to their language Grierson has tried to prove that the Kāmbojas spoke Indo-Aryan and partly Iranian language¹⁹⁴. In the Bhuridatta-Jātaka, the Kāmbojas are said to have followed all sorts of savage or rather non-Aryan customs. It is stated: Eti hi dhammā anariyarūpā Kambojakānam vitathā bahunanti¹⁹⁵ (These are your savage customs which I hate ; such as Kamboja hordes might emulate). Further, it is learnt from Yāska that the Kāmbojas spoke a dialect which was not illegible to the Aryans. It has been, however, already observed that the Kāmbojas were perhaps of Tibeto-Chinese origins, and in that case, their language was also likely to be of the same stock. There is little doubt

that the Kambojas like the Kirātas were non-Aryan Mongoloid peoples living in both North-west as well in Bengal. But gradually, the Kambojas were brought under the Brahmanical influence. Even in the later Vedic period, Kambojadesā, i.e., the land of the Kambojas is said to be a home of Brahmanical learning. In reality, the Varṇsa-Brāhmaṇa actually mentions a teacher named Kāmboja Aupamanyava¹⁹⁶. The presence of the Āryas or the Arṇyans in Kambojadesā has been also referred to in the Majjhimanikāya¹⁹⁷. From such references it may be presumed that the Kambojas were gradually brought within the fold of the Brahmanical culture. This had happened also in Bengal wherein they integrated themselves by being converts to different Brahmanical sects which became very popular, more particularly with the non-Brahmanical or non-Aryan peoples of the land. This would be evident from a study of the inscriptions of Bengal, which are to be attributed to the Kambojas who held sway over North and South-west Bengal. They mostly patronised Śaivism, and in fact, the Kamboja king had even erected temples in honour of Śiva. This is how the Kambojas were assimilated and even recognised as Kshatriyas, but later on relegated to the position of the Śūdra.

This process of assimilation of the Kambojas is also clearly borne out by the prescriptions made in the Manu-Saṁhitā wherein it is stated that they were previously Kshatriyas, but later on reduced to the position of the Śūdra because of their non-adherence to the Vedic rites and non-contact with the Brāhmaṇas^{197a} (Śanakaistu Kriyāloṇpādīmāḥ Kshatriyajātayah Vriṣhalatvaṁ gatā loke Brāhmaṇadarśanena cha Paundrakāṇḍaudra Pravidāḥ Kāmbojā Yavanāḥ Śākāḥ, Pāradāḥ Pallavāśchīnāḥ Kirātā Daradāḥ Khasāḥ...). This is how the Kāmbojas were integrated within the Brahmanical fold and got merged with the Bengali people and culture in general.

III. THE KŌCHS, THE MECH AND THE RĀJBANŚIS

Allied or almost identical with the Kambojas are the Kōchs who are found well-distributed over the districts of Northern Bengal and more particularly concentrated in the district of Coochbihar which was and is even today their own political and cultural stronghold.

(i) Derivation and Meaning :

The word Koch derived from Kuch+ā-bha can hardly be met with in early Indian Sanskrit texts. In the Jaina Bhagavatī-sūtra, Kōccha is mentioned along with Aṅga, Vaṅga, Magadha, Accha, Vaccha, etc., as native peoples. This Kōccha may be no other than the modern Kōch of Bengal¹⁹⁸. The present Bengali word Kōch is a derivation from the middle Indo-Aryan source, i.e., from Kawōcha or Kamōcha which can be again transformed into Sanskrit as Kamboja^{198a}. In this connection, a particular reference may be made to a later Tantra text, namely, Yoginī-Tantra wherein the word Kōcha occurs in the form of Kuvācha which may be another Sanskritized form of Kōcha. The term Kuvāchaka denotes in Sanskrit evil-speaker or bad speaker. The same word occurs also in the Padma-purāṇa wherein the Kuvāchakas have been mentioned as Mlechchhas speaking a Pisācha language¹⁹⁹. Here occurs a positive reference to the original Kōch before they were Brahmanized.

It has been pointed out by Chatterji that the Kochs of North Bengal originally belonged to the Bodo group speaking a language of Tibeto-Burman origin, and they have been branded as Western Bodos, i.e., western extension of the Bodo people of Assam and East Bengal, who once covered a wide belt of territory covering even the modern regions of Sylhet, Comilla and Tripurā state. This has been specifically stated by Grierson:
 Linguistic origins "....there can be little doubt that the original Kochs were the same as the Bodos. The Koch, Mech and Bara or Bodo all connoted the same tribe or almost different septes of the same tribe²⁰⁰". Grierson has also expressed the opinion that the name Koch denotes a Hinduized Bodo who has abandoned his ancestral religion for Hinduism and ancestral Bodo language for Bengali or Assamese²⁰¹. Again, the ancient Kochs being converted into Brahmanism became Rājbaṁśīs or started calling themselves as such, and they also claim to belong to the Kshatriya caste category of the Brahmanical social order. In reality, the Brahmanized Kochs turned to be Rājbaṁśī-Kshatriyas, and all the Kochs of Coochbihar now claim themselves to be called Rājbaṁśī Kshatriya.

As to the derivations of the term Koch various suggestions have been made : (1) It has been contended that the term Koch is a local dialectical variation of Krōḍ, i.e., lap; in other words, those Kshatriyas who took refuge

in Krōd or Kōch of Bhagavatī came to be known as Kōch. (2) Some have pointed out that the Kshatriyas being afraid of Paraśūrāma became Samkuchita, and that is why, they came to be called Kōch. (3) The word Kōch is again supposed to have been named after the territory on the river Sankosh (from Samkosh to Kōch). (4) The term Kōch is also derived from Kuvācha (bad speech). According to the Padma-purāna, and the Yoginī-Tantra, the Kuvāchas lived in the hills and spoke in Pisācha language (Kuvācakāh ... teshām paisāciki bhāshā²⁰²). (5) Further, the word Kōch has been derived also from Kabōch or Kamōch and the Sanskritized form of Kōch is Kambōja^{202a}. (6) In the Kulakārikā, the term Kōch is said to have been obtained from Kōchak, i.e., the inhabitants of the Kōchak country are called Koch. All these derivations are, however, of later origins or adaptations. (7) In the Bṛihaddharma-purāna, the list of the Antyajās and untouchable castes includes one called Kōchā, and the appellation Kōch appears to be a derivation from it or a Sanskritized form of the latter²⁰³. Thus the origin of the term Kōch has been variously traced, and its meanings are also accordingly diverse. It seems, however, that the word Koch is of Tibeto-Burmese origins.

(ii) Rise and Fall of the Kōch People :

It has been already observed while discussing the Kamboja peoples that the Kōchs can hardly be distinguished from the Kambojas who rose into prominence in the later part of the 10th and the beginning of the 11th century A.D. to such an extent that they could establish political paramountcy in North Bengal at the cost of the Pālas. But the Pālas under Mahāpāla I succeeded in driving out the Kambojas, and it is not unlikely that they did take resort in the hilly areas and more particularly in Coochbihar region which gradually became their strong citadel. In this context, a particular reference may be made to the account obtained from the Tabaqāt-i-Nāsirī describing the expedition of Bakhtiyar Khalji into Tibet²⁰⁴. It is said that Bakhtiyar Khalji after conquering West and North Bengal invaded Kāmarūpa on his way to conquering Tibet with the purpose of gaining control over the rich trade route between Tibet, North Bengal and Assam. According to the author of the Tabaqāt-i-Nāsirī, Kāmarūpa was peopled by the Kwnc (Kōch), Myj (Mech) and Thrw (Thārū) who spoke a language quite distinct

from the one of the plains²⁰⁵. They were, however, powerful enough to thwart the Muslim inroads.

A review of the history of Bengal from the 10th century onwards would show that a number of Koch principalities came into prominence in Northern Bengal including the district of Dinājpur. Even a dynasty of considerable power called Khen or Khyan was established at Kāmatāpur in the first half of the 15th century under the leadership of Nīlādhwaja, the ruins of whose capital city are still noticeable²⁰⁶. Nīlādhwaja, appears to have been a person of considerable influence who worked actively for the Brahmanization of his own people. In the 15th century A.D., there are references to a king named Danujamardanadeva who issued coins in his own name, and he was one of the Kōch chieftains of North Bengal who "with his sturdy Kōch-Pāiks (foot soldiers) created a diversion in favour of the Hindus by seizing the kingship of Bengal, repeating the feat of the Koch conquerors of the Bengal throne in the 10th century²⁰⁷". The district of Dinājpur might have been named after Danujamardana. The Kōch rulers continued even in the 15th and 16th centuries as indicated by the legends on the coins²⁰⁸. However, of all Kōch kings of Northern Bengal, the most important one was of course Bīśu or Bīśā who is described as the son of Śiva by a Yoginī as narrated in the Yoginī-Tantra²⁰⁹. He made himself an independent king of Kāmatā by defeating the local chieftains and the Muslims and assumed a Brahmanical name Viśvasimha being a devout worshipper of Śiva and Durgā. He is said to have organised the Kōch people and formed a Kōch-militia²¹⁰. It is further said that he died leaving 19 sons, of whom the third one usurped the throne. He was a great organiser and conqueror. He fought successfully against the Āhoms and conquered Jayantiā, Tripurā and Sylhet. Though he built the temple of Kāmākhyā yet he was a great patron of Vaiṣṇavism. It was during his time that the great English traveller Ralph Fitch visited the Kōch country and spoke highly of the different welfare institutions in the country²¹¹. It was during his time again that the assimilation of the Kōch people within the fold of Brahmanism was completed, though full liberty was given to adhere to all traditional Kōch rites and rituals. But this consolidated Kōch kingdom did not last long, and several minor Kōch states arose in its place,

such as, Kōch Hajo in Goālpārā and Coochbihar in Northern Bengal, the former submitted to the Āhoms and the latter to the Mughals²¹². This is how the Koch lost their political importance, but they continued for sometimes as feudatories. Gradually they were, however, brought under servitude and transformed into a number of sub-castes of the larger Hindu community, the most important of which was or is of course the Rājbaṁśis of Coochbihar. But the remnants or survivals of the original Kōch people are still to be found amongst the Bodo speaking Rābhās and Meches of North Bengal and Western Assam²¹³. The Kōch princes of eastern Kāmarūpa were subjugated by the Āhoms and those of the western parts, i.e., Raṅpur and Goālpārā by the Muslims, but their descendants are now to be found concentrated in Coochbihar. They have all become Hinduized and took the name of Rājbaṁśi, and those who declined became socially degraded and subsequently adopted Islam.

(iii) The Kōch and the Rājbaṁśis :

It appears that the Rājbaṁśis of today were originally the Kōch people, and it is only in recent years that the Kōch have started claiming to be called Rājbaṁśis, i.e., belonging to Royal families, and accordingly to the Kshatriya caste²¹⁴. But this claim has little historical foundation, nor there is any basis whatsoever in the story which has been created to establish that they were Kshatriyas and took resort in North-eastern India, more particularly in Coochbihar, in order to save themselves against the wrath of Paraśurāma²¹⁵. That the name Rājbaṁśi is a later adaptation by the Kōch community would be also evident from a review of the Census Reports from 1872 onwards.

From 1872 to 1891 there was no recording of any community under Rājbaṁśi as such, and all peoples were placed under the category Kōch. It is only in 1901 Census Report that some Kōch people returned as belonging to the Rājbaṁśi caste, and others made themselves separated.²¹⁶ In the Census Report of 1921, the Rājbaṁśis were returned as Kshatriyas²¹⁷. It has been pointed out by Balle in 1942 that the Rājbaṁśi-Kshatriyas who

are now found in the districts of Rangpur, Jalpāiguri and Coochbihar in large numbers were formerly known as Pāliyas and that they are indistinguishable from the Kōch, and that is why, he has observed that "the Kōch, Rājbaṁśis and Pāliyas are really the three names for the same thing"²¹⁸. From the study of the Census Reports it would further appear that the Kōch of North Bengal actually preferred to be classed as Rājbaṁśis. Again, some Rājbaṁśis were as early as 1891 recorded as Bhaṅga-Kshatriya and Vrātya-Kshatriya. Subsequently, some have been recorded as Rājbaṁśis and others as Kshatriyas, and in 1921, as Kshatriya-Rājbaṁśis. Not only that, between 1921 and 1931 many Rājbaṁśis started even wearing sacred thread claiming to be Kshatriyas²¹⁹. These claims as recorded in the Census Reports are all later innovations, the main purpose of which was to get entrance into the Brahmanical fold as full fledged members of the second caste order and thereby to enhance their social position and prestige.

(iv) The Mech :

Along with the Kambojas/Rājbaṁśis/Kōch another allied people called Mech are also to be referred to in this context. These peoples are now to be mostly found in Assam. In West Bengal, their number is about 10,862 (1971 Census), but in Assam their number is 589906 (1961 Census²²⁰). In ancient times, the Mech people appear to have figured as a widely spread dominant people in both Assam and North Bengal.

It has been said that the term Mechh or Mech is a Prākṛita form of the Sanskrit word Mlechchha. In fact, in the early Indian texts, the Mechs (Meches) have been described as Dānavas/Asuras/Mlechchhas. In the Mahābhārata, the Kāmarūpa king Bhagadattā who was the son of Narakāsura has been actually called a Mlechchha²²¹. According to a Puranic story, the first king of the Pīthas in Kāmarūpa was Mairang who has been called Dānava. His successors were all Asuras. Then again, there was a Kirāta ruler named Ghaṭaka who was dethroned by Narakāsura²²². From Dubi and Nidhānpur epigraphic records, it appears that Bhāskaravarman, a descendant of Bhagadatta, was a Mech king²²³. Even Śālastambha of the Baḍgāon Copper plate is called a Mlechchha, i.e., Mech^{223a}. These Mech rulers continued to rule for a long time, and subsequently they came into conflict with Bakhtyar-Khaljī who defeated them. This Mech king was a convert to Islam

and came to be known as Āli-Mech. In the 16th century the Mech leadership established the kingdom of Coochbihar. In fact, Riāj-us-Sālātin speaks of the Coochbihar kings as Mech. Not only that, even before the Mechs, their allied people the Kāmbojas ruled over Bengal. It would appear that the Mech and the allied Kāmbojas played an important role in the history and culture of Bengal. The Mechs, the Kochs and the Pāliyas are indeed the descendants of the Kāmbojas belonging to the Bodo family.

(v) Origins :

There is hardly any authentic literary or epigraphic records revealing the actual origins of the Kōch or the Rājbaṁśī community. It is, however, evident that the Kōch people were not autochthonous of Bengal. On the other hand, it has been already pointed out that they entered into the plains of Bengal from North-eastern India and got mixed up with other peoples. It may be noted here that the Kāmbojas have been mentioned in the early texts and inscriptions, but not the Kōch as such. It follows then that the Mixed name Koch may be of later origins. If the Kamboja and Kōch Origins peoples are made identical; it would not be difficult to trace the origins and diffusions of the Mech. Both the Kochs and the Rājbaṁśīs appear, however, to be of mixed origins.

In 1911, O'Malley observed that the Rājbaṁśīs or the Burmese Mugs were the offsprings of the Bengali woman by the Burmese men or more generally of the Arakanese mothers by Bengali fathers²²⁴. Subsequently, however, a divine origin for the Kōch community has been claimed as already observed. The founder of the supremacy of the Kōch people is said to have been the son of Śiva by a Yoginī. It has been narrated in the Yoginī-Tantra that Basu (Biśva Singh) was born of a Yoginī named Revatī as a result of her intercourse with Śiva²²⁵. But this story has little historical bearings. It appears that in later times, a divine origin was ascribed with the purpose of enhancing the position of the Kōchs and thereby smoothening the path of their assimilation within fold of Brahmanism. Besides, for the Divine Origin Kōch kings there are Varṁśāvalis (family lists) of the Dārāṅg-Rājās, the authenticity of which is not also beyond any dispute. According to this source, the Kōch king's progenitor was a Mech or Kōch named Hāriyamaṇḍal

of Chikangrām (Goālpārā) who was the head of the 12 Parganās of the Kōchs²²⁶. He married two sisters, Hīrā and Jirā, who gave birth to Biśu and Śiśu respectively before the conquest of Kāmatā by Husain Shah²²⁷. Biśu by conquering many chiefs established his power in the 16th century A.D. The Brāhmaṇas got hold of him and declared him as the son of Śiva who in the form of Hāriya had intercourse with Hīrā. He was given the name of Biśva Singh who became a patron of Brahmanism and made Coochbihar, the centre of his power²²⁸. Still later on, the Kōch started claiming themselves as Rājbaṁśis or Rājbaṁśi-Kshatriyas who had fled to the North-eastern region to escape from the wrath of Paraśurāma²²⁹. They also claim descent from Daśaratha. Other claims relate more particularly to such names as : Bhaṅga-Kshatriya or Vrātya-Kshatriya. But all these are vague and fictitious claims without any historical bearings. In the Brahmavaivarta-purāṇa the Kōch has been described as the issue between a Tivara female and Māṁsachchhedī (butcher) male. Both are Patitas and so also the Kōch.

It is now generally accepted that the Kāmbojas and the Kōch people might have belonged to the Bodo group of North-eastern India, and in olden times, they might have moved towards West through Assam and settled over different parts of North Bengal. While living in Bengal, they certainly got mixed up with other peoples, and as such, they lost their racial and linguistic identity and became wholly a mixed people. It has been rightly pointed out by Chatterji that the Kōch people may be described as Hinduized or Semi-Hinduized Bodos who have abandoned their original Tibeto-Burman speech and have adopted Bengali language²³⁰.

(vi) Original Habitat and Movements :

If the Kōch or Rājbaṁśis are taken to be members of the Bodo community, there is hardly any doubt that they were originally settled in the North-eastern hilly regions. There is little justification of holding the view that the Rājbaṁśis are the indigenous people of North Bengal²³¹. On the other hand, there are positive indications that they were the ancient inhabitants of Kāmarūpa, i.e., Assam and that they originally settled along the banks of the river Brahmaputra and gradually spread over Assam, North and East Bengal. In fact, Kāmarūpa was the land par-excellence of the Kōchs,

the Mechs, the Kirātas and others whose life-patterns have been depicted Upper Assam in the Yoginī-Tantra as : "In Kāmarūpa animal food should not be discarded. The women always chew betel-leaves; ducks, pigeons, tortoise and hogs as food are not tabooed in Kāmarūpa. None should avoid eating them²³²". The area of Kāmarūpa has been also specifically demarcated in the Yoginī-Tantra by indicating its boundaries : "The area between the Brahmaputra on the East where it emerges from the hills and the river Karatōyā on the West, the junction of the Brahmaputra and Lukkha on the South and the Himalayas on the North is called Kāmarūpa²³³". The concentration of the Kōch people in Kāmarūpa is further supported by the account obtained from Tabaqāt-i-Nāsirī wherein it is stated that Kāmarūpa was inhabited by the Kōch, the Mech and the Thāru peoples²³⁴.

Evidently, the Koch or Rājbaṁśīs were originally in Assam, and from there they moved towards the plains of Bengal. They are in reality the Western Bodos who subsequently came into prominence in Bengal. Several Kōch settlements were established over the territory from the Bhairav to the Tistā and the Karatōyā rivers and beyond. In the later period (the 16th Century), they established their political paramountcy lasting for about 200 years²³⁵. These Kōch peoples were thence driven out, and they took refuge in different parts of North Bengal, and they concentrated themselves more particularly in Coochbihār. Regarding the present inhabitants of Coochbihār. In Bengal it has been pointed out by Captain Lewin that they do not belong to any particular race and that they got mixed up with many peoples and the present Coochbiharis are the result of this admixture²³⁶. The fact that emerges from a perusal of all materials is that the original Koch or Rājbaṁśī peoples came from North-eastern India and subsequently got mixed up with other peoples both in Assam and Bengal.

(vii) General Life Patterns :

The Kōchs or Rājbaṁśīs today belong to a lower order of the Brahmanical social hierarchy. It may be noted that the Kōch people, though of foreign extraction, have been fully brought within the fold of Brahmanical religion and culture. Yet, they have succeeded in retaining their own traditional beliefs and practices to a considerable extent. Linguistically, the Kōch or the Rājbaṁśīs belong to the Bodo family. Hodgson has given a copious vocabulary

of the Koch language which reveals its Bengali or Hindi or Assamese character, Language and that not a single word or grammatical construction would affiliate them with anyone of the North-eastern tribe²³⁷. But Chatterji who has made a critical analysis of the language of the Kōch and other allied peoples of North Bengal is of opinion that they are Hinduized or Semi-Hinduized Bodos who have abandoned their original Tibeto-Burman speech and have adopted the Northern Dialect of the Bengali language which has a close affinity with the Assamese²³⁸. It would thus follow that originally the Kōch language was Tibeto-Burman and subsequently, the Indo-Aryan Bengali language was fully adopted by them. In this connection, a particular reference may be made to the Padma-purāṇa wherein the Bhāshā or language of the Kuvāchakā has been described as Paiśāchiki, i.e., a demon's language²³⁹. Therefore, the language originally spoken by the Kōch people appears to have been apparently non-Aryan. This is also supported by the Tabaqāt-i-Nāsirī which records that these peoples speak idioms different from the language of India proper²⁴⁰. It is only during the process of Brahmanization that the Koch peoples adopted the Bengali language in its dialectical form in such a way that their original language has been primarily lost. Even today the Rājbaṁśis speak a local dialect which is "widely away from standard Bengali"²⁴¹.

Regarding the dress and ornaments of the Kōch or Rājbaṁśi people, it may be stated that the womenfolk leave the head uncovered and wear a dress of blue or purple colour reaching only the knee and bound over the bosom leaving both shoulders bare in a fashion not common among other peoples in Bengal²⁴².

The males wear only a loin cloth while working and full cloth when going out.

Dress and ornaments On the other hand, their ornaments of the head and limbs resemble those worn by the South Indian²⁴³. Neither men or women wear

any head-dress. Their hair is combed and kept tied in a knot over or behind the head. Silver ornaments are very common. In the Padma-purāṇa, the Kōch

peoples like other barbarians have been described as accustomed to eat everything, and that they even kill cows and Brāhmaṇas. They are idiotic and their social

Food usages bad²⁴⁴. The Kōchs are primarily cultivators. Their food articles are very simple. They drink milk, but do not partake clarified butter. They smoke and chew pān-supāri²⁴⁵.

In their religion, the Kochs have fully adopted the Hindu religious behaviour patterns and culture, and at the same time, they have succeeded in retaining a vague memory of their glorious past during the days of Viśva Singh and Naranārāyaṇa. Accordingly, in recent times they have started calling themselves Rājbaṁśis and Kshatriyas. They have now become full-fledged members of the Brahmanical community by adopting even the Gotra-system, but the most peculiar trait with them is that all the Rājbaṁśis belong to the Kāśyapagotra, and any intermarriage within the same gotra is not tabooed²⁴⁶. This is not, however, permitted under any circumstances in the Brahmanical society. The Rājbaṁśis claim to be Kshatriyas wearing sacred thread, but at the same time they have contented themselves by including their community within the scheduled caste category for the sake of political and economic advantages. Herein lies the very hollowness of the claim put forward by the Rājbaṁśis or Kōch and other allied peoples. The Kōch people are quite well conscious of all these drawbacks, and they are now on the way of rectifying them.

The Kōch or the Rājbaṁśis are mostly followers of either Vaishṇava or Śaiva cults. Some of the Kōch chieftains patronised Brahmanism and did their best to raise the cultural level of their peoples. It is true that Brahmanism is the dominant religion amongst these peoples, but they have been enjoying full freedom in regard to the performance of their own traditional rites and Brahmanism practices under the aegis of Brahmanism. The Kōch chieftains like Naranārāyaṇa and Sukladhaja granted permission for the maintenance of Bodo rites and ceremonies and even appointed the Bodo priests to minister in some Kālī or Śakti temples²⁴⁷. The Vishṇu temple of Hayagrīva-Nārāyaṇa at Hajo was restored by Naranārāyaṇa, and the Kāmākhyā temple which is of Austro-Mongoloid origin was also built by his brothers²⁴⁸.

As to the traditional rites and worship performed by the Kōchs or Rājbaṁśis, a particular reference may be made to the worship of snake (Manasā), Śivarātri (Mahākālī), river goddess (Tistā-Burī), forest god (Sāleśvarī), goddess Kālī, Bisoba festival, etc.²⁴⁹. It may be further noted that the goat sacrifice is a very common ritual phenomena, but the manner of sacrificing is quite

different. The goat is sacrificed either by twisting or breaking its head or by hanging or stoning. Previously, human sacrifice was in vogue before the Traditional goddess Kālī. Besides, the Kōchs also worship a number of godlings, worship and rituals of whom one is Hudum-deo who is worshipped in the forms of two figures, male and female, made of cowdung during draught. All sorts of magical rites are also performed by chanting spells in filthy languages all night for bringing down rains²⁵⁰. They also observe festivals during harvesting operations by offering grains to the ancestors and worship Balabhadra in the form of yoked plough at the time of sowing²⁵¹. Here is a distinct evidence of Brahmanization of the non-Aryan or rather Indo-Mongoloid religious rites and practices of North Bengal²⁵².

A review and study in depth of the socio-religious activities of the Rājbaṁśis or Kōchs of Bengal reveal that they have been overwhelmingly Brahmanized, and in all aspects, they have become full-fledged Bengali people. But in their inner core, there still persist certain elements which are non-Bengali or rather non-Brahmanical or rather non-Aryan in nature and character. In this connection, a reference may be made to the observation of Risley regarding the transformation of the Kōch or the Rājbaṁśis into a Brahmanical caste. He has rightly pointed out that the Kōchs like the Bhūmij and others have been transformed into a Brahmanical caste preserving its original name and many of its characteristic customs, but modifying its animistic practices more and more in the direction of orthodox Hinduism and ordering its life-patterns in accordance with the same mood²⁵³. Naturally, it may be presumed that the Kōch or Rājbaṁśis like the Kambojas or the Kirātas who are all allied Indo-Mongoloid peoples made also substantial contributions in the ethnic and cultural moulding of the Bengali people.

(viii) Ethnic Affiliations :

The Kōch or Rājbaṁśi or Mech peoples of North Bengal have become inextricably mixed up with many other peoples belonging to diverse racial stocks, and as such, it is extremely difficult to determine their separate ethnic identity. This will be evident from a description of the physical characters of the Kōch, the Rājbaṁśis and other allied peoples. In this context, different opinions expressed by the ethnographers may be also taken into consideration.

At the very outset, a reference may be made to the Tabaqāt-i-Nāsiri wherein the Kōchs, the Mechs and the Thārus are said to have Turki countenances, i.e., slanting eyes, snub-noses, high cheek bones and yellow skin-colour of the Mongols²⁵⁴. They are also said to resemble those of a tribe of South Siberia²⁵⁵. It has been stated that the Kōchs are characterised by flat face, black and oblique eye, black and straight hair and sometimes curly hair, short and flat nose, prominent cheek bones, less facial hair, dark skin-colour, flattened head, retreating forehead and short and medium stature.²⁵⁶ The Rājbaṁśis also possess almost identical characters like dark skin-colour, thick lips, etc.²⁵⁷. While discussing the physical features of the Mechs, Campbell has observed that they are fairer than the Kōch and possess marked Mongolian features²⁵⁸. Regarding other characters of the Kōch people it has been pointed out that their facial line is accidentally angular and that the upper line along the forehead continues in the Kōch tribe in one direction to the extremity of the upper lip, then suddenly receding to the bottom of the jaw bone²⁵⁹.

Here, it would be profitable to refer to anthropometric measurements of the Kōch and other allied peoples taken by Risley and Waddell²⁶⁰:

		<u>Average</u>	<u>Maximum</u>	<u>Minimum</u>
	Koch (Rājbaṁśi) : (After Risley)			
1.	Cephalic Index	75.2	84	68
2.	Nasal Index	76.6	92	61
3.	Orbito Nasal Index	110.8	121	104
4.	Stature	1607	1746	1440
	Koch (Rājbaṁśi) : (After Waddell)			
1.	Cephalic Index	76.7	87	71
2.	Nasal Index	76.6	92	61
3.	Orbito Nasal Index	110.8	121	93
4.	Stature	1591	1695	1502
	Mech (Goālpārā) : (After Risley)			
1.	Cephalic Index	79.0	84	71
2.	Nasal Index	90.6	100	84
3.	Orbito Nasal Index	109.6	114	140
4.	Stature	1722	1852	1643

		<u>Average</u>	<u>Maximum</u>	<u>Minimum</u>
	Bodo (Kāchāri) : (After Waddell) (Kāmarūpa)			
1.	Cephalic Index	78.4	84	73
2.	Nasal Index	88	118	72
3.	Orbito Nasal Index	109.7	116	103
4.	Stature	1608	1734	1483

It would be evident from the above that the measurements of the Kōchs taken by Waddell and Risley are almost identical, and there is hardly any significant difference. Risley holds the view that the Kōchs of Dinājpur and Rañgpur are Dravidians and those of Assam, Mongoloid. Again, a comparative study of the Kōchs of Bengal with the Mechs of Goālpārā shows, however, a difference which is found in respect of nasal index and stature. But the Mechs are more akin to the Kāchāris (Bodo) as would be evident from the measurements.

As to the ethnic affiliation of the Kōchs and the Mechs, Miller includes them within his Lohitic races and says that they are of the same stock as the Kāchāri or Bodo. Oldham has pointed out that "they are probably the original inhabitants of Darjeeling and Terai and are a distinctly Mongolian race with fair skins and large bones and limbs²⁶¹". But he describes the Dhimals and the Rājbarāsis as dark skinned Dravidians, and that they are distinct from the fair complexioned Mechs. Others include the Mech and the Kōch peoples under the generic term Bodo belonging to the same race. Campbell has, however, spoken about the Mech as fairer than the Kōch and bear markedly Mongolian features²⁶². At the same time, he has referred to the modified and softened features of the Mech and to the Kōch as possessing Hindu physiognomy. Dalton has made a differentiation between the Gāro and the Kōch peoples. In the case of the former, the facial line is vertical, but in the latter, angular with lesser prominence of nose. "The Gāro mouth is compressed and the Kōch deploys protuberant lips²⁶³". Beames describes the Muhammadan Kōch as characterised by stunted figure, sharp features, high cheek bones, tufted beard, etc. Some others again separate the Kōch from the Bodo group, but make the Pani-Kōch belong to that family. The Mechs

are fairer than the Kōchs and have more markedly Mongolian features. They are characterised by softness of outline which distinguishes them from other allied peoples. They are also said to be similar to the Māgs and Burmese²⁶⁴. In spite of differences amongst the investigators about the ethnic affiliation, there is no denying the very fact that originally the Mech people belonged to the Mongoloid stock, but the process of fusion or admixture with other peoples has not yet gone so far as not to discern any trace of primary Mongolian stock²⁶⁵. This is also clearly borne out by the study of the physical features of the Kōch and the Rājbaṁśis who have also undergone considerable physical changes.

It would also appear that ethnically the Kōchs, the Mechs, the Rājbaṁśis and the Pāliyas have the same affiliation, and Risley describes them as a Dravidian tribe with the suspected Mongolian blood²⁶⁶. It may be noted that Risley has made the Kōchs and the Rājbaṁśis identical, and accordingly, no separate treatment has been made by him. But others have treated them differently. As for instance, it is stated that though the Kōch people freely call themselves Rājbaṁśis, the two communities sprang from different sources, i.e., the former of Mongoloid while the latter of Dravidian origins²⁶⁷.

In the Census Report of Rangpur, 1891, it has been stated that amongst the Rājbaṁśis there are two distinct groups, one of which belongs to the Vaishṇava faith and the other to the Śaiva. The Śaiva followers are, however, the Kōchs who are of Mongolian origins coming from the North, whereas the Rājbaṁśis are of Dravidian origins. A still more clear differentiation has been made by O'Donnell who says that the Rājbaṁśis or the Kōchs belong to the third wave of the Mongol infiltration through the North-eastern passes, the first being that of the Chaṇḍāl, the second of the Kōch and the last of the Āhoms²⁶⁸. Besides, Dalton after the opinion of a medical officer in Coochbihar has described the Kōch people as possessing square flat faces, straight and black hair, flat ^{Koch and Rājbaṁśis} and short nose, prominent cheek bones, dark skin-colour, flattened head and retreating forehead etc.²⁶⁹. Hodgson classed the Kōch with the Bodo and the Dhimal²⁷⁰. Dalton further states that the very appearance of the Kōch people shows that they are non-Aryans. He, however, thinks that they belong to the Dravidian stock²⁷¹. According to Risley, the Kōch people belong to the Dravidian stock, who being pressed from the West moved towards the swamps and forests of North-eastern Bengal and there they came into contact with

the Mongoloid race of the lower Himalayas and Assam border. What Risley wants to suggest is that the Kōchs are of Monglo-Dravidian origin. Risley, however, thinks that the Dravidian characters predominate among the Kōchs over the Mongolian as he says that there are grounds to suspect the same admixture of Mongolian blood²⁷².

Waddell has made a comparative study of the physical measurements of the Kōch people of North-eastern Bengal and Assam. He, however, denies the Dravidian ethnic origin and describes them as distinctly Mongoloid, though somewhat heterogeneous²⁷³. In fact, some have taken the Kōch as a Lohitic tribe and Oppert accepts them as belonging to the Dravidian stock and as a branch of the Bhuiyā family²⁷⁴. Dalton thinks that they belong to the Dravidian stock and form a branch of the Bhuiyā family. Here is a clue to the Bādo-Bhuiyās²⁷⁵. Gait has, however, stated that the true Kōchs are Mongoloid and allied to the Mechs and the Gāros, and that the Rājbaṁśis of Jalpāiguri, Coochbihār and Goālpārā are either pure Kōch having Mongoloid physiognomy or a mixed breed with a preponderance of Mongoloid elements²⁷⁶. This would be evident also from Haddon's observation as well. He says that the Rājbaṁśi-Maghs of the Chittagong hills are frankly Mongoloid and their cephalic and nasal indices are 83 and 74.9 respectively. But the Kōchs are not so in regard to their cephalic and nasal indices which are 75.2 and 76.6²⁷⁷. In other words, the Chittagong Maghs belong to the Brachy-mesorrhine stock and the Kōchs to mesocephaly-mesorrhine type. But Haddon has pointed out in no uncertain terms that 'in eastern Bengal Mongoloid traits become apparent and the population is mesocephalic (C.I. 75.2 - 79) and mesorrhine (N.I. 70.3-80.5²⁷⁸). This is most appropriately applicable to the Kōchs or Rājbaṁśis of North Bengal as well. The exact position of the Kōchs in this respect has been thus pointed out by Gait : "There seems to be no doubt that the true Kōchs were a Mongoloid race, very closely allied to the Mechs are Gāros; and we find that in Jalpāiguri, Coochbihār and Goālpārā, the persons now known as Rājbaṁśis are either pure Kōchs who, though dark, have a distinctly Mongoloid physiognomy, or else a mixed breed in which the Mongoloid element preponderates²⁷⁹".

This view is also largely corroborated by somatic measurements taken by Datta on the Kōchs and Rājbaṁśis of Assam. Datta found out

dolichocephaly (72-83 C.I) and leptorrhine to mesorrhine (75-80) amongst the Kōchs and the Rājbañśis²⁸⁰. It has also pointed out by him that the Kōchs and the Rājbañśis have the largest number of brachycephalic element and in this respect, they are not different from the Brāhmaṇas and Kāyasthas. Lastly, Datta observes that the Kōch and the Mech people who were originally hill tribes migrated to North Bengal and that these peoples of Bengal and Assam belong to the same community. It may be also construed that the Kōch and Mech peoples who were originally mountainous tribes infiltrated into North Bengal long before.

The Kōchs or the Rājbañśis or the Mech and other allied peoples of North Bengal do not at present form any homogeneous racial group. They are primarily heterogeneous both linguistically and ethnically. In other words, they are of Australoid-cum-Mongolo-Dravidian origins. It can not be, however, denied that the Mongoloid ethnic elements predominate amongst the Kōchs or Rājbañśis. Taking into consideration their original habitat and affiliation with the Bodos, it may be also stated that the Kōchs were originally Mongoloid peoples who entered into Bengal and mingled with other peoples and were thereby largely responsible for the introduction of Mongoloid racial elements into the composition of the Bengali people.

(ix) Identity :

The word Kōch is now considered even by those very peoples who belong to this community as a contemptible one, and accordingly, they have started calling themselves Rājbañśis. Even the name Coochbihār has been changed into Nijvihār. Despite this general tendency prevailing amongst them, the peoples bearing the name Kōch are still to be found in different parts of North Bengal. The Kōchs who were recorded as such in 1941 Census Report belong mostly to East Bengal and only about 4000 in West Bengal. As early as 1891, Risley could make the Kōch identical with the Rājbañśis, the Pāliyas and Deśis, and in 1872, Dalton made the Mech identical with the Kōch²⁸¹. Dalton is also of opinion that the Mech and the Kāchāri are the same people and of identical origins²⁸². Even today in Goālpārā district, an area is called Mechpārā which

is certainly derived from the Mech people. But these peoples have started calling themselves Rājbaṁśis. They are also to be found in Nepal, Bhutan and Duar areas as well. They possess a fairer skin-colour than the Kōch and markedly Mongoloid characters resembling more particularly the Mags and the Burmese. Again, the Mech appear to have kin-relation with the present Bāgdis of Bengal as well. Their three subcastes named as Machhu, Mechhuā and Mechho bear linguistic semblance with the term Mech²⁸³.

Regarding the Rājbaṁśis, it has been already pointed out that they are mostly to be found concentrated in Coochbihār and its neighbouring regions, and that they were originally of Kōch origins²⁸⁴. Besides, the Pāliyas are also of Kōch origins, and now they have formed a sub-caste. Risley has, however, stated that though the Rājbaṁśi and the Paliya are convertible terms, socially some differences may be noticed more particularly in respect of the higher position claimed by the former. The Pāliyas are mostly to be found in the districts of North Bengal, particularly in the districts of Dinājpur and Maldah²⁸⁵. The Pāliyas are today divided into two groups called Sādhu-Pāliya and Bābū-Pāliya, the latter eats pork, crocodile, lizards and indulges in strong drinks²⁸⁶. But all these food-articles are forbidden to the former group. The Deśi is another sub-caste of the Kōch people who claim superiority over the Pāliyas²⁸⁷. The peoples belonging to this community are mostly to be found in Dinājpur district²⁸⁸.

It would thus appear that the ancient Kōch peoples of Bengal have undergone considerable transformations and changes into a number of groups and sub-groups bearing different names, but originally coming from the same stock. These are the Rājbaṁśis, Pāliyas, Deśis, etc. Even the people bearing the name Kōch still survive in different parts of North Bengal. But they call themselves Rājbaṁśi or belonging to the royal family, and fictitious stories have been invented to justify such claims which have been put forward only when they were brought within the Brahmanical fold. Those who are still bearing the Kōch name are, however, regarded as socially inferior in the Brahmanical social order.

It would be also evident that different groups and sub-groups of the Kōch community have retained their original name or names despite their assimilation of many Brahmanical norms, rites and practices. Not only that, inspite of their entrance into the Brahmanical fold, their traditional beliefs and practices still persist in their daily life and activities. Accordingly, it may be contended that though the Kōchs and other allied peoples of Bengal who have got entrance into the Brahmanical fold have been treated as Bengalees yet they can not be said to have been completely Brahmanized. There is, however, little doubt that in course of time they will be fully integrated within the Hindu framework.

(x) Observation :

From the above discussions it would be evident that the Kōch or Mech or Rājbaṁśī community which still persists in different parts of Bengal within the general framework of Brahmanism was in ancient times composed of distinctly Mongoloid peoples coming from North and North-eastern regions and even establishing their political supremacy in different parts of Bengal for sometimes. In ancient times, the Koch peoples had a wider distribution over all parts of Bengal and her neighbouring regions, and the bulk of these peoples was absorbed within the Bengali cultural fold while others were pushed out and compelled to take refuge in hilly regions where they still enjoy a predominant position. One of such regions is of course the veritable Coochbihār which is even today a stronghold of the Kōch peoples who are now known as Rājbaṁśīs. In respect of their language, manners and customs and religious behaviour patterns, the Kōch or Rājbaṁśīs have been largely Brahmanized and transformed into fullfledged Bengalees. But the most notable feature of this transformation is of course the retention of their original name, i.e., Kōch or Rājbaṁśī and some traditional beliefs, rites and practices which are certainly non-Brahmanical in nature and character. It has been also found out that in respect of their ethnic affiliations, the Kōch and the Mech peoples were definitely of Mongoloid origins. But during the process of integration within the Brahmanical or rather Bengali community, their physical characters have also undergone considerable changes. This has been possible because of a large scale intermixture with other peoples of Bengal. It is in this respect that the Kōchs like other Mongoloid

peoples did make no meagre contribution in the ethnic composition of the Bengali people. If admixtures with other peoples had taken place to a large extent, the Kōchs might have also contributed largely some of their cultural traits in the general mould of the Bengali culture. It has been pointed out by Safer that the ancient languages of Aṅga, Vaṅga and Kaliṅga were analogous to the Mech language²⁸⁹. The Padavinyās and Uchhāran in Bengali language appear to have been the contributions of the Mech people. It is really interesting to note that some have even derived the word Vaṅga (Bengal) from the Mech term Vāṅg+lā as already referred to. In religion, Tantricism and the worship of Śiva and Śakti appear to have been lasting contributions of the Mech people. Further, in North Bengal the Mechs have given their name to the Mechi river, and in Assam, a large tract is called Mechpārā and its owners call themselves Rājbaṁśis and refuse to admit any connection with the Mech peoples²⁹⁰. Most significantly, the Kōchs or the Kambojas did succeed to secure such a prominent position that they could build their own kingdoms, and in later times, they did successfully withstand the violent onrush of the Muslim invaders. It is true that they failed ultimately and were ousted from their positions, but their valiant fighting against the Muslims and their devout patronage to the cause of spreading Brahmanical religion and culture in Bengal and outside bears ample testimony to their assimilation or integration within the general framework of Bengali culture and religion which they patronised and which is still being zealously guarded by them against all sorts of hindrances. In reality, it has been rightly pointed out by Risley that the Kōch (Rājbaṁśis) have been no doubt branded as one of the low castes, to which they were transformed, but they have preserved their original tribal name and many of their characteristic customs modifying their animistic practices more and more in the direction of orthodox Hinduism and ordering their patterns of life in accordance with the same model²⁹¹. Like some other foreigners in India, the Kōchs (Rājbaṁśis) have been also recognised as belonging to a Kshatriya clan and in fact, they claim themselves to be Kshatriyas, though they are classed even today with the low caste groups of the Brahmanical social hierarchy.

IV. GENERAL OBSERVATION

The above discourse on the extra-Indian tribes pouring into Bengal from North-eastern and Northern direction relates to only five tribal communities like the Kirātas, the Kambojas, the Kōch, the Mech and the Rājvaṁśis. Of these the last four communities are all cognate peoples, and they are very often treated as one and the same. The appellations Kōch and Mech appear to have been the original tribal names. The remaining two other names, i.e., the Kambojas and the Rājvaṁśis are later adaptations, the latter being of recent origins. The Kambojas are no doubt mentioned and described in the early records as the people of North-west India. There might have been an infiltration of the Kambojas into Bengal from North-west in the train of the army of the kings of Upper India who had directed their military operations against Bengal. But a greater possibility of the incoming of the Kambojas into Bengal from North-eastern direction has been explored and found out on the basis of basic historical facts that there was also a Kamboja territory in the North-eastern region. The political-cum-cultural role played by the Kambojas in the history of Bengal indicates that they had swept down on the plains of Bengal from the North-eastern direction. Attempts have been also made to show that they rose into prominence in Bengal's history and seized even political power from the Pāla rulers of Bengal. Not only that, they also intermarried with the Pālas and thereby integrated themselves in the social fabric of Bengal.

Even the Kōch people came into prominence in Bengal and yielded considerable power and influence. Being pressed by other dominant peoples and invaders from outside the Kōchs had to retreat to Northern Bengal where they succeeded in carving out a principality of their own. This principality became actually named after them as Coochbihār which has been their strongest citadel from very early times. Even today the Kōch people predominate over this region. But the Kōchs are also to be found today spread over other parts of Bengal.

With Brahmanization, the Kōch people came under the direct influence of the Brahmanical culture. They have been no doubt brought within the Brahmanical fold, but relegated to a very low social position in the social hierarchy of Bengal. In fact, they have been included within the category of the Patita or untouchables. In the Brahmavaivarta-purāṇa, the Kōch (Koñcha) has been described as the issue of the union of a Tivara female and a Māmsachchedin male (butcher) and classed as Patita. But in the 19th century classified caste orders of Bengal, the Kōch has been placed under the category called Sat-sūdra (clean Sūdra) and placed under class II. It is difficult to understand as to how the Kōch could be elevated to the Sat-sūdra class. Risely, has, however, included them within his class VI category, i.e., the lowest order of the Hindu social hierarchy of Bengal.

As to their social elevation, it may be noted that the Kōch people were no doubt brought within the Brahmanical fold and transformed into a caste of a very low order. In course of time, they became considerably impregnated with the Brahmanical socio-religious ideas and practices. Hence arose the question of heightening their social status. Accordingly, diverse attempts were made to raise their social status by tracing origins from mythical figures. The Kōch have in recent years started calling themselves Rājvaṁśis (belonging to the royal family). Not only that, they even claim to be Kshatriyas. These claims bear, however, little historical credence. In fact, even today all the Kōch people are not Rājvaṁśis. Many of the Kōch people still retain their old traditional name, of course artificial social differentiations have been created to separate the Rājvaṁśis from the Kōch people. It is, however, to be admitted that the Rājvaṁśis have become more imbued with Brahmanism than the Kōch. They have assimilated Brahmanical ideas, rituals, sectarian beliefs and many other social norms. Even they have gone to the extent of adopting the Brahmanical Gotra-names. It is, however, to be noted that they have not yet fully succeeded in absorbing the characteristic traits of the Brahmanical Gotra system. As for instance, they all claim to belong to the Kāśyapa-gotra, but they intermarry. This is strictly tabooed in the Brahmanical society because the Gotra is always exogamous. Yet, the Kambojas are making serious attempts to integrate themselves within the Brahmanical society, and very

soon, they would be in a position to adopt other Gotra-names with the purpose of adhering to the exogamous rules, and they would be accordingly recognised as a fullfledged Brahmanical caste. But the Kōch people are, however, as yet far from being impregnated with the Brahmanical religious and social norms like the Rājvaṁśīs. In spite of the Brahmanical influence, the Kōchs have still retained their original/traditional social norms and religious behaviour patterns. Even the Rājvaṁśīs who are very close to the Brahmanical culture adopting certain chief Brahmanical norms have also retained some of their basic traditional norms and values of life. Though not yet fully transformed into a fullfledged Brahmanical caste, the Rājvaṁśīs have all throughout championed the cause of Brahmanism and upheld it. In fact, the Rājvaṁśīs have through centuries acted as a bulwark against all sorts of onslaughts on Brahmanism.

The image of the Kirātas as can be viewed from the available materials is, however, different from that of the Kōch and the Rājvaṁśīs. The Kirātas are the most ancient people who swooped down on the plains of Bengal from North or North-eastern directions. They came to Bengal long before the Mech, the Kōch/Rājvaṁśīs, etc., and spread over her different parts. It was because of their wanderings and settlements over different parts of Bengal that the Kirātas had the advantage of mingling largely with all other peoples who were either indigenes or subsequent immigrants from outside. The intermingling of the Kirātas with other peoples was on such a large scale that they lost their identity completely. Those who failed either to intermingle with others or to withstand the onrush of a superior or aggressive culture retreated and took refuge in the periphery hilly regions of Bengal wherein their surviving remnants under the same/modified names are still to be found. But in Bengal proper, there is hardly any firm clue regarding their identity. The name Kirāta is, however, very familiar with all sections of the Bengali people. Even in most of the early and later literary records the Kirātras figure markedly. It follows accordingly that the Kirātas were one of the ancient peoples of Bengal and that they came to Bengal from outside, either from North-east or North as can be gleamed from the early literary accounts.

Despite their heavy intermixture with many other peoples, the Kirātas as such have been mostly referred to in a contemptuous manner. They

have been mostly counted as Mlechchhas and downtrodden along with the Śavāras, the Pulindas, etc. It appears that during the time of Manu their position was considerably enhanced by counting them along with other foreigners as a subdivision of the Śūdra. In the Manusamhitā, it is stated that the Kirāta is a Kshatriya, but reduced to the position of the Śūdra because of the non-performance of rites and non-contact with the Brāhmaṇas. This shows that like several other foreign tribes the Kirātas were also given a position in the society. Though condemned and relegated to a very low social position, the Kirātas have been largely known as skilful warriors and men of fiery valour. Besides, it has been also shown that the Kirātas were great devotees of Śiva and Śakti. In fact, the Mother Goddess cults appear to have been the creations of the Kirātas. In the development of Śakti cult and Tantricism in Bengal the contribution of the Kirātas is the foremost. In many other matters as well, the Kirāta contributions have been most marked and lasting.

That the Kirātas belonged to the Mongoloid ethnic stock is well-attested to by the description of their physical features and also by the anthropometric study of their surviving remnants. It may be said that the Mongoloid elements in the composition of the Bengali people and culture have been quite considerable and lasting, traces of which are still marked. Most of the Mongoloid elements that are found in Bengali people and culture have been the veritable contributions of the ancient Kirātas who started entering into the plains of Bengal from indeterminable times. All other Mongoloid peoples coming from North-east or North were subsequent infiltrators. The Kambojas, the Mech, etc., bearing Mongoloid physical features and cultural traits have not only made their position strongly felt in Bengal, but also succeeded in retaining their identity to a considerable extent even under the pressing impact of Brahmanization.

It has been already discussed in the Chapter on 'Aborigines' that many other Mongoloid tribal communities infiltrated into Bengal at different times from North-east, North and South-east of Bengal. All of them have left their traces, and many of them are still surviving in different parts of Bengal. Their contributions in the physical makeup and cultural set up of the Bengali people are not also negligible.

Leaving aside the tribal communities entering into Bengal from North-east and North, a host of foreign tribes belonging to diverse ethnic and cultural groups entered into India through North-west and proceeded up to Bengal. Some of these tribes who came and settled in Bengal under various circumstances have been treated in the section that follows.

B. TRIBAL COMMUNITIES FROM NORTH-WEST

Besides the tribes as discussed above and those in the preceding Chapters, many other foreign tribes entered into India through North-west of India and gradually spread over different parts of North India. Some of these tribal communities had also moved towards East and infiltrated into Bengal under various circumstances, particularly as mercenary soldiers in the army of the ruling monarchs. The tribal communities settling in Bengal were all ultimately absorbed in the Bengali people in various ways. It may be noted that most of these foreign tribes did come to Bengal in the train of the expeditionary forces led by the invaders from Upper India. Naturally, they had to move about from place to place under the directives of their employers. The foreign tribal communities in Bengal coming from Upper India mostly belong to this category. Besides, a second category of foreign tribals consisted of those who perhaps came down to Bengal in search of their means of livelihood. Here, an account of some of these foreign communities of Bengal have been treated with the purpose of showing as to how various tribal communities of foreign origins entered into India and moved into Bengal, and in course of time they all mingled with other peoples and made their respective contributions in ethnic and cultural compositions of Bengal. A perusal of the presence in Bengal of these foreign tribes belonging to diverse ethnic and cultural groups is indeed a desideratum for a proper understanding of diverse foreign elements composing the people and culture of Bengal. Amongst many, a treatment of some of these foreign tribal communities has been made here. These are : the Yavanas and the Mlechchhas, the Khasas, the Śakas (and the Murāṇḍas), the Hūṇas, the Chīnas, the Ābhiras and the Turushkas.

Besides, the Hāthigumphā inscription mentions Yavandarājadimita²⁹⁸. From all these references it becomes clear that the term Yavana actually denotes the Greeks. But the term Yavana might not have been always used in the sense of the Greeks. As for instance, Stein expressed the opinion that the Yavanas mentioned in the Nāsik inscription were not the Greeks, but the Indians of a Greek Polis²⁹⁹.

Some scholars are also of opinion that the term Yavana is a derivation from a Persian word Yauna. The Persians became acquainted with the Greeks through the Ionian colonists whom they called Yauna, i.e., Ionian. The term also occurs in the inscriptions of Darius to denote the Greeks. Accordingly, it has been contended that the Indians borrowed the term Yavana from the Persians who occupied certain parts of North-Western India. It is very significant to note in this context that the Persian word Yauna actually occurs in the Mahābhārata (XII.207.43) wherein the Yaunas have been mentioned along with the Gandhāras, Kirātas and Barbaras. From these it has been supposed that the term Yavana actually meant the Persians. Accordingly, Bhandarkar argued that in early times the term Yavana denoted the Greeks only, but from the second century A.D. the term was used to denote the Persians as well³⁰⁰. Thomas has expressed the opinion that the Indians never made any distinction between the Persians and the Greeks, i.e., Yavanas³⁰¹. Besides, in the Junāgaḍ inscription there is a reference to Yavandarāja-Tushaspha, a Persian name. Against this, it has been argued that the name itself does not always indicate the nationality to which a person belongs. As for instance, Yavanas and the name Vāsudeva (Kushāna king) is a Hindu name. But he actually Pāraśikas belonged to the Kushāna community. Similarly, many inscriptions refer to the Hindu names of the Yavana king like Chamda or Chandra³⁰². But the fact is that the Persians were separately known to the Indians as Pārsavah from the R̥gvedic times onwards³⁰³. Accordingly, it may be contended that the term Yavana denotes the Greeks and the Pāraśikas, the Persians. This is also supported by Kālidāsa who in his Raghuvamśa distinguishes the country of the Pāraśikas from that of the Yavanas. Besides, it has been stated that Raghu had to cross the Yavana country with which he had no desire to fight, but simply to frighten the Yavana girls and cause temporary cessation of merry-making amongst the Yavanas. Again, in the Mudrārākshasa (Act-II) the Yavanas have been mentioned along with the Kirātas, the Kambojas,

the Pārasīkas, etc. Here the Yavanas and the Pārasīkas have been mentioned as separate peoples. Similarly, Varāhamihira also distinguishes the Yavanas from the Pārasāvas³⁰⁴. Pādatādika-bhāna (5th A.D) distinguishes also the Pārasīkas from the Yavanas. Vākpatirāja in the 8th Century refers to the Pārasīkas and the Yavanas as conquered by his master. Even as late as Alberunī, the term Pārasāva has been used in the sense of the Persians. From all these references it appears that the Persians and the Greeks were denoted by the Indians under two different terms, and the two are not always identical.

In later literatures and inscriptions the denotation and connotation of the term Yavana have been, however, widely extended to include all the foreigners who were known to the Indians and who came and settled in India. In Bengal, the Yavanas have been equated with the term Melechchha bearing a still wider connotation including also the Muslims. This would be evident from the study of the Bṛhaddharma-purāṇa and the later Sena inscriptions³⁰⁵.

Yavanas and But in some other inscriptions and literary records the Yavanas
Mlechchhas and the Mlechchhas have been mentioned separately. As for instance, both the Mlechchhas and the Yavanas are described to have sprung from the body of Veṇa³⁰⁶. Even the Yavana has been described as one of the sons of Mlechchha. Again, it is learnt from the Sena inscriptions that Lakshmanasena claimed victories over the Mlechchha king and his sons, against the Yavanas. Here the two terms appear to have been used with analogous meanings.

It follows that in ancient times, the term Yavana was first used to denote only the Greeks and subsequently, even the Persians have been also sometimes vaguely referred to by the same expression. When the Muslims came to India and established their political authority, they came to be also widely called Yavanas. Still later on, even all the peoples coming from West European countries have also been largely called by the term Yavana. In other words, it appears that the term Yavana was/is used as a generic name Yavana : a to denote all the foreigners who came to India. Since all these
generic name foreigners were outside the pale of the Brahmanical culture, they were all looked down with contempt. Accordingly, the term Yavana bearing contemptuous import has been all throughout used to designate the foreigners.

(iii) Origins :

Historically speaking, the Yavanas in the beginning were indeed the Greeks, and naturally, they were of Greek origins. But when they came and settled in India and became integrated within the fold of Brahmanism, many myths were created to explain the origin of the Yavanas with a view to give them a stamp of Indianness. In the Rāmāyana, it has been stated that the Yavanas, the Pulindas, the Śakas and the Kambojas came out of the tail of the Kāmadhenu (cow granting all desires). Again, from the Mahābhārata and Matsya-purāna (1.85.34;34.30) it is learnt that the king Yayāti cursed his four sons and gave the throne to his youngest son. The descendants of these four sons were the Yādavas, the Yavanas, the Bhōjas and the Mlechchhas. Here, the Yavanas and the Mlechchhas have been distinguished. Further, the Yavanas, the Pulindas, the Khasas, etc., have been described as the sons of Mlechchha who sprang from the body of Veṇa³⁰⁷. It is very interesting to note that by making Yavana, a son of Mlechchha, the identical bearings of both the terms have been made. It becomes further clear that the term Mlechchha has been always a generic name used to denote all the foreign peoples who were considered by the Indians as barbarians and unclean or Mlechchha foreigner, i.e., not included within the Brahmanical/Hindu cultural fold. Later on, when the Yavanas were assimilated within the Brahmanical fold, an attempt was made to establish their origin from the Pratiloma - union between a Kshatriya female and a Śūdra male^{307a}.

It appears that the Yavanas were largely Indianized and regarded as members of the Hindu community by tracing their origin from the aforesaid Pratiloma-union. According to Gautama, Yavana originated from^a Śūdra male and Kshatriya female (IV.17). But the mythical stories and the subsequent recording of their birth from the said union for tracing the origin of the Assimilation Yavanas are absolutely bereft of any historical bearings. This is the usual process/method of Hinduizing the foreign peoples. In reality, the Yavanas were all foreigners, and there is little doubt that they mingled with peoples of different caste orders and became assimilated within the Hindu fold.

The assimilation of the Yavanas was perhaps largely complete, but the social position attributed to them appears to have been very low. There is little doubt that they were all included in the Śūdra community. Patañjali in his Mahābhāṣya describes the Yavanas as Anirvasita-śūdra, i.e., pure or clean Śūdras. But in the Manusmṛiti (X.43-44) the Yavanas along with some other foreign tribes have been described as Kshatriyas degraded to the position of the Vrshala for their non-performance of rituals or non-adherence to the Samśkāras and neglect of the Brāhmaṇas. Patañjali makes the Yavanas clean Śūdras and Manu, degraded Kshatriyas. This kind of attribution of the caste-order has been most arbitrarily made. As for instance, another foreign tribe, namely, the Ābhīras have been described as belonging to the mixed caste. It is, however, clear that the Yavanas were given the status of the Śūdra.

(iv) Original Habitat and Dispersal :

Yavanadeśa or the country of the Yavanas were perhaps applied to Ionia, Greece, Bactria and later on, Arabia and Persia. The Yavanas or the Greeks might have originally come to India from the main land of Greece or its colonies, and in India, they became largely concentrated in North-western region and its neighbouring areas beyond the present border of the subcontinent. They mostly came to India in the wake of Alexander's invasion and became permanent dwellers in different colonies established by the Greek conqueror. Some of the colonies are now in the peripheral regions of India.

Further, in North-western region, the Yavanas did establish their kingdoms and also carried out inroads from time to time into the interior of India. A vivid account of the Yavana-inroads and devastations carried out in the Indian interior has been given in the Mahābhāṣya and the Gārgīśaṁhitā wherein it is stated that the 'Yavanāḥ dushtāvīkrāntāḥ' advanced up to Pāṭaliputra and created great disorders and confusions in different countries through which they passed³⁰⁸. That the Yavanas were concentrated in North-west and considered generally as peoples of that region is proved by both literary and epigraphic records. The Agni-purāṇa refers to the land of the Yavanas³⁰⁹. The Garuda-purāṇa, however, records that they lived in Western countries³¹⁰. In the Mahābhārata again, the Yavanas have been described as peoples of Uttarāpatha and/or Udīchyadeśa, i.e.,

of Northern India³¹¹. In the Aśokan Edicts, the Yavanas or Yonas appear to have belonged to the region on the borders of his empire. This is supported by their mention along with other communities of the region like the Kambojas, the Gandhāras, etc. The existence of the Yavanas in that region is also upheld by the account of Raghu's expedition as described by Kālidāsa in his Raghuvamśa. It is said that Raghu went by land to conquer the Pārasikas and for this, he had to cross over the Yavana country. It implies that Yavana country was beyond the border of India towards Persia.

The identity of the Yona country cannot be determined with certainty. The Mahāvamśa refers to it and its chief city Alasanda, i.e., Alexandria (Begram, west of Kāpiśā). Bactria, i.e., Balkh which is to be equated with Balhika was indeed a great stronghold of the Yavanas who also held sway over Udīchya (North) and Aparānta (West). These Yavanas were no doubt Bactrian Greeks. Yavana country Milinda was the king of Śākala or Śāgala (Siālkot). It is from this region that they carried on inroads into different parts of Northern and Western India. From Aśoka's Edict XIII it is further learnt that there was no Brāhmaṇa or Śramaṇa in the Yona countries implying thereby that there were no Brahmins or Buddhist monks. On the other hand, the Majjhima-nikāya records (ii, 149) that there were two groups of people in the Yona country, namely, Ārya and Dāsa. In other words, in the Yavana country there was the absence of Chaturvarṇa. The Yavana country is also described to have produced sphaṭika (crystal).

(v) Yavanas in Bengal :

That the Yavanas moved eastward from Upper India and settled also in different parts of Bengal becomes evident from both literary and epigraphic records. In certain texts, the Yavanas have been mentioned along with other tribal communities of Bengal. In the Brhatsaṃhitā, the Yavanas have been actually mentioned along with the Vaṅgas, the Suhmas, the Śakas, the Kambojas, the Chīnas, etc. All these were distinctly peoples of Eastern India. In the Mudrārākshasa, the Yavanas have been referred to along with the Kirātas who dwelt in Bengal and North-east India. The Bhāgavata-Purāṇa refers to the Yavanas and the Khasas while describing the Suhmas³¹². It shows that the Yavanas might have settled in West Bengal. There are also certain other references to the Yavanas of Bengal in the epigraphic records. The Khālīmpur inscription of Dharmapāla refers to the Yavanas together

with other peoples who submitted to the great Pāla conqueror³¹³. The Yavanas referred to in the inscriptions do not, however, appear to have belonged to Bengal, but rather to Upper India. But a more specific information is supplied by the Kenduapāṭṇa plates which refer to the Yavanas of Rāḍha and Vārendrī who were defeated by the king of Orissa³¹⁴. It implies that the Yavanas came into prominence in both North and West Bengal. This is also supported by the Tabaqāt-i-Nāsirī³¹⁵. Further, from the Edilpur plate of Keśavasena it is learnt that the king was the god Rudra to the race of the Garga-Yavanas "on the day of destruction". Here, the term Yavana appears to have been used in the sense of the Muslim invaders³¹⁶. Besides, in the Madanapāḍā grant, Viśvarūpasena is described as Yavanānvaya-prālaya-kāla-rudra-nripaḥ³¹⁷. Lastly, a reference may be made to Paśchimabhāga inscription which records the custom prevailing among the Yavana girls as already referred to.

From all these references it is clear that the Yavanas came to Bengal from Upper India and were mostly concentrated in Western and Northern Bengal. They were perhaps mostly employed in the army as mercenary soldiers of the ruling monarchs of Bengal. Besides, some of the Yavanas who carried on military exploits up to Pāṭaliputra in the 2nd century B.C. might have also intruded into Bengal. Generally speaking, the Yavana forces employed in the military service became stationed in Bengal and subsequently got settled and were gradually assimilated and included within various caste orders. As a result, their present identity has been completely lost.

(vi) Physical Features :

Nothing positive is known about the physical features of the Yavanas. In the Dronaparva of the Mahābhārata, the Yavanas are described as having long and flowing beards. This implies that the Yavanas had plentiful facial hair. According to the Vishnu-purāṇa (IV.3.21) the Yavanas are said to have shaved their head and beard. Does this refer to their less hair on head and no facial hair ? No other details are available. But a rough idea may be formed about their physical features by a study of the sculptural or iconic representations. Such a study is, however, bereft of any anthropometric bearings. Yet, it may be said from a general study that the Yavanas were

perhaps characterised by fine features like long nose, long head, well-built, etc. Taking into consideration such features it may be presumed that the Yavanas might have belonged to the Mediterranean ethnic stock.

(vii) Culture :

No definite information regarding the general cultural patterns of the yavanas are, however, obtainable from the available sources. According to the Harivaṁśa they are said to have lived in the forest, but this is not applicable to all the Yavanas because it is known for certain that the Yavanas established kingdoms, and many of them lived in towns and cities as well and achieved great cultural attainments. There are some side-references regarding certain customs prevalent amongst the Yavanas. Kālidāsa in his Raghuvamśa has given a beautiful account of the merry-making of the Yavana girls about whom the great conqueror Raghu himself was extremely jealous. It is because of the merry-making of the Yavana girls that Raghu was attracted towards the Yavana land, and he is described to have stopped or caused its temporary cessation. Another custom prevalent amongst the Yavana women has been vividly recorded in the Paśchimabhāga inscription (10th century A.D.) of Śrīchandra of the Chandra dynasty, wherein the Yavana girls have been described as drawing lines of paintings on their breast with coloured sandal wood and saffron paste or any other fragrant substance. This was indeed a very popular custom in India known as patra, patra-bhaṅga patra-lekha, etc. Besides, in the Vishṇu-purāṇa (IV.3.21) the Yavanas are said to have shaved their head and also beard. Again, the Harivaṁśa (XIV. 15-17) describes that at the command of the king Sagara, the Yavanas shaved their head entirely (Yavanānām Śīrahsarvaṁ).

It becomes also evident from the available sources that the Yavanas were great fighters and valiant and brave soldiers not to be easily reckoned with. They did not hesitate to carry out all sorts of devastations and destructions. Their military skill and upholdings enabled them to establish political domination over different parts of North-western and Western regions. They were also endowed with administrative capabilities. Even one of the Yavanas was appointed by the great Mauryan king Aśoka as a governor. This has been referred to in the Junāgaḍ inscription of Rudradāmana, which speaks

of a Yavana Tushāspa (Aśokaisya-Mauryasy-Amte-Yavana-rājena Tushāspen
 Role = Adhishthāye³¹⁸). With great political attainments the Yavanas
 played by played a very significant role even in the political history of
 the Yavanas Northern India. Nothing is known with certain about the language of the
 Yavanas. Pāṇini (IV. 1.59) has referred to Yāvanāḥ = lipyām for the formation
 Yavanāṇī in the sense of the writing of the Greeks³¹⁹.

(viii) Identity :

The Yavanas have been identified with the Balhikas, i.e., the people
 of Balkh³²⁰. Sircar, however, places them in Kābul and Kāndāhār region³²¹.
 Agrawala further locates them in the area of Ghalcha dialects in the Pāmīr³²².
 This identification finds support from the Raghuvaṁśa of Kālidāsa³²³.

(ix) Integration and Assimilation :

It has been observed that the Yavanas were largely Indianized
 and that in the process of their assimilation diverse mythical stories have
 been created to give them the stamp of Indianness. In the Harivaṁśa and
 the Vāyu-purāṇa, it has been narrated that the Yavanas were compelled
 to change their Dharma and Veśas as a result of their defeat at the hands
 of the Ikshāku king Sagara and at whose command they shaved their heads
 entirely. This shows as to how the Yavanas were Indianized and brought
 within the fold of Brahmanism. Not only that, the Yavanas have been also
 attributed a distinct caste order in the Brahmanical social hierarchy. It
 has been already pointed out as to how their origin was traced from the
 union of a Kshatriya female and a Śūdra male and that they were recognised
 as clean Śūdras by Patañjali. But Manu has called them Vrshala or degraded
 Kshatriyas. It appears that they were originally Kshatriyas, but degraded
 to the position of the Vrshala for the non-performance of rituals and showing
 disregard or neglect towards the Brāhmaṇas. Patañjali regards the Yavanas
 and the Śakas as Śūdras, but outside Āryāvarta. In the Mahābhārata, (Śtriparva)
 they are associated with the Śakas and other non-Aryan tribal communities,
 and it has been stated that Jayadratha had the Kamboja and Yavana women
 in his harem. The Yavanas also adopted Vaishnavism and Buddhism. The
 Besnagar inscription refers to Yona Heliodora, son of Diya as a Bhāgavata³²⁴.
 Besides, the Nāsik and Kārlē cave inscriptions record the names of the Yavanas

as donors³²⁵. From these inscriptions it can be gathered that many Yavanas became converts to Buddhism.

From the above, it follows that the Yavanas were outside the pale of Aryan culture, and they may be regarded as one of non-Aryan tribals who were assimilated within the Brahmanical fold and included in the Śūdra community. They were no doubt absorbed within the fold of Brahmanical culture, but were apparently given a low social position. It is only after their absorption that the duties and occupations of the Yavanas were specifically prescribed. The Mahābhārata (Śāntiparva, 65.17-22) lays down for the Yavanas and the cognate tribes the duties of obedience to parents and attendance on teachers and tending cattle and looking after agriculture, dedication of wells and making gifts to Dviṣas, Ahimsā, Satya, absence of fury, Sañcha, Adroha, maintenance of wife and child³²⁶. This is what happened also in Bengal where the number of the Yavanas was not sufficiently large, and they were all absorbed and included within different low caste orders of the Hindu Society. This becomes evident from Atri who puts receiving of gifts from or eating the food of or having sexual intercourse with women of the Yavanas, the Śakas, the Kambojas, etc., or the same level with doing the same things with reference to Naṭa, Nartaka, Śvapāka, etc. Again, Aparaka states that the touch of the Mlechchhas is on the level with that of the Chāṇḍāla, the Bhilla etc.³²⁷. It follows that the Yavanas were practically reduced to the position of the untouchables. By their amalgam with other peoples, the Yavanas lost their separate identity no doubt, but their contribution in the ethnic and cultural composition of the Bengali people has been considerable.

II. THE MLECHCHHAS

Along with the Yavanas another tribal community which is very often referred to in both epigraphic and literary records is called by a generic name Mlechchha. The term Mlechchha is derived from Mlechchh+a (ach)-ka. The word Mlechchha has been used to denote a language and also its speakers.

(i) Language and Peoples :

The expression Mlechchhabhāshā or Parabhāshā is commonly used in the sense of a corrupt speech or non-Aryan language or a language, unintelligible to the Aryans. Accordingly, the Mlechchha language has been very much decried upon, and in the Dharmaśāstras and other texts, the use of this language by an Aryan has been strictly prohibited. Even in the Satapatha-Brāhmaṇa it has been stated that the Asuras were defeated because of their utterances of the corrupt speech, i.e., Mlechchhabhāshā³²⁸. The Dharmaśāstras have, however, categorically stated that a corrupt word is Mlechchha, and one should not study the language of the Mlechchhas³²⁹. In Vasīṣṭha's Mlechchha Dharmaśūtra (VI.41) it has been enjoined that one should not even learn the Mlechchha dialect. Similarly, according to Gautama a Brāhmaṇa must not utter Mlechchha language, and if he does so, he would also become a Mlechchha. It has been also enjoined that one should not speak with a Mlechchha or speak in a Mlechchha language. Manu has been more specific in this respect when he refers to a number of tribal communities who spoke both the Mlechchha language and that of the Āryas. Such tribes included among others the Pundrakas, the Yavanas, the Śakas, the Kambojas, the Pāradas, the Kirātas,³³⁰ etc. It would appear that all these tribes were originally speakers of the non-Aryan language, and it is only after their Hinduization that they might have adopted the Aryan speech.

But the term Mlechchha is also used in the sense of Mlechchhajāti or a community or group of peoples who speak in Mlechchha language. Such tribal communities were too many to be enumerated. Manu (X,43-45) prescribes that the speakers of the Mlechchhabhāshā are to be reckoned as the Dasyus. Besides, the term Mlechchha has been also used in a generic sense denoting lawless peoples who are bereft of any moral customs. Accordingly, in some texts the term Mlechchha denotes the barbarians or foreigners in general. Very often the Mlechchha has been also identified with the Yavana (Mlechchhāhi Yavanāh). Again, the term Mlechchha has been used in the sense of any foreigner. In some medieval texts, both the terms, Yavana and Mlechchha, have been used as synonymous denoting any foreigner. Not only that, even several primitive tribal communities who were mostly of foreign extractions have been also specifically branded as the Mlechchhas.

Pulindā nahalā nishtyah Śavarā Varutā bhatā/Mālā Bhillāh Kirātāscha Sarvvechapi Mlechchhajātayah. Besides, in the early medieval period the term has been used in a still wider sense. Alberunī in the 11th century used the term Mlechchha to denote the Arabs, and subsequently in Bengal, the Muslims have been widely called as Mlechchhas or Yavanas in a contemptuous sense.

(ii) Origins :

As the term Mlechchha was used in a wider connotation marking out even a number of tribal communities of foreign extractions, it is very difficult to specifically trace and determine their origins. It would be, however, evident from a perusal of the Indian texts that the Mlechchhas were largely brought within the Hindu fold, and it is only after their Hinduization that prescriptions have been perhaps laid down for tracing their origins. In the Mahābhārata there is the narration of a mythical story wherein Yayāti is stated to have cursed his four sons and gave the throne to the youngest one. The descendants of these four brothers became the Yādavas, the Yavanas, the Bhojas and the Mlechchhas³³¹. Subsequently, the origin of the Mlechchhas has been ascribed to a Pratiloma-union between a Brāhmaṇa woman and a Vaiśya³³² male. In the Sūta-saṁhitā, a Mlechchha is described as the offspring of a clandestine union between a Brahmin female and a Vaiśya male^{332a}. This was done only after their integration within the Brahmanical fold.

(iii) Habitat and Dispersal :

The land of the Mlechchhas has been described as Mlechchhadeśa, which lies beyond the Āryāvarta. In the Dharmaśāstras, the land wherein the Chaturvarṇa or the institution of the four Varṇas does not exist is the Mlechchhadeśa. Thus the Mlechchhadeśa has been more specifically described in the works of Manu and Viṣṇu (2.23 ; 84.4) as a country wherein the Mlechchhas lived and wherein is the absence of Chaturvarṇa and which is devoid of Śiṣṭāchāra (pure conduct) and which is Antadeśa (Chaturvarṇayāvas-thanam yasmin deśe na vidyate Mlechchhadeśaḥ sa vijñeyah Āryāvarta-stahparam³³³). Again, the Mlechchhas have been described as the people of Udichyadeśa in the Mahābhārata³³⁴. Varāhamihira, however, places the Mlechchha country in the Western division (Nirmāṇyādā: Mlechchhā ye paśchima dik sthitāste cha³³⁵). That the Mlechchhas were in Western

India is also attested to by the Junāgaḍ inscription of Skandagupta. Besides, the Mlechchhas are also to be associated with the North-eastern region. This becomes evident also from the Mahābhārata wherein Bhagadatta has been described as the leader of the Chīnas, the Mlechchhas, etc., and Bhīma is stated to have defeated the Mlechchha ruler³³⁶. Then again, the Mlechchha land is also to be located in the Himalayas. Even the holy place in the land of the Mlechchhas in the Hīmalayas has been referred to as the one at Lohar-gala (Kumaon³³⁷). Most interestingly, Haradatta states that the Mlechchhas were the peoples of Ceylon and other countries where the four Varna system does not exist³³⁸. Besides all these, the Mlechchha-land is also equated with the Muslim world. Makran has been described as Mahā-Mlechchha-parāyana and Khurasan (Iraq) as Mlechchhamārga-parāyana³³⁹. On the whole, the Mlechchhas are to be associated with the West and generally speaking, Bahlīka-deśa has been recognised as the land par-excellence of the Mlechchhas. It was from this region that the Mlechchhas might have dispersed in all directions.

(iv) Mlechchhas in Bengal

The Mlechchhas had also come to Bengal from Upper India, but unfortunately references to the presence of the Mlechchhas in Bengal are very few. If the Mlechchhas are to be located in the North-eastern region as early as the 5th or 6th century A.D. as referred to in the Mahābhārata, there is little justification of denying their non-existence in Bengal as well. The available epigraphic evidences in early medieval period, i.e., during the time of the Senas and the Chandras are also meagre. The Sena king's court-poet Umāpatidhara and Śaraṇa describe the expedition of an unnamed king who is stated to have conquered Prāgyōtisha, Gauḍa, Kālīṅga, Kāśī, Magadha, Chedi and Mlechchharāja³⁴⁰. This unnamed king has been identified with Lakshmaṇasena, and the Mlechchharāja in that case might have been one belonging to the family of Bhagadatta of Kāmarūpa. Besides, in the inscriptions of the Chandras, there is a reference to the Mlechchhas. It is stated in the inscription that Kalyāna Chandra caused shedding of 'big tears' in the eyes of the Mlechchhas. It is learnt from the Maynāmātī plate of Govinda Chandra that Kalyāna Chandra made the river Lauhitya redoubled by tears dropping down from the eyes of the Mlechchha ladies who were agitated owing to the killing of their husbands³⁴¹. These Mlechchhas might have been the

Muslims as well. But by that time, the Muslims did not come in such a large number in East Bengal. It, however, follows that the Mlechchhas were defeated by the Chandra kings. Even long before the coming of the Muslims into Bengal, the Mlechchhas as members of a tribal community did settle in different parts of Bengal and became merged with the Bengali people and formed a caste bearing the same name within Brahmanical fold. This becomes evident from the Brahmavaivarta-purāṇa which describes the Mlechchha caste under the category Patita, and in the Jātimālā he is described to have been born of a union between a Brāhmaṇa male and a Tivara female.

(v) Culture :

The Mlechchhas were undoubtedly foreigners, and they have been described by Parāśara as eaters of cow's³⁴² flesh. That the Mlechchhas were foreigners becomes also evident from the very fact that their land lay beyond Āryāvarta, and that it was an impure country not to be visited by any person and wherein no Śrāddha-rite is to be performed³⁴³. Further, it is learnt from the Arthaśāstra (III.13) of Kaṭilya that the Mlechchhas incur no blame by selling their children, and as such, they are not to be punished. It follows from these prescriptions that the Mlechchhas pursued also the practice of selling their children. Again, Devala prescribes purificatory rites for a woman raped by the Mlechchhas. This perhaps refers to the Muslims. From these few references and their association with other foreign peoples, it may be reasonably upheld that Mlechchhas were of foreign extractions.

(vi) Identity :

It is very difficult to identify the Mlechchhas with any particular tribal community of today. It has been already observed that the term Mlechchha is a generic one denoting several tribes of foreign origins who were condemned and considered impure peoples. Yet, there are certain positive indications in the Dharmasūtras and other texts which hint at the very existence of a tribal community by the name Mlechchha. It is only after Hinduization that the Mlechchha has been ascribed an origin to the Pratiloma-union. From this it follows that originally there was perhaps one tribal community known by the name Mlechchha, and it was only in a subsequent period that the connotation of the term was widened to include a host of foreign peoples. Sircar on the basis of philological similarity identifies the Mlechchha with

the Mech people ruling in Assam from the middle of the 7th to 11th century³⁴⁴ A.D. But unfortunately, excepting philological analogy, there is no other concrete evidence for this identification. If the identification is accepted, the Mlechchhas are to be placed in North-eastern India. But it has been already observed that the original stronghold of the Mlechchhas was in Western India, and they might have entered into India along with the Śakas and other peoples through North-west. It is from Upper India that they perhaps moved to Bengal and North-eastern India. Besides, it has been already discussed that the Mech people are the cognates of the Kambojas and other associated tribals. It is quite likely that even these peoples have been also subsequently called Mlechchhas. In this connection, attention may be drawn to a passage of the Vishnu-purāṇa wherein "Sagara is described to have made the Yavanas to shave their heads entirely; the Śakas, he compelled to shave the upper half of the head ; the Pāradas wore their hair long and the Pahlavas let their beards grow in obedience to his command. Then also other Kshatriya races, he deprived of the established usages of oblations to fire and study of the Vedas; and that separated from religious rite and abandoned by the Brāhmaṇas, these different tribes became Mlechchhas³⁴⁵". Here, it has been thus specifically stated that the Yavanas, the Śakas, the Pāradas and the Pahlavas were the Mlechchhas par-excellence. In that case, the Mlechchhas are to be associated with all these foreign tribals who entered into India through North-western region and established their strongholds in the Pāñjāb and Western India. There is therefore little justification of any presumption regarding the affiliation of the Mech people with the Mlechchhas.

(vii) Physical Features :

It is not possible to say anything distinctly about the physical features of the Mlechchhas. If the cognate tribal communities are taken into consideration, it may be presumed that the Mlechchhas were basically Mongoloid peoples, and they might have possessed characteristic traits of the Mongoloid ethnic stock. In this respect, the Mlechchhas may be distinguished from the Yavanas who might have been of Greek or Persian affiliation.

(viii) Assimilation :

Leaving aside the question of any specific identity of the Mlechchhas, it may be contended that the Mlechchhas appear to have been fully assimilated and given a sort of recognition by tracing their origin from a Pratiloma-union. More significantly, the origin of the Mlechchhas has been traced from a clandestine union between a Brāhmaṇa female and a Vaiśya male³⁴⁶. Not only that, in the Bhaviṣya-purāṇa, the Mlechchhas have been allowed to worship Devī and Liṅga made of clay and sand³⁴⁷. That the Mlechchhas after their assimilation were ascribed to a very low social position becomes also evident from several literary texts. They have been generally described as irreligious and impure persons, and the Āryas are not to speak with them. Even the performance of the Śrāddha-rites is not permitted in the land of the Mlechchhas. Further, their language has been always described as impure and specifically called Mlechchhabhāṣā. Even references have been made to the Paṇḍras, Yavanas and Śakas whose languages have been also branded as Mlechchhabhāṣā which is not to be uttered by the Aryans. Naturally, the people belonging to this foreign tribal community after their Indianization has been given a very low social position on a par with several other untouchable castes. This has been also specifically stated by Aparaka who prescribes that the touch of the Mlechchhas is on the same level with that of the Chāṇḍālas, the Bhīllas and the Pārasikas³⁴⁸. It follows that the Mlechchhas occupied a very low position in the society and were/are treated as untouchables. The connotation of the term Mlechchha was extended to such an extent as to include all foreign tribals and other barbarous peoples who were outside the fold of the Brahmanical culture. In Bengal, the term Mlechchha is even today used in the same sense, but generally denoting the Muslims and even the untouchables within the Brahmanical social framework.

III. THE KHASAS

Next to the Yavanas and the Mlechchhas, another cognate tribal community of foreign extraction known as the Khasas had also swept down over the plains of Bengal and got themselves fully integrated into the Bengali people.

The term Khasa denotes a country and its people. In the Brhatsamhitā, the term Khasa has been referred to as a country which has been identified with the modern region known as Gharwal and its northern parts. Besides, in the Mahābhārata, the Khasas are again called Khaladeśavāsī³⁴⁹. The term Khal denotes low, vile or mean, and the expression accordingly means the people of the low/vile country. The Khaladeśavāsīs who were recognised as low or vile peoples were indeed the Khasas. Again, in the early literary texts, the Khasas have been mentioned along with the Kambojas, the Yavanas, the Kirātas, the Daradas, etc., implying thereby that they were all perhaps allied peoples.

(i) Origins :

Traditionally speaking, the Khasas are said to have originated from Veṇa. It has been said that from the body of Veṇa sprang an issue called Mlechchha whose sons were Khasa, Yavana, Kamboja and others³⁵⁰. In the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata it has been narrated that from various parts of the body of Vaśistha's cow forcibly taken away by Viśvāmitra were born different peoples like ^{the} Pahlavas, the Draviḍas, the Yavanas, the Śavaras, the Puṇḍras etc., and the Khasas from her mouth³⁵¹. All these peoples thus coming out of the cow formed the army which routed that of Viśvāmitra³⁵². It is very significant to note that the Khasas have been actually described as Mlechchhas, i.e., originated from Mlechchha. This is supported by the Harivaṁśa and Śukranīti wherein the Khasas have been described as Mlechchhas³⁵³. In the Purāṇas, more particularly in the Bhāgavata and the Vāyu Purāṇa, the Khasas have been, however, referred to as low or inferior peoples³⁵⁴. Again, in the Vāyu-purāṇa, the Rākshasas have been marked out as the descendants of Rākshasa, son of Kāśyapa and Khasa³⁵⁵. In the Vishnu-purāṇa Khasa is said to have been the daughter of Daksha and the wife of Kāśyapa and mother of the Yakshas and the Rākshasas. Thus the non-Aryan origin of the Khasas becomes evident. But the Bhāgavata-Purāṇa refers to the Khasas as degraded Kshatriyas³⁵⁶. Manu, however, has given an explanation of the low social position of the Khasas. It has been specifically pointed out by Manu (X.44,22) that the Khasas like the Kambojas, the Śavaras and the Pulindas were originally Kshatriyas, but later on became reduced to Sudrahood because of the non-performances

of the Samśkāras and absence of contact with the Brāhmaṇas³⁵⁷. Further, while stating the origin of the Khasas Manu points out that he was born of Vrātya-Kshatriya-Savarnā-Strī³⁵⁸. Thus the Khasas and the Draviḍas along with others described as descendants of Vrātya-Kshatriya. Again, a Khasa is called Khala-jāti. It would be evident from a perusal of all such literary texts that the Khasas were integrated into Brahmanical social order, and while doing so, they were relegated to the Sudrahood, but in order to heighten their social position it has been enjoined that they were originally Kshatriyas, but subsequently relegated to the position of a Śūdra. The fact remains that the Khasas were tribal peoples of foreign extraction who were gradually integrated within the Brahmanical fold and given a low position in the social hierarchy.

(ii) **Movements and Settlements :**

It is indeed a difficult task to determine the exact location of the homeland of the ancient Khasa peoples. Generally speaking, the Khasas have been described in the early literary texts as the people par-excellence of the hilly regions beyond the frontiers of India. This would be evident from a passage of the Mahābhārata which refers to a list of tribes including the Khasas living in the hills (... Yavanāḥ Khasāḥ Dārvvābhisārā Daradāḥ Śakā ... Āndhrakāścha Pulindāścha Kirātas Chogravikramāḥ Mlechchhāścha Pārvatiyāścha ...³⁵⁹). In the Karṇāparvan of the Mahābhārata, the Khasas have been described as the inhabitants of the Pāñjāb region. Atkinson also places them in the Pāñjāb. Similarly, the Purāṇas refer to a large number of tribes, such as, the Khasas, the Kirātas, the Hūṇas, etc., who have been described as Parvatāśrayinah, i.e., sheltering in the hills³⁶⁰. In this passage, all these peoples have been actually described as Paryatiyāścha, i.e., of the hilly country. That the Khasas were once very prominent peoples of Kāśmīr is also borne out by concrete evidences.

From Kalhaṇa's Rājatarāṅginī, it is learnt that the Khasas were the principal inhabitants of that country and lived in the regions comprising the "valleys lying immediately to the south and west of Pīr Pantsāl range between the middle course of the Vitastā on west and the Kāśtavāṭa on east". Besides, in many other parts of Kāśmīr like the valley of the Chandrabhāgā,

Vitastā, Khasālya and Rājapuri there were settlements of these Khasa peoples³⁶¹. In this connection, a particular reference may be made to an Khasas in inscription which refers to the Khasa country as Sapādalaksha North-west hill which is to be located in the North-west and Himalayan foothills³⁶². These Khasa peoples had also formed a number of independent and semi-independent hill states³⁶³. Here, it may be noted that the castle of Bāṇsāla which guarded an important route of communication between the upper Chenab valley and the Eastern Pāñjāb hill states was in the hands of a Khasa chieftain of the 12th century³⁶⁴ A.D. Not only that, even some of the Purāṇas locate the Khasas in the North-western region. As for instance, in the Agni-Purāṇa, the Khasas are stated to have been dwellers of the North-western region³⁶⁵. Here it would be very interesting to note that the Khasas established their stronghold in Kāśmīr politics. It is learnt from the Rājatarāṅgī that the great favourite of the queen Diddā of Kāśmīr was a young Khasa from Parṇotsa named Tuṅga who was originally a herdsman and later on became a letter-carrier in the royal office. By the grace of Diddā, Tuṅga became Sarvādhikārin (Chief minister) and commander-in-chief. He most successfully crushed the Dāmara uprisings,^{365a}

But it would be wrong to suppose that the Khasas confined themselves to the North-western region alone. Even in the Brahmāṇḍa and Bṛihad-dharma Purāṇas, the Khasas are described as the forest-peoples of the Vindhyan tract³⁶⁶. They have been not only called Parvatāśrayinah, but also described as peoples of Vindhyāchala. It appears that the Khasas perhaps moved downwards up to the Vindhyan mountains and made their settlements. The Purāṇas also Khasas in refer to the Khasas as the peoples of North-eastern hilly region. South and East In the Mārkaṇḍeya-Purāṇa, the Khasas have been mentioned as the people of North-eastern region and of the Himalayas³⁶⁷. Still more significant is the reference in the Brahmāṇḍa and Matsya Purāṇas wherein the Khasa Kingdom of the East watered by Chakshush and Gaṅgā is referred to³⁶⁸. In this connection, a particular reference may be made to the Divyāvadāna wherein the Svaśa-rājya belonging to the kingdom of Aśoka has been mentioned³⁶⁹. This Svaśa has been identified by Burnouf with Khasa³⁷⁰.

It may be also noted that the Khasas in the early mediaeval period became very powerful in the eastern hilly region. In the 13th century A.D., Nepal appears to have been overwhelmed by the inroads of the Khasas³⁷¹. It is learnt that under the leadership of Jayatāri and Mukundasena the Khasas invaded Nepal and devastated the entire country by burning villages, destroying temples and massacring peoples. Not only that, thereafter a pestilence broke out which compelled the Khasas to quit³⁷². Nepal was once again invaded under the leadership of Ādityamalla in the 14th century³⁷³ A.D. All these inroads or invasions certainly bear ample testimony to the fact that the Khasas made deep penetration into different parts of Nepal and thereby could make their settlements permanent in such a way that they could become gradually integrated with other peoples of the land.

(iii) The Khasas in Bengal :

It would follow from the above that the Khasas were spread over the entire region covered by the foothills of the Himalayas, and it was from North and North-eastern directions that they might have moved downwards into the plains of Bengal. That the Khasas were well-spread over different parts of Bengal as well is proved by their frequent references in the Pāla and Sena records. In a number of inscriptions like the Nālandā plate of Dharmapāla, Monghyr Copper plate of Devapāla, Bhāgalpur Copper plate of Nārāyaṇapāladeva, Bāngad Copper plate of Mahipāla and Manahali Copper plate of Madanapāla, the Khasas have been mentioned along with other tribal communities³⁷⁴. In the Nālandā plate of Dharmapāla, the Khasas along with the Hūṇas, the Kulikas, etc., have been mentioned as mercenary soldiers. Generally speaking, the Pāla inscriptions record the royal communications regarding donations to Gauda-Mālava Khasa-Hūṇa-Kulika-Karnāṭa-Lāṭachāta-Bhāta-Sevakādin. All these people were definitely in royal service as it is distinctly stated Anyāmiś-cha-a-kirti tan-sva-pad-opajīvinah³⁷⁵. In other words, these peoples appear to have been employed in the military department of the state. It is indeed very significant to note that the Khasas and others were experts in fighting, and as such, they were mostly recruited in the Pāla army. The implication is that the Khasas like many other peoples

coming from outside got settled in Bengal, and that they were mostly recruited as soldiers or army officials. Naturally, it was quite easy for them to become assimilated or integrated into the Bengali people.

(iv) **General Life-pattern :**

From the early texts, very little information can be obtained about the life-patterns including the nature and character of the Khasas. The Khasas certainly belonged to the non-Brahmanical cultural fold. Even the prevailing Khasa language of the western Himalayas as far as Kumaon contains elements of Pisācha speech³⁷⁶. In the Mahābhārata, the Khasas have been described as fierce, ferocious and very powerful³⁷⁷. Not only that, the Bhāgavata-purāṇa refers to the Khasas as well-known fighters, though they were ultimately defeated by Bharata³⁷⁸. In the Harivaṃśa, Vāyu-purāṇa (88.127) and Śiva-purāṇa (VI. 61. 29), the Khasas along with the Yavanas, the Pāradas, the Kambojas, etc., fought on the side of the Haihayas. Further, Sagara is said to have obtained victory over the Khasas and others^{378a}. That they were well-known fighters is partly borne out by the very fact that in the Manusmṛiti, it has been stated that previously they were Kshatriyas, but later on fallen to the position of a Śūdra because of the non-performance of the Saṃskāras³⁷⁹. The military character of the Khasas is also amply borne out by the Pāla inscriptions wherein, as already observed, they have been referred to as recruits to military services of the state. The Pāla militia of Bengal with such recruits as the Khasas, the Gaudas, the Kulikas and the Hūṇas is referred to in the Nālandā Copper plate of Dharmapāla, and subsequently, other peoples like the Karṇāṭakas, the Lāṭas and the Choḍas were added³⁸⁰.

The Khasas were not only great fighters and renowned soldiers, but also traders of gold-dust with the ancient miners of Thok-Jalung in Tibet³⁸¹. The Khasa's military acumen enabled them to carry on raids and also to establish kingdoms. References to Khasa Chieftains are also to be met with. It has been already pointed out that the Khasas had indeed established political hegemony in Kāśmīr and Nepal. Even Viśākadatta in his drama speaks of the Śabara and the Khasa chiefs³⁸². In spite of their military eminence, the Khasas have been described as half civilised in the Mahābhārata

and Mlechchhas in the Harivaṃśa. In Manu, however, the Khasas have been delineated as Kshatriyas, but fallen to Śūdrahood³⁸³. The Khasas have been branded as such perhaps because of their non-Brahmanical affiliation. That is why in the Bhāgavata-purāṇa, the Khasas have been described as sinful peoples³⁸⁴.

(v) **Physical Features :**

Little information is available regarding the physical features of the Khasas of either North-western India or of Eastern India. Since the Khasas lived in the Himalayan regions from hoary antiquity, it is quite likely that they most likely possessed Mongoloid physical features. This is amply borne out by the study of the physical features of the surviving remnants of the ancient Khasas. The modern Khasas of Juanswar-Bawar in the north-western corner of Uttarpradeś, a typically polyandrous people, bear ample testimony in support of this presumption. The modern Khasas are characterised by tall stature, fair complexion, long head, fine nose, curly hair and other well proportioned features³⁸⁵. The Khasas of Juanswar-Bawar possess some typical Mongoloid features as well. It has been said that these Khasas have mixed with or subjugated a Dom element which is the basic substratum of the population in these parts. Majumdar, however, thinks that 'the Khasas, even if they have been diluted in blood by mixture with the Mongoloids of the upper Himalayas or with the Doms of the lower region, belong to the Mediterranean stock, and some amongst them represent true Mediterranean features'^{385a}. But the ancient Khasas appear to have been originally Mongoloid. If Mediterranean features are present, these might have been later developments caused by heavy admixtures with other peoples. According to Risley the Khasas of Nepal are born of a union between the Rājputs or Brahmin immigrants and the Mongolian women of the country³⁸⁶. Here Risley has made a particular reference to the tribal or Mongoloid Khasa women who would welcome polished Brāhmaṇas. The Khasas now call themselves Chhatris (Kshatriyas³⁸⁷). The Khasas, however, do not appear to have originated from such a union. Risley perhaps simply noted the present view current in Nepal. It is quite likely that the Khasas like the Kambojas and others belonged originally to the Mongoloid ethnic stock. But frequent admixtures with other peoples might have been largely responsible for changing their physical features, and as such, their modern survivals can not be always

branded as typical Mongoloid. But there are certain traits present amongst them, which certainly speak of their original Mongoloid affiliation. The ancient Khasas of both North-western and North-eastern India were all ethnically Mongoloid.

(vi) Identity:

The ancient Khasas of both North-western and Eastern regions have left their remnants under different names. Even in ancient times, the Khasas have been referred to by the classical writers under different forms. Pliny refers to Cesi and Cetriboni as hill tribes living between the Indus and the Iomaners³⁸⁸. This Cesi of Pliny has been identified with the Khasas³⁸⁹. Again, the present Khasiyas (Khasias) of Kumaon have been identified with the ancient Khasas³⁹⁰. According to Atkinson the Khasas were the same as the Yakshas. At present, their descendants are found in Juanswar-Bawar (N.W. of U.P.). Recently, some scholars have connected the Khasas with the Todas of the Nilgiri hills because of their common polyandrous practice. But the physical features of these two tribes are so dissimilar that by no stretch of imagination they can be equated^{390a}. In fact, the ancient Khasas might have left their names in the forms of Kāshgarh, Kashkāra, the Hindukus, Kāśmīr, etc.³⁹¹. Moreover, Vogel holds the opinion that the Khasas who played an important role in the history of Kāśmīr are at present represented by the Khakka (Khakha) tribe in the Vitastā valley below Kāśmīr and in the neighbouring hill districts³⁹². In the North-eastern region the surviving remnants of the Khasas are to be found in Nepal and North-eastern India. It is not quite unlikely that the Khāsis of the Khāsi and Jayantiā hills of North-eastern region might have been also connected with the ancient Khasas.

It would be quite evident that the surviving remnants are widely spread over both in North-western and eastern regions and also along the foothills of the Himalayas, and the Khasas of Juanswar-Bawar are the typical surviving remnants of the ancient Khasas of North-western India. The Khasas of Juanswar-Bawar today call themselves Khas-Rājputs, Khas-Brahmins, etc. This wide-spread distribution of the Khasas along the foothills of the Himalayas and their movements downwards into the plains is no doubt a matter of deep investigation. Those who moved downwards and settled in the plains had in course of time got themselves merged with other peoples

in such a manner that they lost their tribal identity altogether. This is what happened more particularly in Bengal.

(vii) Observation :

From whatever meagre information is available about the Khasas from both literary and epigraphic records, it may be said that they were no doubt very ancient peoples who were widely spread over the Himalayan belt, and that they moved downwards into the plains and in Bengal as well. There was perhaps a widespread movement of the Khasas from the North and North-eastern regions, and that they might have carried on inroads into Bengal as well. Because of their bravery and skill in fighting, the Khasas were largely recruited in the Pāla army. It is very interesting to note that like the Khasas, other foreign hordes were also included in the militia of the Pāla kings of Bengal. This was undoubtedly a golden opportunity on the part of the Khasas to become integrated with other Bengali peoples. Gradually, the Khasas were no doubt brought within the Bṛāhmanical fold, and were no doubt assimilated, but relegated to the position of a Śūdra. Today, the surviving Khasas of Juanswar-Bawar claim to be Hindus. They are adopting Hindu surnames and trying to establish connections with the Rājputs and Brahmins of the plains. They have even started worshipping Hindu deities. But their religion as such is a curious blend of Hindu and tribal beliefs and practices³⁹³. In Bengal, however, this assimilation of the Khasas with the larger Bengali peoples was very successful to the extent that there is hardly any surviving remnants at present bearing any semblance of the name of the Khasa. It implies that the Khasa tribal community was completely integrated within the greater mass of the Bengali people and their culture. In the course of their absorption, the Khasas like other foreign tribal communities might have also contributed their own cultural traits as well in the building up of the Bengali culture as a whole.

IV. THE ŚAKAS

Another cognate people of foreign^{origin} is largely known in Indian records as Śaka. The Śakas have been again grouped together with the Yavanas, the Pahlavas and other peoples of foreign extractions.

(i) Derivation and Meaning :

The term Śaka is derived from Sak+a(ach)-(Ka). The derivative meaning of the term is simply a wish or desire. But the term is used also to denote a particular group of people who have been identified with the Scythians and more particularly with the inhabitants of Śakadvīpa, i.e., the Dvīpa of the Śakas or Śakasthāna, i.e., land of the Śakas. Here a reference may be made to Sai-Wang which in Indian language stands as Śaka-Murunda, i.e., Śaka-lord or Svāmin of the inscriptions and coins. The epithet Svāmin was used by the Kshatrapas of Surāshṭra and Ujjain.

(ii) Origins :

In the early Indian texts different stories have been narrated to explain the origin of the Śakas. In the Rāmāyaṇa (1.54.22 ; 55.3) the Śakas along with the Yavanas and others have been described as originating from the private parts of the Kāmadhenu of Vaśiṣṭha, namely, Śavalā, when the latter was being forcibly taken away by Viśvāmitra. In the Mahābhārata (1.175), a similar account has been given. It is said that the Śakas originated from the urine of Nandini. A more detailed account has been however, presented in the Harivaṃśa and in several Purāṇas like the Vāyu, Brahmāṇḍa, Brahma, Śiva, Vishṇu, Bhāgavata, etc. It has been narrated in the Harivaṃśa that Sagara, the son of Raghu, stopped the performances of the prescribed duties of the Kshatriyas by the Śakas, the Pahlavas and the Pāradas who were the allies of the Haihayas. It would be evident from the mythical story that the Śakas and other foreigners became the allies of and the Haihayas, and Sagara was bent upon destroying these allies and legendary tales who thence appealed to the preceptor Vaśiṣṭha and sought refuge under him. Vaśiṣṭha advised Sagara to spare these foreign allies like the Śakas, the Yavanas, the Kambojas, the Pāradas and the Pahlavas. Sagara did so, but he compelled them to give up their prescribed vocations. Not only that, he also caused them to change their appearances, and it is said that the Śakas were made to shave half of their head.

It would appear that the stories thus narrated are fictitious and bereft of any historical bearings. These stories appear to have been added after the admission of these foreigners within the Brahmanical social framework. The main purpose of these stories was to trace mythological origins of the

foreign peoples. Such stories also reveal as to how these foreigners were admitted within the Brahmanical fold. Perhaps, these stories reflect also the procedures of conversion as well. This is evident from the practice that these foreigners had to shave their heads wholly or partly. It has been prescribed in the Śāstras that during conversion or performance of any purificatory rites the shaving of the head of the person concerned is obligatory. It may be accordingly presumed that these foreigners were also converted or purified by performing rites, and as a requisite for which their heads were shaved.

(iii) **Habitat and Dispersal :**

The Śakas are the peoples of Central Asia, and the land where they mostly concentrated came to be known after them as Śakasthāna or the land of the Śakas. This land of the Śakas has been called by the Greeks Scythia and as such, the Śakas are well-known as the Scythians. The Śakas did mainly establish themselves in Eastern Iran, which thereby became known as Śakasthāna by the Persians. This Śakasthāna appears to have been known to the Indians as Śakadvīpa which is one of the seven Dvīpas (Saptadvīpāsumatī) into which the world was divided by the writers of the Purānas. The ancient Śakasthāna became transformed into Sijistan in medieval times, Śakadvīpa and in modern times, it is called Seistan. The settlements of the Śakas have been also referred to in the Persian inscriptions. One of the settlements was in the plains of the Syr Darya and Oxus (Amu Darya) in Central Asia. The Śakas are also believed to have settled in the Helmund Valley (East Iran) which came to be known as Śakasthāna to the Indians³⁹⁴. The original homeland of the Śakas was perhaps in the valleys of the Jaxartes and Oxus. It is from this region that the Śakas dispersed towards West and East. On the decline of the Indo-Greek power in North-western region of India, the Śakas of Seistan appeared in different parts and succeeded in establishing their authority. From the region of North-western India, the Śakas again dispersed in different directions, and in certain regions they yielded considerable power.

In ancient Indian literary texts and inscriptions, the Śakas have been frequently mentioned along with the Yavanas, the Kambojas and other tribes of foreign extractions. In the Allahabad Pillar inscription, the Śaka-

Murundas are stated to have submitted to the great Gupta lord Samudra Gupta^{394a}. These Śakas are to be placed in North-western region. In the Purāṇas, the Śakas are said to be one of the tribal communities of the Udīchya country³⁹⁵. Again, the Mārkaṇḍeya-purāṇa (Chap.58) refers to the Śaka-settlements in Madhyadeśa. But the Śakas appear to have been largely concentrated in Western India. In the Bṛhatsaṃhitā, the Śakas have been actually placed in Western division³⁹⁶. The association of the Śakas with Western India is also attested to by the Nāsik inscription³⁹⁷. Several inscriptions of Western India also refer to individual Śakas who played important part in the history of the region, such as, Ushabhadāta, son-in-law of the Kshatrapa Nahapāna³⁹⁸. Besides, from the Chandrāvalli inscription it is learnt that Mayūra-sarman defeated the Śakas along with the Ābhīras and others³⁹⁹. Thus the Śakas appear to have exercised considerable power in Western India. Again, the Śakas were also settled in the Vindhyan region. It has been suggested that the Puri-Kushāṇa coins from the region were perhaps issued by them.

(iv) Eastern India and Bengal :

But the Śakas were not confined to the North-west and Western India alone. They also dispersed towards other parts of Eastern India as well. That they were people of Eastern India is also clearly borne out by the early literary records and inscriptions. According to the testimony of the Mahābhārata, the Śakas appear to have lived in the hills, and the Pāṇḍava brother Nakula is described to have defeated the Śakas and other tribes like the Pallavas, the Kirātas and the Yavanas. This account refers to their Eastern association. Though originally of North-western India, the Śakas appear to have infiltrated into Eastern India and Bengal as well. In this connection, a particular reference may be made to the Murunda tribal community which was not perhaps entirely different from that of the Śakas.

From Ptolemy's Geography, it is learnt that the Murundas are to be placed in the Ganges valley⁴⁰⁰. According to Ptolemy, the upper Bengal appears to have formed a part of an extensive territory which was under the government of the Murundai⁴⁰¹. That the Murundai were an important people of Eastern India is also proved by the Jaina work Prabhāvakacharita

which refers to the influence of the Muruṇḍa family at Pāṭaliputra⁴⁰². In Pāṭaliputra, the Mitra kings appear to have been replaced by the Muruṇḍas and the Kshatrapas who were in turn succeeded by the Nāgas and the Guptas.

Though the Śakas as such do not figure prominently in the inscriptions of Bengal, their settlements in different parts of Bengal are borne out by certain facts contained in the inscriptions and literary records. The Govindapur inscription of 1137 A.D. records that the Maga-Brahmins springing from the Sun's body were brought to India from Śaka-dvīpa by Samba. The first of these Brāhmaṇas was Bharadvāja who had 100 Branches. In one branch were born two brothers Manaratha and Daśaratha, and the former's son Gaṅgādhara, a councillor of the king of Magadha, composed this record. He married the daughter of an official of the king of Gauḍa⁴⁰³. This shows that the Maga-Brāhmaṇas entered in matrimony with the Gauḍas. According to another traditional legend, the Śakadvīpi (Sakaladvīpi) Brāhmaṇas were brought by Rāma from Ceylon for the purpose of practising medicine. Still another tradition describes them as original peoples of Magadha, and this is why they are called Magas. But the Sakadvīpi-Brāhmaṇas associate themselves with the Rāma-legend. They now mostly serve as priests of the Rajputs, and some are landlords and others practise medicine. They have the usual Gotras, but they do not observe the Gotra-exogamy. They have their Pur-exogamy⁴⁰⁴. This shows that they do not belong to the orthodox Brāhmaṇa community and are of foreign origins. If they would have come from Śakadvīpa, it is not known for certain their exact relation with the Śakas. It is not also unlikely that the Śakas from that region became branded as Brāhmaṇas in India because they were worshippers of the Sun. But they were relegated to a low social position. Besides, in Bengal there is a Brāhmaṇa community occupying a very low social position. They are known as Grahaviṇas who are said to have migrated in two sections, viz. Rādhiya and Vaṅgaja. According to the Śakaladvīpika, a Kulaji-text, there were 8 sages in Śakadvīpa whose descendants made a special study of planets. They were brought to India and settled in Madhyadeśa. The descendants of these 8 sages became settled also in Gauḍa, and they were known as Gauḍiya-grahaviṇas. According to Majumdar, these Kulaji-texts show that they might have come to Bengal 5 to 6 hundred years before. In the Kulaji-text of the Vaṅga-Samāja, the

Grahavipra narrates that they were brought to Gauda by the king Śaśāṅka for curing his disease by worshipping the planets. These Vipras got settled in Gauda and became known as Grahavipras⁴⁰⁵. If the accounts of the Kulaji-texts are given any credence, the Grahavipras from Śakasthāna might have come to Bengal as early as the 7th century A.D. Besides, in Bengal there is another low caste Brāhmaṇa community called Devala-Brāhmaṇa. The issue of a Devala father and Vaiśya mother is a Ganaka, i.e., Grahavipra and Vādaka⁴⁰⁶. It is not, however, known for certain as to whether these Brāhmaṇas were Śakas. But the fact remains that they came from Śakasthāna. It is not quite unlikely that the Magas were also affiliated to the Śakas who were perhaps worshippers of the Sun. Besides, there are also references to certain individuals with the prefix Śaka against their names or surnames, who appear to have been peoples in different parts of the Pāla kingdom. In this connection, a particular reference may be made to Śakasena who figures prominently in the Stone slab inscription of Gopāladeva II, which records the carving of the image of the Buddha at the command of one named Śakasena who was commonly known as Śrī Dharmabhīma who again was born in the family of the Sindhus and whose fame shone like rays of the Moon and whose compassion was attached to the feet of the Buddha⁴⁰⁷. Śakasena appears to have been a Śaka. He became a devotee of the Lord Buddha, and it is at his command that the image of the Buddha was carved out. Another interesting point that emerges is that he is described to have been born in the family of the Sindhus. It shows that the Śakas perhaps came to Eastern India from the Sindhu region.

The Śakas in Bengal appear also to have introduced Sun-worship in Bengal. The popularity of the Sun-worship in Bengal might have been also due to the Śakas. Many images of the Sun-God belonging mostly to the Pāla-Sena period have been discovered from different parts of Bengal. One of the characteristic features of the image of the Sun as described by Varāhamihira is that the feet and legs should be covered up to the knees. The Sun-images of Bengal have boots up to the knees. This is an un-Indian character⁴⁰⁸. The Sun-worship became very popular in Bengal, and its popularity continued even up to the end of the Sena rule. This is proved by the opening verse in the copper-plates of Viśva-rūpasena and Keśavasena, the last Sena rulers⁴⁰⁹. From all such evidences

Sun-
worship
in Bengal

it would appear that the Śakas also settled in Bengal and became gradually integrated with other peoples of the land.

(v) Early References and History :

In the Atharvaveda-Parīśiṣṭā, the Śakas and the Yavanas have been grouped together⁴¹⁰. In Pāṇini's (IV.I.175) work the term Śaka occurs in the Kambojādigaṇa. In the Mahābhārata, the Śakas have been mentioned along with the Yavanas and other foreign tribes^{410a}. In the Rāmāyaṇa, the Yavanas have been, however, distinguished from other foreign tribes like the Śakas. (Śakān = Yavanā miśritān⁴¹¹). In Patañjali's Mahābhāṣya, the Śakas have been described as pure Śūdras. Besides, the Śakas have been also referred to in a large number of inscriptions, such, as those from Nāsik, Mathurā, Sāñchi, Allahabad etc. The Mudrārākṣhaśa (Act.II) mentions the foreign tribes like the Śakas, Yavanas etc. (Astitāvaca = chaka = Yavana = Kirāta-Kāmbōja-Pārasika-Bahlīka-Prabhritih). In a work of the 5th century A.D., the Śakas and the Yavanas are mentioned together⁴¹². In the Purāṇas as well, the Śakas are always mentioned along with other foreign peoples like the Yavanas, the Barvaras^{412a} etc. Manu (X.43-44) refers to the foreigners including the Śakas who were Kshatriyas, but reduced to the status of the Vrīshala.

The Śakas played an important part in the political history of ancient India. According to the Chinese record, Kāpiśa (Kipin) was occupied by the Śaka lord Sai-wang in the later part of the 2nd century B.C. At that time, the Greek rule in Gandhāra-Hazara country was supplanted by the Śakas, and by the 1st century, they occupied Seistan⁴¹³. As already stated, the Śakas were not, however, confined to the North-western region alone. On the other hand, they spread out in different directions and succeeded in establishing their political supremacy on the decline of the Kushāṇa power. The Nāsik inscription refers to the Śakas along with the Yavanas who were defeated by the Sātavāhana king. The Śaka-Mahākṣhatrapa Nahapāna was conquered by the Sātavāhanas. Besides, the Śakas also spread to Saurāṣṭra and Ujjayinī and established their political authority. References may be also made to Dāmaghsada of the Śakas of Ujjain⁴¹⁴. The Sāñchi inscription also refers to the Śaka principality⁴¹⁵. The Sāñchi inscription of

Vāśishka, and the Sāñchi and Erān inscriptions of the Śāka ruler Śrīdhara-varman refer to him as one who was first a governor and then became a Rājan (King) and Mahākshatrapā⁴¹⁶. They became established also in the Vindhyan region. It has been suggested that the Puri-kushāna coins were perhaps issued by them. Further, the Mathurā inscription proves that the Śakas extended their sway up to the Yamunā in the East, perhaps by contesting with the Mitra kings. All these show as to how the Śakas were spread over different parts of India and even succeeded in establishing their political authority in certain places by contesting with the ruling chieftains in those regions.

That the Śakas played an important role in the political and cultural life of India is proved by the very fact that the Śakas actually introduced an Era named after them (Śaka-era) which became widely accepted all over the country and is being continued even today (Śakābda). The Śaka-era was also popularized in South India. The Chālukyas of Bādāmi were responsible for its spread in Gāṇḍāra and Mārāṭhā speaking areas⁴¹⁷. Not only in Northern India, even in Bengal the Śaka-era became very popular in later period. The Senas popularised the Śaka-era in Bengal, and it has been supposed that they brought it from the South. Even a few Pāla inscriptions have been also dated in the Śaka-era. The Saṁāth stone slate inscription of the time of Mahīpāladeva was recorded on the 11th day of Pausha in the year 1085 Śaka-ēra Śaka-era (Samvat 1085 Paushadine⁴¹⁸). The date of the coming of the Brāh-
In Bengal maṇas as described in the Kulaji-texts has been also given in Śakābda. It has been said that these Kulaji-stories were created after the popularization of the Śaka-era in the 11th-12th century A.D. There are some indirect but doubtful evidences regarding the use of the Śaka-era at a still earlier date. Śrīdhara wrote his Nyāya-Kandalī in Śaka 913, i.e., 991 A.D. He was an inhabitant of Rāḍha, but there is no evidence that the work was written in Bengal. The author's patron Pāṇḍudāsa flourished perhaps in an area where the Śaka-era was popular⁴¹⁹. Again, Udayana composed Lakṣhānāvalī in Śaka-era 906, i.e., 985 A.D. But this has been taken to be dubious. The use of the Śaka-era shows at least the influence of the Śakas, which is being continued even today.

(vi) Culture :

Very little information is available regarding the cultural life-patterns of the Śakas. Since the Śakas were of Central Asiatic origin, they

appear to have been originally predatory and pastoral nomads. It is, however, clear that they were experts in warfares and were also noted for their fighting skill. In the Mahābhārata (V.19), it has been stated that the Kamboja king marshalled the Śaka forces at the great battle field of Kurukshetra. It is further learnt that the forces of Chandragupta consisted of the Śakas, the Yavanas, the Kirātas, etc.⁴²⁰ In the Rāmāyana, the Śakas are said to have dressed themselves in yellow robe. The Śakas and the Turukshas are said to have shaved half their head. This is definitely an un-Indian practice. But the coins of the Śaka kings of Western India represent them with a close fitting cap and hair hanging by the neck over shoulders⁴²¹. Accordingly, it has been observed that if the head was shaved at all, it might have been in the front, i.e., above forehead⁴²².

It appears that the Śakas were perhaps worshippers of the Sun in the form of image. The members of the priestly class of Persia were called Magis. In Greek language, they are called Magos. These Magis came and settled in India, and after their absorption they became known as Maga-Brahmanas/Śākadvīpa⁴²³. Varāhamihira in his Bṛhatsaṃhitā (Chapt. 60, 19) refers to the construction of temples and consecration of the images of the Sun by the Magas who were the special priests of the Sun-god. According to the Bhaviṣya-purāṇa (Chapt. 139), Samba, son of Kṛṣṇa brought the Magas from Śākadvīpa for the worship of the Sun and thereby to become cured of his disease. This is how the Sun-worship was introduced in India⁴²⁴. Alberunī in the 11th century speaks also of the Magas in India⁴²⁵. They may or may not have been Śakas. But they appear to have been a cognate tribal community. The Śakas were also perhaps Sun-worshippers, and they might have introduced Sun-worship in India.

(vii) Physical Characters :

No positive information is available about the physical characters of the Śakas. Their skin-colour was perhaps yellowish. Bharata in his Nāṭyaśāstra has specifically pointed out that the Śakas, the Yavanas, the Pahlavas and the Bāhlikas of the Northern countries shall be made to have Gaudavarṇa, i.e., yellow fair or yellowish white skin-colour. In the Harivaṃśa and the Bhāgavata-purāṇa there are accounts which show that they were made to shave half of their head⁴²⁶. But this description has little to do with the physical characters of the Śakas. Since it has not been possible to identify

the Śakas with any known group of peoples, the physical characteristics of the Śakas in India can be hardly determined. Accordingly, attempts may be made to describe the ethnic characters of the Śakas on the basis of the physical features of those living in their original habitat. Originally the Śakas dwelt to the west of the Wu-sun and to the north of the river Naryn or Upper Jaxartes and occupied these lands⁴²⁷. In India, the Śakas are identified with the Sacae whose modern descendants seem to be the Baltis and a horde of pastoral nomads like the modern Turkoman⁴²⁸. The Balti is included within the Indo-Afghan group by Haddon. This group is characterised by dolichocephalic head, leptorrhine nose and medium to tall stature⁴²⁹. But the Baltis have also undergone considerable changes, though originally they were brachycephalic peoples. On this basis, Risley has pointed out that the Śakas and the Scythians came from the region occupied largely by the broad-headed race and that they themselves belonged to it⁴³⁰. The Śakas were characterised by broad face, high cheek bones, short and brachycephalic head. Risley includes the Śakas, the Khasas, the Kirātas, etc., within his tribal or national group⁴³¹. From these physical features, it would appear that the Śakas belonged originally to the Mongoloid ethnic group. But in India, they got mixed up with many other tribal and non-tribal communities in such a way that no trace of their former existence can be detected at present.

(viii) Assimilation and Contributions :

The history of India records the role played by the Śakas in both political and cultural aspects of the Indian people. But the Śakas like many other foreign tribes have failed to retain their firm individuality or identity. It implies that the Śakas were fully assimilated and absorbed within the Hindu fold under various ways. It has been pointed out that the Śakas after entering into India adopted the Aryan language written in Kharosthi-script and accepted both Buddhism and different sectarian beliefs and practices of Hinduism⁴³². The Śakas might have carried the Brahmanical language and beliefs to South India as well. The Śaka-Scythians also entered into matrimonial alliances with many royal houses. Here a particular reference may be made to Sātakarṇi's marriage with the daughter of a Śaka-Kshatrapa. It may be noted that the Sātavāhanas claimed themselves to have belonged

to the Brāhmaṇa family (Eka Brahmana, i.e., unique Brāhmaṇa⁴³³). In that case, even the Brāhmaṇa royal houses entered into matrimonial relation with the foreign peoples like the Śakas. That the Śakas were actually assimilated within the Hindu fold becomes also evident from certain very poignant evidences. Even as early as Patañjali, i.e., 2nd century B.C., the Śakas and the Yavanas have been recognised as clean or pure Śūdras. Patañjali (on Pāṇini, ii.4.10) describes the Śakas as Anirvasita, i.e., pure Śūdra. But in the Manusmṛiti (X.42-43), the Śakas and others have been recognised as belonging to the Kshatriya, but sunk to the position of the Vrishala or low born Śūdra. It thus follows that Patañjali regards the Śakas as clean Śūdras, but Manu accepts them as originally Kshatriyas, but reduced to Sudrahood. It is perhaps because of their political influence that the Dharmasāstra-writer had to brand the Śakas as Kshatriyas. Again, since the pure Kshatriyas would not favour such a recognition of the foreigners like the Śakas as included within their community, the Śakas were again described as reduced to the status of a low Śūdra. But the fact remains that the foreigners like the Śakas were actually assimilated within the Brahmanical fold and given also a caste status.

In this context, a particular reference may be made to the very interesting evidences furnished by the Harivaṃśa and the Bhāgavata-purāṇa⁴³⁴. It has been stated that after the defeat of the Śakas, the Yavanas, etc., the great king Sagara did not kill them, but made them Vikṛita-vesin. In other words, he caused changes in their appearances ; some of them were caused to shave their heads, some to keep long beard ; some hanging hair; some to shave half head; some to wear antarvāsa, i.e., undergarment and some vahirvāsa, i.e., outergarment. Not only that, it is further learnt from the Harivaṃśa that Sagara stopped the performances of the prescribed duties of the Kshatriyas by the Śakas and caused them to have their heads half-shaved. The veracity of these legends can not be established. On the other hand, the half-shaved head of the Śakas is not also supported by the representations of the Śaka rulers on the coins issued by them⁴³⁵. But the significance of these legendary tales is to be found out as has been already hinted at. The shaving of the head or causing the change of their appearances including their dress, etc., was perhaps done at the time of their conversion into Hinduism. It also implies that certain form of ritual practices might have been also performed to effectively materialise the conversion of the Śakas and other

foreigners. Perhaps, after going through the procedures of conversion that the Śakas were relegated to the position of the Kshatriyas and subsequently reduced to the status of the Śūdra.

In Bengal as well, the Śakas might have infiltrated after their assimilation within the Hindu fold. Though not specifically mentioned in the Pāla and Sena inscriptions, it is not quite unlikely that they also came to Bengal as mercenary soldiers in the army of the Pāla and Sena rulers. These Śakas might have settled in Bengal as well. Besides, particular references have been made to the Maga-Brāhmaṇas, Śākadvīpa-Brāhmaṇas, Grahavipras and the Devala-Brāhmaṇas of Bengal. It has been already pointed out that all these Brāhmaṇas were brought from Śākadvīpa and that they were branded as Brāhmaṇas because they were the devout worshippers of the Sun God. In fact, the worship of the Sun in the form of image was introduced into India and also in Bengal by them. But unfortunately, this so called Brāhmaṇa worshippers of the Sun have not been included within the orthodox Brahmanical community. On the other hand, they were relegated to a very low social position, even lower than the upper classes of the Śūdras. Even today in Bengal, there are Brahmins under such categories as Grahavipras, Daivajñas, Agradānis, etc. They are all Brahmins in name only. They do not enjoy any other rights and privileges of a Brāhmaṇa. On the other hand, even the upper class Śūdras like the Kāyasthas, Vaidyas, etc., do not even accept food from them. This shows that a very degraded position has been ascribed to these Brāhmaṇas. All these so-called Brāhmaṇas appear to have come from Śākadvīpa, and they spread over different parts of Bengal. It has been already hinted at that these communities might be also affiliated to the Śaka community of Śakasthāna. In fact, these so-called Brāhmaṇas may be recognised as the remnants of the migrants in Bengal from Śākadvīpa. It has been also pointed out that even the Maga-Brahmins who came from Śākadvīpa entered into marital unions with the people of Gauḍa. This shows as to how these foreigners were integrated and got mixed up with other peoples of Bengal. The assimilation of the Śakas in Bengal as in other parts of India was, however, fully achieved in the sense that no distinct trace of their identity is available.

The Śakas belonging to the Mongoloid ethnic group were fully assimilated with the Indian people. It was through this assimilation that the Śakas contributed also some of their basic cultural traits in making the Indian culture as a whole. In this respect, attention may be drawn to the introduction of the worship of the Sun in the form of image bearing un-Indian costumes. As for instance, the Sūrya images found in India bear foreign costumes, such as, the covering of the foot and leg upto the knees. This is distinctly an un-Indian practice. Even in Bengal the Sun-worship in the form of image was introduced by these people from Śakasthāna. The images of the Sun discovered from different parts of Bengal bear the same foreign costumes and characteristics. It is perhaps because of the foreign origin of the worship of the Sun in the form of image that the same did not or could not survive in India for a long time. Even in Bengal today, the worship of the Sun-image is rarely to be found. Further, with the decline of the popularity of the Sun-worship, the worshippers from the Śakasthāna being helpless in respect of their austensible means of livelihood took up the profession of worshipping planets for the welfare and well-being of their clients, and this is how the original Sun-worshippers became Grahaviṇas who now form a separate community in Bengal. Their main vocation is to worship planets. They have also taken up astrology as one of their vocations, and in Bengal, these Brāhmaṇas are also experts in preparing horoscopes for their clients. Even the Agradāni-Brahmins may be affiliated to these so-called Brāhmaṇas from Śakasthāna. In Bengal, these Brahmins accept the first gift during the Śrāddha-rite, which is otherwise tabooed on the orthodox Brahmin priests.

The foreign affiliation and undesirable vocations are primarily responsible for the degraded and low position of the aforesaid Brāhmaṇas from Śakasthāna in the social framework of the Brahmanical hierarchy in Bengal. It has been already suggested that all the aforesaid so-called low Brāhmaṇas of Bengal may be affiliated to the Śakas of Śakasthāna. Even these people have largely mingled with other tribal and non-tribal communities of Bengal. As a result of these comingling, the people from Śakasthāna might have contributed some of their basic ethnic and cultural traits in the general composition of the people and culture of Bengal.

V. THE HŪṆAS

Along with the Yavanas and the Śakas another tribal community of Central Asia that swept down into India and played an important role in the political and cultural life of the Indian people is indeed the Hūṇa.

(i) Name, Derivation and Meaning :

The term Hūṇa has been derived by the Indians from the Chinese word Hiung-nu. In the Greek accounts, the word mentioned is Fuoni/Uoni. But the Indian appellation Hūṇa has been long accepted and used to denote the v/rile / and barbaric people of Central Asia who poured into both Europe and different parts of Asia. The word Hūṇa is spelt variously as Hūn, Hoon and Hool⁴³⁶. The term Hunār means cleverness/skill or experience, and Hunāri denotes a clever or an expert or an ingenious person. These two terms appear to have been derived from the Indianized foreign term Hūṇa which in Indian literary texts denotes a barbarous tribal group from Central Asia. It is in this sense that the term Hūṇa is used, i.e., as a tribal nomenclature.

(ii) Early References :

The Hūṇas are always mentioned along with other foreign peoples like the Śakas, the Yavanas, etc. In the early Indian literary texts and inscriptions, the Hūṇas are frequently mentioned sometimes not only in association with the foreign peoples, but also with other Indian tribal communities. The Mahāvastu mentions them along with the Chīnas, and the Mahābhārata includes them among several foreign tribes enlisted. Sometimes, in the Mahābhārata (9.65-66), the Hūṇas have been also associated with the Pārasikas. This was perhaps done after the Hūṇas came into contact with the Sāsānian dynasty of Persia. The classical Sanskrit literatures also refer to the Hūṇas. As for instance, Kālidāsa in his Raghuvamśa gives glaring accounts of the Hūṇas. The Harshacharita of Bāṇa also frequently refers to the Hūṇas. Besides the literary texts, the early Indian inscriptions also refer to the Hūṇas under various capacities, sometimes as mercenary soldiers and also as rulers. All these early references clearly point out the dominant role played by the Hūṇas in the history and culture of India.

(iii) Early History :

The Hūṇas formed a kingdom in Mongolia by about 1200 B.C. and for several hundred years they fought against the Chinese who built the great wall as a defence against their inroads. Hence, the Hūṇas turned their attention elsewhere and hurled themselves against the Yue-chi (Turki) of Kān-su. Next, they encountered the Śāka or Se who dwelt on the west of Wusun and occupied their lands lying on the north of the river Syr-Darya or the upper Jaxartes. By about the middle of the 2nd century B.C., Hiung-nu and Wu-sun drove them southwards to Sogdiana and Bactria. The Hūṇa empire broke up in the 2nd century A.D. On the ruins of the Indo-Scythian (Yue-chi) empire, the White Hūṇs ruled in India and the surrounding lands from 425 onwards. By about that period the Hūṇas also moved towards different directions, and they poured into India by the middle of the 5th century A.D. At first, their onrush was no doubt checked, but afterwards they succeeded in establishing their supremacy in different parts of India. This is proved by the available literary and epigraphic records.

In India, the Hūṇas played a dominant role in the 5th and 6th century A.D. The Bhitārī Pillar inscription describes that the Gupta empire convulsing after the death of Kumāragupta (Pitaridivamupète viplutam vaṁśa-lakshmīr), and that Skandagupta saved the Gupta empire by his own prowess. The Gupta empire was convulsed by the Pushyamitras and the Hūṇas⁴³⁷. From this inscription, it follows that the Hūṇas carried on depredations on a large scale which resulted in the convulsion of the Gupta empire. For the time being, the Gupta empire was saved. But soon it started tottering again due to further depredations carried on by the Hūṇas. After the death of Skandagupta, there was no powerful king to repulse the Hūṇa inroads, and they penetrated as far as Chitrakuṭa (Chitor in Rājputanā). After the death of Buddhagupta, the Hūṇas conquered an extensive area of Northern India. The Sanjeli Copper plates of Toramāna testify the rule of the Hūṇas over Gujrat by 500 A.D. They also conquered Eran. But the principal centres of their power in India during the time of their kings, Toramāna and Mihirakula, were Pavvaiyā on the Chenāb and Śākala (Śiālkoṭ) in the upper Pāñjāb. The inscriptions of the Hūṇa rulers come from Eran and Gwalior in Madhyapradeś and Kura (Salt Range) in Pākistān^{437a}. The success of the Hūṇas in Central India was, however, short lived. The Harshacharita refers to the

possession of Malwa by the Guptas. It shows that the Hūṇas were perhaps deprived of their political power over Malwa, but their survivors continued⁴³⁸. The Gupta king Bālāditya is described to have imprisoned the Hūṇa king Mihirakula, but he was set at liberty at the request of the queen-mother as recorded by the Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsang⁴³⁹. The Hūṇa chieftain Mihirakula was finally subjugated by Yaśodharman as recorded in the Mandasor inscription : "to whose feet respect was paid ... by even that king Mihirakula whose head had never previously been brought into "humility ... obeisance to any other save the god Sthānu and embraced by whose arms the mountains of snow falsely prides itself as being styled an inaccessible fortress"⁴⁴⁰. It would appear from this passage that Mihirakula was then the king of a Himalayan country, i.e., Kāśmīr and its neighbourhood. After the submission of Mihirakula, the Hūṇas as a great political force ceased to play any role. The Hūṇas were resisted not only by the Guptas and Yaśodharman, but also by the Maukharis. In spite of their political submission, the Hūṇas were active in carrying out raids. This becomes evident from Bāṇa who describes Prabhākara vardhana as Hūṇa-harīṇa-keśarī, i.e., a lion to the Hūṇa-deer. Rājyavardhana was deputed to quell the Hūṇas. He is described to have entered the Hūṇa territory and quelled them⁴⁴¹. But they continued to have small principalities in different parts of Northern India, and they also continued to work as mercenary soldiers in the army of the ruling chieftains of different places. This becomes evident from a number of inscriptions. The Apsad inscription of Ādityasena refers to Uddhata-Hūṇa-sainya as the enemies of the Maukharis⁴⁴². Dāmodaragupta of the Later Gupta dynasty who had to struggle hard with the Maukharis is stated to have thrown aloft in battle the troops of the Hūṇas⁴⁴³. Subsequently, the Hūṇas are also mentioned as mercenary soldiers of the Pāla kings of Bengal. In the Bādāl Pillar inscription and the Gārūḍa pillar inscription of the time of Nārāyaṇapāla, Devapāla is stated to have curved the pride of the Hūṇas⁴⁴⁴. This shows that the Hūṇas were still active in different parts of Northern India. The Hūṇas as mercenary soldiers are, however, mentioned in the Nālandā plate of Dharmapāla.⁴⁴⁵ Even in the subsequent periods, the Hūṇas worked mostly as mercenary soldiers.

It would thus appear that the Hūṇas wielded considerable political power for a brief period. But they soon lost their glory. They did not, however, leave India. Instead, they continued their stay in different parts of India and became fully Indianized.

(iv) **Original habitat and Dispersals :**

It has been already stated that the original habitat of the Hūṇas is to be placed in Central Asia, and it is from there that they dispersed in different directions and occupied the region of the upper Jaxartes and thence moved to Sogdiana and Bactria. It is perhaps from these places that the Hūṇas moved down to India. In this connection, a particular reference may be made to the account of the Hūṇas given by Kālidāsa in his Raghuvamśa (IV,68). Kālidāsa describes that Raghu's expedition against the land of the Hūṇas on the Varṅkshu river (Oxus) resulted in the destruction of the Hūṇa's chiefs (Tatra Hūṇavarodhānām bhartrishuvyaktavikraman). It shows that Kālidāsa places the Hūṇas close to Persia and in the region of the Oxus or the Balkh region⁴⁴⁶. Thus, by the time of Kālidāsa (5th century A.D) the Hūṇas may be located in the Balkh region. Again, Raghu is stated to have conquered the Hūṇas on the bank of the river Sindhu⁴⁴⁷. It means that the Hūṇas made settlements in North-western region by that time. Further, the Balhikas have been identified with the Hūṇas, and it is learnt from the Meherauli Iron Pillar inscription that the king Chandra after crossing the Indus delta conquered the Balhikas, i.e., the Hūṇas⁴⁴⁸. Similarly, in the Harshacharita, Bāṇa places them in Uttarāpatha, somewhere in Western Pāñjāb⁴⁴⁹. It has been suggested that the Hūṇa country was in the Doab of the modern Naksh and Akshu (tributaries of the Oxus) and the northern boundary of the Kamboja abutted on that of the Hūṇa land⁴⁵⁰.

From all these references it would appear that the Hūṇas covered a wide belt of territory from the Oxus to the Indus. But the Hūṇas were not confined to this region alone. Varāhamihira in his Bṛihatsamhitā (XIV.27) refers to the Hūṇas in the Northern division. In XI. 61 the expression Chol-Avagāṇa-Śveta-Hūṇa has been translated by Kern as Cholas, Afghans (and) White Hūṇas. But in another place (XVI.38), the expression Pahlava-Śveta-Hūṇa has been translated as Pahlavas, Śvetas (and) Hūṇas⁴⁵¹. Gradually, they

poured into the interior of India as well and established their centres of political power in Malwa and other places. Further, while carrying out their depredations they also advanced towards Eastern India and Magadha. Even when they retreated, many Hūṇas were most likely left behind, and they settled in different parts of Eastern India.

Even in Bengal the Hūṇas lived and made permanent settlements. After the decline of their political power, they were mostly recruited as mercenary soldiers of the ruling chieftains in different parts of Northern India. When the Pālas came to power in Bengal in the middle of the 8th century A.D., the Hūṇas were recruited as soldiers in the army, perhaps in Bengal because of their fighting skill and bravery. From the Monghyr Copper plate inscription of Devapāla, it is learnt that Dharmapāla issued commands to all employees including those of the Hūṇa and the Kulika stocks⁴⁵². In the same way, the Bhāgalpur copper plate inscription of Nārāyaṇapāla refers to similar commands being extended to all employees including those of the Hūṇa and the Kulika stocks⁴⁵³. Again, the Bāngaḍ Copper plate inscription of Mahipāla I also refers to the Hūṇas, the Kulikas,⁴⁵⁴ etc. The Pālas of Bengal recruited the Hūṇas as mercenary soldiers, perhaps from outside Bengal. The Bādāl Pillar inscription records that Devapāla curbed the pride of the Hūṇas. It means that the Hūṇas were defeated and presumably many of them might have been brought to Bengal as well. All these Hūṇas settled also in Bengal, and they gradually mingled with other peoples of the land, and it may be said that they were fully absorbed.

(v) Culture :

Certain very interesting Hūṇa cultural traits are known from both literary and epigraphic records. Before dealing with those interesting traits it may be noted that the Hūṇas were peoples from Central Asia being mostly barbarous in their nature and character, more particularly while carrying out depredations, vandalism and destruction. The Hūṇas carried with them the Central Asiatic nomadic cultural traits, and some of these traits appear to have been contributed by them to the Indian culture. In India of course, the Hūṇas were all Indianized and in course of time they gave up their predatory and destructive habits and became permanently settled. A special reference may be made here to an interesting custom which was prevalent amongst the Hūṇa women. An account of this custom has been vividly described by

Kālidāsa in his Raghuvamśa (Canto IV, 68) as : Tatra Hūṇavarodhānām bhatrishu/...

⁽ⁿ⁾
Kapōlapātaka, ādeśivabhuva Raghu cheshtitam // It follows that the invasion

Strange of the Hūṇa land resulted in the destruction of the Hūṇa chiefs
Customs and the consequent sacrifice of the cheeks of their wives.

This practice has been fully explained by the commentator as : Pātana denotes vidāraṇa, kuttana or nakh-ot-karshana. This has been further elaborated by stating : Hūṇa-striyaḥ kapōla-pātana-pūrṣvaṁ rorudant = iti tad deś-ā-chāraḥ pati-vadhān = nāryo-rudat-yaḥ kucha = kapōlaṁ nakhjir = vidāray-anti, pati-vadhāt = tatra deśe striyaḥ kapōlaṁ nakhair = vidārayanti = iti, etc. Here Kālidāsa makes a specific reference to scarification of the cheeks of the Hūṇa widows ; others mention that their breasts along with cheeks were also scarified. The commentator has pointed out that the piercing of cheeks and breasts of the Hūṇa women was done with the aid of finger-nails. This is similar to the Turkish customs. On the basis of the Chinese accounts, Julien has observed that the widows go round their tents weeping and piercing their faces with a knife in such a way as one can well see blood flowing with tears. Here is a positive reference to scarification of faces by knife and breast with finger-nails⁴⁵⁵.

Most interestingly, an epigraphic record containing an almost analogous instance of scarification has been recorded in an inscription from Bengal. This is the Paśchimbhāga (Syhlet) Copper plate inscription of Śrīchandra of the Chandra dynasty of East Bengal belonging to the 10th century A.D. This inscription records the military achievements of Śrīchandra and gives an account of three popular practices or customs prevalent amongst the Yavanas, the Hūṇas and the Utkala peoples⁴⁵⁶. It has been stated that the Utkala women were addicted to drinking. About the Hūṇa women, it is described that they made their cheeks and belly Śoka-pracchāna-jarjara, i.e., made their cheeks and belly wounded out of grief. Here prachana is used for pracchāna or pracchita in the sense of scarification. Thus the whole expression means that the aggrieved Hūṇa women scarified their cheeks and belly on the death of their husbands.

It would appear that the Indians had direct knowledge of the strange customs prevailing amongst the Hūṇa widows who mourned the loss of their husbands by scarifying their cheeks, breasts and bellies by a knife or nails.

The main purpose of resorting to these practices was to make themselves ugly to look at. In such a case, others would not be eager to woo their faces. Still more interesting is that even in Bengal this strange custom of scarification was prevalent amongst the Hūṇas as indicated by the Paśchimbhāga inscription, as already referred to, which testifies to the very fact that the Hūṇas did also live in Bengal for otherwise this strange custom could not have been mentioned. It further shows that the people of Bengal were also well-acquainted with the customs prevailing amongst the Hūṇas.

(vi) Assimilation :

The Hūṇas were spread over different parts of Northern India, and they also established their political authority over certain parts, mostly in North-western region and Central India (Malwa). In fact, there is a reference to Hūṇa-maṇḍala in Malwa in an inscription of the Paramāra king Vākpatirāja^{456a}. All the Hūṇas who came to India continued their stay in India earning their livelihood by pursuing various vocations, mostly working as mercenary soldiers. Since the Hūṇas held political power for sometimes, there are also a few references to their marital unions with other Indian princes. In this connection, a reference may be made to Allata of the Guhila dynasty, who married a Hūṇa prince named Hariyādevi^{456b}. Besides, the king Yaśokarṇadeva of the Kalachuri dynasty is said to be the son of Karṇadeva and Āvalladeva, a Hūṇa princess. This kind of references show as to how the Hūṇas married the persons of the ruling houses, and their children were thus fully absorbed within the Hindu community. Not only that, it has been pointed out by Tod that the foreigners including the Hūṇas were mostly absorbed and recognised as one of the 36 respectable Rājput clans⁴⁵⁷. The ordinary Hūṇas must have mingled with other peoples and became also fully absorbed.

This appears to have happened in Bengal as well. It has been already suggested that the Hūṇas were recruited as mercenary soldiers, and they certainly got themselves settled in different parts of Bengal. Since no remnants of the Hūṇas are found today, it may be naturally presumed that all those Hūṇas who were in Bengal became mingled with other peoples of the land, and they were all absorbed in such a way as their separate identity has been entirely lost.

(vii) Identity :

No particular group of people bearing the name Hūṇa can be identified. According to Smith the most important element in the Hūṇa group was that of the Gurjaras⁴⁵⁸. The Gujars who established themselves in the Gujrāt district of the Pāñjāb before the 7th century A.D. appear to have come in with the Hūṇa invaders. The Gujars again are not different from the Jāṭs. It seems that the Hūṇas were largely absorbed within the Hindu society under the guise of the Rājput clans. But the Gujar caste has retained its ancient tribal name⁴⁵⁹. In Bengal, there is no such direct evidence of any Hūṇa survival. In this connection, a particular reference may be made to the modern Kirāntis living in the Himalayan country, and some of them are also to be found in Bengal. These Kirāntis have a tradition that they had rulers five centuries ago who were called Hang or Hwang. They have none now, but the village headmen who are called Pasung collect the taxes and settle disputes⁴⁶⁰. These Hang or Hwang may be equated with the Hūṇa. In that case, it may be presumed that the Hūṇas had also exercised their political authority over certain areas of the East Himalayan belt. But they have been all fully integrated with the Limbus, the Kirāntis and other peoples.

(viii) Ethnic Affiliation :

No distinct information is available regarding the physical characters of the Hūṇas. Both the literary and epigraphic records do not refer to anything about the physical features of the Hūṇas. The Hūṇas are stated to have been characterised by white colour, regular features and sedentary life in the Chinese records, and they are of the same race as the Tu-Kiu^{460a} (Turks). If the Hūṇas and the modern Gujars are taken to be identical, it may be possible to form an idea about the physical characters of the Hūṇas. The modern Gujar caste is believed to be of Hūṇa descent. They had entered into India along with the Hūṇas. The modern Jāṭs are also included within this group. It would be interesting here to refer to the physical features of the Jāṭs and the Gujars as given by Haddon. The Jāṭs are characterised by tall stature (1.716 m), light transparent brown skin-colour, dolichocephalic head (CI. 72-72), well developed forehead, regular features and a prominent straight leptorrhine nose (N.I.68.8). The cephalic and nasal indices of the

Jāts and the Gujars are 72.4 and 66.9 (stature 1.703 m). Both the Jāts and the Gujars may thus be placed in the same ethnic group⁴⁶¹. Further, the Jāts and Gujars Hūṇa has been taken to be a mixed Turki and Tuṅgu who are all Central Asiatic peoples. The Turki type, according to Haddon, is characterised by dark hair, yellowish white complexion, medium to tall stature, brachycephalic head (C.I.85-87), elongated oval face, broad cheek-bones, straight and prominent nose, thick lips and dark non-Mongolian eyes⁴⁶². The Tuṅgus are also characterised by black, coarse and straight hair, very little on face and body, yellowish brown skin-colour, medium stature, brachycephalic head (C.I. 84-87), prominent cheek-bones, mesorrhine nose and typical Mongolian eye characters⁴⁶³. It would follow that both the Turki and the Tuṅgus belong to the same ethnic group. If the Hūṇas are taken to be a mixed Turki and Tuṅgu people, it is quite but natural to presume that the Hūṇas also belong to the same ethnic stock.

This contention of the Mongoloid affiliation of the Hūṇas and their remnants in India is also supported by archaeological findings at Taxila. While excavating the site of the great Buddhist monastery named Dharmarājikāstūpa at Taxila, the excavator discovered several skeletal remains. Five skulls have been studied and their anthropometric measurements taken by Guha and others⁴⁶⁴. Five skulls were complete and others were distorted and damaged. Even all measurements could not be taken on these five Skulls. It has been pointed out that 'each of the 4 Skulls had a large brain, long head and face and prominent narrow nose'. The fifth one has been, however, taken as an essential brachycephalic race with a high cranial vault, and the nose has been supposed to have been long and prominent and face of a short squarish type. From the study of the results of the measurements the authors observed : "We have not been able to find their exact counterpart in the older races of the Indus valley, but from Somatic characters of some of the isolated tribes of the Hindukush mountains, such as, the Red Kaffirs ... the Taxila monks appear to be closely allied to them^{464a} ...". The characteristics of the fifth Skull were found to be quite unique, and no parallel could be sought amongst the ancient Indian skulls or the modern population of India. The authors could, however, find out similarities between this skull and those from Tārim basin which is supposed to be the homeland of the white Hūṇs who destroyed the city of

Archaeo-
logical
findings

Taxila. Accordingly, it has been concluded that one of the Hūṇas who came to destroy the monastery was slain there, and the other skeletons belonged to the slayers, perhaps the defenders of the monastery. Thus 4 skulls were characterised by the dolicho element and the fifth one by the brachy, latter element is perhaps represented by the Mongoloid ethnic type. In this context, it has been observed that the Dharmarājikā-stūpa was destroyed by the Hūṇa invaders, and there were perhaps killing of the residents of the Stūpa-monastery. In the fighting, some of the residents and invaders were killed, and the skeletal remains represent those who fell fighting. The skeletons belonging to the brachy type may accordingly be attributed to the Mongoloid ethnic stock. This is undoubtedly an important evidence furnished by archaeological findings and anthropometric measurements regarding the ethnic affiliation of the Hūṇas in India. This is undoubtedly an incontestable record of assigning the Hūṇas to the Mongoloid ethnic group. If it be so, it may be contended that the Mongoloid element in Northern India was largely contributed by these Hūṇa invaders. An attempt has been made to show that the Hūṇas also came and settled in Bengal under various capacities. In that case, it may be also contended that the Hūṇas like others coming from North-eastern India also contributed Mongoloid ethnic elements in the general composition of the Bengali people.

(ix) Observation :

From the above brief survey of the Hūṇas, it becomes evident that they played an important role in the ethnic composition and cultural build of North India. It has been also found out that all the Hūṇas who came to India have been fully absorbed without leaving behind any trace of their firm identity. This is what happened also in Bengal wherein the Hūṇas were absorbed in such a way as no trace of their identity can be found. It is, however, to be admitted that the Hūṇas settled in Bengal, and naturally they mingled with other peoples of the land and thereby contributed some of their ethnic features and cultural traits in the general composition of the Bengali people and culture as a whole.

VI THE CHĪNAS

Another foreign tribal community of considerable importance that infiltrated into India from different directions is the Chīna. The name Chin which in Chinese is probably Jin meaning men/people occurs in Sanskrit texts as Chīna (Hindi, Chin), and in Arabic and Persian, it is Sin (Sinae). 'The most common national name is Chung-kue (middle kingdom), and 'Chung-kue-jin' means the Chinese people. According to some, Chīna refers to the Chin (Tsin) dynasty (900 B.C.). Ptolemy's Thinae has been taken as Sinae⁴⁶⁵. The term Chīna is used in the Indian records in the sense of a group of peoples and their country. As for instance, in the Mahābhārata (V.86.10) the expression used is Chīnadeśodbhava, i.e., people of Chīna or Chīnadeśa. It is in this sense that the term has been largely used in the early texts and inscriptions.

(i) Early references ;

The Chīnas are referred to in the Epics, the Purāṇas, the Dharma-sāstras and other texts. The Rāmāyana mentions the Apara-chīnas, i.e., the Western Chīnas^{465a}. In the Mahābhārata (VI.9.65), the Chīnas are linked up with the Yavanas and the Kambojas. They are described to have taken part in the Bhārata war as allies of the Kurus. The Bṛhatsamhitā refers to them as the people of North-eastern India and couples them with the Vaṅgas, the Suhmas, the Kalingas, the Śakas, the Yavanas, the Māgadhas, the Kambojas⁴⁶⁶ etc. The Mahābhārata further refers to the ruler of Prāgyjyōtisha who fought with his army which was composed of the Chīnas and the Kirātas⁴⁶⁷. The Purāṇas and the Dharmaśāstras also mention the Chīnas under various capacities. The Mārkaṇḍeya-purāṇa (Chap.57, 39) refers to the Chīnas. The Matsya-purāṇa (121, 45-46) also contains allusions to the Chīnas. In the Dharmaśāstra of Manu, the Chīnas figure along with many other tribal peoples as belonging to the Kshatriya-jāti, but they sank to the position of the Vrshala or Sūdra⁴⁶⁸. The Chīnas are also mentioned in several Buddhist works like Jātakas, the Mahāvastu, the Milinda-pañho, etc.^{468a}. Besides, the Chīnas are also mentioned in several inscriptions. As for instance, the Hāthigumphā inscription of the king Khāravela refers to the Chīnas and the Kirātras⁴⁶⁹. Similarly, the Nāgārjunikoṇḍa inscription of the Ikshvāku king Vīrapurushadatta mentions the Chīnas and Chirata, i.e., Kirāta⁴⁷⁰.

(ii) **Habitat :**

The Chīnas were perhaps originally people of Tibet where civilization flourished quite independently of any foreign influence. It has been accordingly contended that the Chīnas might have moved towards North to China from Tibet. The other School holds the view that the civilization of China was flowered by infiltration of peoples from South-west Asia (Mesopotamia⁴⁷¹). If the Chinese did actually disperse from Tibet to China, it is quite natural to presume that they might have also moved downwards to India as well. The Chīnas in the Mahābhārata (Vi.9) have been mentioned as peoples living in the Udīchayadeśa, i.e., Northern country along with the Yavanas, the Kambojas, the Pārasikas, etc. Accordingly, the Chīnas are taken to have lived near the Oxus in Bokhārā⁴⁷². From the Mahābhārata, it appears that they were settled in North-west. Other references indicate their settlement in North-eastern region as well. Besides, there are also references to Chīnadeśa, i.e., the country of the Chīnas, which is described as lying to the South-east of Mānaḍseśa, i.e. Tibet⁴⁷³. In fact, Pargiter contended that the Chīna country comprised Tibet along with the whole range of the Himalayas⁴⁷⁴. Further, in the Mahābhārata (VI.9.66 ; 111.177.12), the Chīnas have been linked up with the Kambojas in North-west, and they have been also placed near the sources of the Ganges. Besides, Chīna or Chīnadeśa, there are also references to Mahāchīna (great Chīna) which is said to have extended from the Kailāsagiri and the place of the origin of the Sarayu as far as Moṅga (Perhaps Mongolia, i.e., North China⁴⁷⁵). The Chinese traveller Hiuen-Tsang in the 7th century A.D. described his homeland as the Mahāchīna⁴⁷⁶. It appears that Mahāchīna North-west actually denotes China proper. The Pāli Buddhist texts refer also to the Kingdom of the Chīnas as lying not far away from that of the Āndhakas, the Muṇḍakas, etc. In the Milinda-pañho it is stated that Chīna is as old as Ujṇīni, Kośala, Magadha, etc.^{476a}. If all these references to the habitat of the Chīnas are taken into consideration, it may be contended that the Chīnas might have infiltrated into India through the North-western region, and this explains their association with the Yavanas, the Kambojas and others.

The Chīnas were, however, peoples, more particularly of North-eastern India as well. In this connection, it may be noted that in the aforesaid inscriptions, the Chīnas have been mentioned in association with the Kīrātās,

the latter being the people par-excellence of North-eastern India. The country of the Chīnas has been accordingly placed in the Himalayas or beyond Chilata/
 North- Kirāta⁴⁷⁷. This is also supported by the contention of Abul Fazal
 east in his Āin-i-Akbarī which refers to Pegu called Cheen by the former writers, and this capital city appears to have included Burma in the Chīna country⁴⁷⁸. The Chinese established a vast empire, and they penetrated into Assam and Manipur, and they became gradually spread over different parts of North-eastern India.

There is little doubt that the Chīnas once held sway over North-eastern India, and it is quite but natural for some of them to infiltrate into the plains of Bengal and to move further westwards. That the Chīnas were people par-excellence of Eastern-India is also proved by the Brhatsaṃhitā wherein Varāhamihira places them in the North-eastern division⁴⁷⁹. Just as in Assam and other parts of North-eastern India, the Chīnas also mingled with other peoples of Bengal. That the Chīnas were very important peoples of North-eastern India is proved by the existence of even today of the Chin-hills, perhaps named after the Chīnas. If the Chīnas were so widespread over different parts of North-eastern India, it is quite likely that they also penetrated into Bengal. Unfortunately, the Chīnas have not been positively referred to in any inscriptions or any other records of Bengal. Naturally, it may be questioned as to whether the Chīnas did actually settle down in In Bengal Bengal. If the Chīnas had settled in North-eastern India and Tripurā, the question of their movements into the plains of Bengal can hardly be doubted. The absence of any reference to the Chīnas in any record of Bengal might have been due to the very fact that they came to Bengal, settled and mingled with other peoples in such a way that their separate existence or identity became completely lost. The Chīnas, however, have been mentioned as a group of peoples in the Epics, the Purāṇas and the Dharmaśāstras wherein they have been recognised as degraded Kshatriyas holding the position of a Vrshala. That the Chīnas lived in Bengal is considerably proved by the very fact that the Mahārājā Śrīgupta built the Temple of Chīna near the Mrigasthāpana monastery in Varendra (North Bengal) before 500 years of the Chinese pilgrim I-tsing's (671-95 A.D) time, i.e., second century A.D.⁴⁸⁰. I-tsing actually witnessed the ruins of this temple. Besides, a Bhaikshuki inscription in the Maldah Museum seems to point to the existence of a

community of foreign (possibly Mongoloid) monks in Varendra⁴⁸¹. These Mongoloid foreigners might have been the Chīnas.

(iii) Origins :

Nothing positive has been furnished in Indian records regarding the origin of the Chīnas. In the Manusmṛhitā, the Chīnas along with other foreign peoples have been described as belonging to the Kshatriya caste, but later on reduced to the position of the Śūdra because of the non-performance of the Vedic Samśkāras and the absence of contact with the Brāhmaṇas⁴⁸². It has been pointed out by Kane that these prescriptions of Manu has been done in tune with the story narrated in the Aitareya-Brāhmaṇa wherein Viśvāmitra is described to have cursed his senior fifty sons by saying that they would be associated with the lowest caste and that they became the Āndhras, the Pulindas, etc., the lowest orders in the society composed of the Dasyus⁴⁸³. But the very name Chīna and its associations prove its foreign origin, and there is little doubt that the Chīnas actually denote the people of China.

(iv) Culture :

Nothing particular is also known about the cultural patterns of the Chīnas from the early Indian records. Some Buddhist texts refer to the Chīna garment. The Milinda-pañho states that once a king of Chīna who wanted to churn the great ocean performed an act of truth at an interval of 4 months and then he entered into the great ocean on his chariot drawn by lions. In the front of his chariot, the mighty waves rolled back and flowed once more over the spot as soon as he left it^{483a}. Again, the Mahāvastu refers to the assembly of the Chīnas who were bound by its decision^{483b}. It appears that the Chīnas were either republican or obligarchical peoples. There are, however, certain concrete evidences which relate to the trade relation between China and India. In other words, the Chīnas appear to have entered into Assam and other parts of India in course of carrying out trade with India. Different products were brought into India by the Chinese. In these respects, a particular reference may be made to the Arthaśāstra of Kauṭilya which makes a positive mention of Chīna-paṭṭa, i.e., fabrics of China-manufacture⁴⁸⁴. This trade between China and India was carried through both North-western India as well as through Assam

and Burma. Further, while carrying on trade, the Chīnas had also established political authority in certain parts of North-eastern India. By the middle of the 13th century A.D., there was a Chinese invasion into Manipur, and the king of Manipur resisted the invading forces successfully and captured a large number of the Chīnas as prisoners who were made to settle down. These Chīnas became great experts in handicrafts, more particularly in manufacturing silk fabrics. They also engaged themselves in pottery, bell-metal work, carpentry, brick-making, etc. They also married Manipuri women and in course of time they became completely merged in the society. This is what happened in Bengal as well. The Chīnas who came and settled down in Bengal mingled with other peoples of the land and became fully absorbed.

(v) **Identity and Ethnic Affiliation :**

The Chīnas of ancient Indian texts are to be identified with the Chinese in general who were spread over different parts of the Himalayan belt. Even the Chinese themselves do not belong to any homogeneous ethnic group, excepting of course certain typical Mongoloid features like yellowish skin-colour, straight hair and epicanthic fold. In the Mahābhārata and other texts the Chīnas and the Kirātas have been mentioned together and it appears that they were cognate tribes. The Chīna and Kirāta soldiers are described to have appeared in gold having their appearance of a forest of Karnikaras. It is quite likely that both the Chīnas and the Kirātas of India belonged to the ^{same} ethnic stock. The Chīnas as known to India might have belonged to at least to the following four ethnic types as differentiated by Haddon:

(i) Protomorphus characterised by mesocephalic head (C.I. 75.9 - 80.8) and platyrrhine nose (N.I. 84-95). This type is confined to southern China and Assam.

(ii) Tibetanus characterised by mesocephalic head (C.I. 76.8-81.6) and mesorrhine (N.I. 67.2-78.5) nose.

Ethnic types (iii) Sinicus characterised by mesocephalic head (79.3 - 80.2) and mesorrhine (N.I. 72.9 - 79) nose .

(iv) Tibetanus brachymorphus . characterised by brachycephalic head (83.3 - 84.3) and mesorrhine nose (71.7 - 74.1)⁴⁸⁵

Of these four types, Nos. i, ii and iv mainly infiltrated into different parts of India ; No.i in Assam and from there into the plains of Bengal; No.ii also swept downwards into Bengal at different times; No.iv is mostly to be found in North-western region. It has been pointed out by Haddon that the brachy-mesocephals expanded northwards and broke through the North-eastern border of mesocephals to find a home in the extreme north-east corner. The centre of Asia is the most brachycephalic area⁴⁸⁶. As to the nasal index Haddon observes that the platyrrhine nose occurs in Assam amongst the Boro peoples, but more narrower noses are to be found amongst the Sinicus, Tibetanus, Lepchas, etc. There is a tendency to narrower noses in north-central region and north-eastern corner of Asia. All these types appear to have mingled with the peoples of Assam, Bengal and other places and the Mongoloid elements that are found may be attributed to the swarming of these peoples. It is in this respect that the Chīnas may be said to have made contributions in the ethnic composition of the people of Assam and Bengal.

(vi) Observation :

The Chīnas though not frequently mentioned have been referred to in the Epics, the Purāṇas and also in certain inscriptions. But no details of these peoples are available. From the Manusmṛiti, however, it is learnt that they were originally Kshatriyas, but subsequently degraded to the status of the Śūdra because of the non-performance of the Samskāras and non-contact with the Brāhmaṇas. Here the Dharmaśāstra-writers followed the general pattern in recognising many other foreign peoples and also some of the indigenous ones as Kshatriyas and made them degraded to the Śūdrahood, perhaps because of their military skill and excellence. That is why Manu (X.42-43) has described the Chīnas along with the Puṇḍrakas, the Oḍras, the Drāviḍas, the Kambojas, the Yavanas, the Darādas, the Khasas and others as originally Kshatriyas, but later on relegated to the position of the Śūdra. Similarly, in the Mahābhārata (VI.9), the Chīnas along with others have been included within the Mlechchha community (Chīna-Kamboja-dārūna-mlechchha-jātayah). From this it follows that the Chīnas were given due recognition as a degraded Kshatriya and a Mlechchha, the latter designation has been mostly applied to denote all the foreigners. Another significant fact that emerges is that the Chīnas and the Kirātas have been very often mentioned together,

and they appear to have been cognate peoples. Both the Kirātas and the Chīnas may be primarily held responsible for the contribution of the Mongoloid ethnic element and the Chinese cultural traits in the composition of the people and culture of Eastern India as a whole.

VII. THE ĀBHĪRAS

Another tribal community of foreign extraction in association with the Yavanas, the Śakas, the Hūṇas, etc., is known in Indian history as the Ābhīra who played a significant role in the history of India and whose survivals under modified forms and categories are even now found in different parts of the country.

(i) Derivation and Meaning :

The term Ābhīra (ā-bhī+rā+a) literary means one who frightens or causes fear. But this nomenclature is widely used in Indian texts to denote a group of people bearing the same name or a country called Ābhīradeśa or the land of the Ābhīras. The Prākṛita form of the word Ābhīra is Āhir, a name applied to groups of peoples of Bihar and Upper India who have been taken to be the surviving remnants of the ancient Ābhīras.

The Ābhīra community does not figure prominently in the literary and epigraphic records as peoples of Bengal. It is only in the Bṛhaddharma-purāṇa that the Ābhīra as a caste has been specifically mentioned, but not in the Brahmavaivarta-purāṇa. Both these Purāṇas have been taken to have been composed in Bengal by about the 12th or 13th century A.D., reflecting the condition and the social milieu prevailing in Bengal at that time. When the Ābhīras have been included within the Brahmanical social framework, it is quite but natural to presume their presence in Bengal as well. In the Charyyā-gīti, the Ābhīras have, however, been mentioned along with the Rajakas, the Naṭas, etc. They have been also described as belonging to a very low community. Besides, in Bengal the Goālās belonging to a caste order bearing the same name are to be found widespread over different parts of the land living on cattle-rearing. These Goālās have been again taken to be the descendants of the ancient Ābhīras.

Taking into consideration all these facts it may be contended that the Ābhīras also infiltrated and settled in Bengal. It would be accordingly necessary to make a brief reprisal of the Ābhīras in India.

(ii) **Early References :**

The Ābhīras have been referred to in most of the indigenous and foreign literary accounts and also in epigraphic records. It is in Patañjali's Mahābhāshya that the Ābhīras are first mentioned. The Mahābhārata in its different sections refers to the Ābhīras. So also, the different Purānas contain references to the Ābhīras. The Ābhīras are also mentioned in several inscriptions including the Allahabad inscription of Samudragupta. The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea and Ptolemy's geography also refer to the Ābhīras and their country. The Periplus mentions the country of Abiria (to be identified with the Ābhīras) and its sea-board Syastrene (i.e. Surāshtra⁴⁸⁷). Ptolemy, however, speaks of Abiria (Aberia = Ābhīra) as included in Indo-Scythia which perhaps meant the whole country along the lower course of the Indus⁴⁸⁸. From this it follows that the Ābhīra people and their country were quite well-known to the classical writers.

(iii) **Original Habitat and Dispersal :**

The Ābhīras were distinctly a people of foreign origin, and they came to India from outside. It has been rightly pointed out that Abiravan between Hirāt and Kāndāhār might have been their original homeland⁴⁸⁹. It is from these regions that the Ābhīras migrated into India and concentrated in western part of the subcontinent which became known as Aberia by the first century A.D. The Ābhīras might have entered into India before or along with the Śakas⁴⁹⁰. In the Bṛhatsamhitā, the Ābhīras have been placed in the Southern division and South-west division⁴⁹¹. According to the Mahābhārata, the Ābhīras are to be located in Aparāntaka, Western division of India. From the Epic, it is further learnt that they lived on the Sarasvatī (Śūdrābhīragaśchaivaye chāsṛitya Saravatin Vārtāyanticha ye Matsyairye cha parvatavāsinah). This location is also supported by the close association of the Ābhīras with the Śūdras who are to be made identical with the tribe Sodrai of the classical writers. This is also corroborated by the Puranic accounts. As for instance, the Vishnu-purāna places the Ābhīras along with the Śūdras, the

North-
West
and
West

Surāshṭras and others in the extreme West⁴⁹². Similarly, the Mārkaṇḍeya-purāṇa (Chap.57 vv. 35-36) refers to the Ābhīras along with the Śūdras, the Surāshṭras, etc. This placement of the Ābhīras in Western India is also supported by the Periplus and Ptolemy's geography⁴⁹³. The land of the Ābhīras was called Abiria which is above Patalene, on the Indus.

But the Ābhīras were not confined to Western India alone. They also spread out to different parts of Northern India and also in certain parts of Southern India. The Vāyu-purāṇa groups the Ābhīras with the Vidarbhas and the Pulindas⁴⁹⁴. The commentator on the Kāmasūtra (6.4.24) places the Ābhīras in the tract including Śrīkanṭha (Thāneśvara) and Kurukshetra. This is also supported by the Mahābhārata (IX.37.1) which also refers to their connection with the North and West Pāñjāb and association with the Daradas and the Kāśmīras⁴⁹⁵. Further, the Ābhīras are also described as living near Pañchanada, i.e., Pāñjāb. That the Ābhīras also entered into the interior of India is also proved by their well-known association with Mathurā and the neighbouring places as described in the later Purāṇas. But Varāhamihira in his Bṛhatsaṃhitā (XIV.12) places the Ābhīras in the Southern division⁴⁹⁶.
 Other Parts Again, the presence of the Ābhīras in Madhyapradeś can be gleamed from such place-names as Ahirwada between Pārvatī and Betwa⁴⁹⁷. The Ābhīras are also described as Northern peoples who lived in the Vinasana region⁴⁹⁸.

It was from Upper India that these Ābhīras might have also moved towards the Eastern regions as is indicated by the widespread presence of the Ābhīras in U.P. and Bihar. It is not quite unlikely that it is from Bihar that the Ābhīras might have infiltrated into Bengal and mixed with other peoples of the land. That the Ābhīras came to Bengal is proved by their mention in association with the Pauṇḍras and other tribes in the Eastern region. The Ābhīras had also another settlement in South India, Bengal and (Dakshināpatha). The Mārkaṇḍeya-purāṇa refers to the Ābhīras along with the Keralas, the Kālīngas, the Puṇḍrakas, the Kuntalas, etc., who were all peoples of South India⁴⁹⁹. Similarly, the Vāyu-purāṇa includes the Ābhīras in the list of the peoples who have been described as Dakshināpatha-vāsinah⁵⁰⁰. Thus the Ābhīras were widespread all over India.

(iv) History :

The Ābhīras in course of their movements into India mostly concentrated themselves in Mahārāshtra region or Western India where they actually came into prominence as a political power. This is amply borne out by inscriptions as well which refer to the Ābhīra king and Ābhīra kingdom. By the middle of the second century B.C. the Ābhīra country might have been under the domination of the Bactrian Greeks, and the whole of Indo-scythia which perhaps included Aberia of the Periplus and Ptolemy was under the hegemony of the Western Kshatrapas or Śāka rulers of Western India. They came perhaps under the domination of the great Kshatrapa ruler Rudradāmana who flourished in the second century A.D.⁵⁰¹. It was from this century that the Ābhīras held important administrative position and appear to have yielded considerable political authority.

^{Rise to Power} From the Gunda inscription of Rudrasīṅgha dated 181 A.D., it is learnt that he had an Ābhīra general named Rudrabhūti who excavated a tank for public welfare⁵⁰². Shortly afterwards, the Ābhīras assumed the position of the Mahākshatrapa. This office was held at about 236 A.D. by Išvaradatta who issued silver coins in Kathiawar. This Išvaradatta has been again made identical with the Ābhīra king Išvarasena who wrested parts of Mahārāshtra from the Sātavāhanas⁵⁰³. From the Kāmasūtra it is learnt that an Ābhīra ruler named Kotturāja established a kingdom in Western India by the third century A.D. Another Ābhīra ruler Vasusena is known from the Nāgārjunīkoṇḍa inscription⁵⁰⁴. Further, the Ābhīra kingdom as one of the tribal states of Western and South-western India paying homage to Samudragupta has been also mentioned in Allahabad pillar inscription⁵⁰⁵. The Ābhīras appear to have formed a semi-independent state outside the Gupta empire⁵⁰⁶. Moreover, the Chandrāvali inscription of Mayuraśarman refers to the annexation of the Ābhīra country by the Kadamba Family⁵⁰⁷. It would appear that the Ābhīras became powerful by setting aside the rule of the Western Satraps. Gradually, they extended their sway over other parts of Western India including the Andhradeśa at the expense of the Sātavāhanas. In the fifth century A.D., the Ābhīras succeeded in overpowering the Āndhras as is indicated by the Nāgārjunīkoṇḍa inscription. Most significantly, the Ābhīras have been also mentioned in the Purāṇas as Andhrabhṛtyas like the Sātavāhanas⁵⁰⁸. But the Ābhīras could not hold their power in Western India and the Andhra region for a long time. They were soon supplanted by the Imperial Guptas and the Vākāṭakas. It is perhaps after losing their political power that the Ābhīras spread out in different directions.

Significantly, a reference may be made to the Vaṁśāvalis of Nepal wherein the settlement of the Ābhīras in Nepal has been referred to. It has been stated in the Vaṁśāvalis that the early legendary history of Nepal begins with the Kirāta kings who were succeeded by the princes belonging to the Gopāla dynasty. The Gopālas are again said to have been supplanted by the Ābhīras who migrated from Upper India⁵⁰⁹.

(v) Origins :

No definite information is available regarding the origins of the Ābhīras. In the Manusāṁhitā (X.15), the Ābhīra has been described as the issue of a Brāhmaṇa male and an Ambashṭha female. Buchanan, however, has quoted a legendary story which makes the Goālās as belonging to the Vaiśyas, and that they were degraded because of their practice of castrating their cattle. But this legendary story has little historical credibility. Such an origin from a union between a Brāhmaṇa male and an Ambashṭha female appears to be a later introduction, i.e., after their assimilation within the Hindu fold. Not only that, the Ābhīras, the Goālās and the Āhīras trace their descent from the God Kṛishṇa whose relations with the milkmaid of Mathurā and Vṛindāvana play an important part in the mythological tales of the later Purāṇas. Kṛishṇa himself is supposed to have belonged to the Yādava tribe which established settlements in and around Mathurā. In fact, one of the sections of the Goālās of North-western India claimed to call themselves as Yadu-vaṁśis⁵¹⁰. All these claims have, however, little historical bearings. Doubtlessly, the Ābhīras were non-Aryan foreign peoples who were subsequently fully Indianised and made integrants of the Brahmanical social framework. In this connection, a particular reference may be made to the Daulatpur inscription of Išvaradeva, which mentions the Ābhīra Išvaradeva as belonging to Śūdausakrāsagotra⁵¹¹. The name of the Gotra is suggestive of the Iranian origin of the Ābhīras⁵¹².

(vi) Identity :

The ancient Ābhīras are represented today by the Āhīras who are to be found spread over different parts of Northern India, and in Bengal and other parts they are most commonly known as the Gopas or Goālās^{512a}. The Āhīras and the Goālās today follow the occupations of the carpenter, goldsmith, cowherd

and even priest. It is quite but natural to derive the word Āhir from Ābhīra, but the term Goālā has little linguistic affiliation to the word Ābhīra. It is perhaps because of analogous vocations pursued by the Ābhīras or Āhirs and the Goālās that the latter have been affiliated to the former. Not only that, both the Āhirs and the Goālās have strong legendary affiliation to the cowherd Kṛishṇa. In fact, the Goālās also trace their descent from Kṛishṇa. There is hardly any other concrete evidence of identifying or affiliating the Goālās of Bengal to the Ābhīras excepting of course their analogous vocations, beliefs and practices.

(vii) Culture :

The Ābhīras were originally a nomadic pastoral people whose occupation was primarily the tending of cattle. In the Purāṇas, the Ābhīras have been included amongst the tribes called Āṭavyas/Vanavāsikas, i.e., dwellers of the forest⁵¹³. The cowherds amongst whom the legendary boy God Kṛishṇa lived belonged to this nomadic Ābhīra community which once occupied the whole tract of the country from Madhuvana near Mahurā to Anupa and Anārta, the regions about Dvārakā⁵¹⁴. According to the Amarakōsha, the Ābhīras were the cowherds par-excellence⁵¹⁵. The occupations of the Goālās and the Āhirs differed/differ from regions to regions. As for instance, the Goālās of Mathurā who claim to be pure Gopas possess substantial farms where they keep large cows and buffaloes and deal in milk and ghee. In Bihar, the Goālās feed their cattle on the forest-clad table lands and pursue a nomadic life during the dry season living in tents of bamboo-matting⁵¹⁶. In Bengal, the Goālās have different sections. In Dacca area, there are two curious subsections named Sādā and Lāl Goālās, i.e., white and red, the names being derived from the colours of clothes worn by them⁵¹⁷. The former section claims to be superior in social position.

The Ābhīras may be again closely associated with Kṛishṇa's early life and his play with the cowherd women. Accordingly, Kṛishṇa has been identified with the god par-excellence of the Ābhīras. In this connection, a reference may be made to Nandagopa. Nanda and Yaśodā or Gopa of Gokula are compounded together to form the name of the maidservant. This compound form contains a clear reminiscence of the boy god Kṛishṇa who can not be, however, considered as belonging to the pre-Christian period for the identification of Vāsudeva-Kṛishṇa with Gopāla-Kṛishṇa⁵¹⁸. It has been observed by Bhandarkar that the dalliance of Kṛishṇa with cowherdresses, which introduced an element of indecency with the advance of morality into the Vāsudeva religion was an aftergrowth, consequent upon the free intercourse between the Ābhīras and the Aryans. Morality does not appear to have been very high and strict amongst the Ābhīras at that time, and their neighbours took the advantage of its looseness⁵¹⁹. Further, it has been suggested that the Ābhīras brought to India the story of Kṛishṇa's boyhood from outside, and that they might have brought with them also the name of Christ, and this probably led to the identification of the boy God Kṛishṇa with Vāsudeva. In fact, it has been said that the Christ of the Ābhīras was recognised as Kṛishṇa⁵²⁰. But Bhandarkar has, however, rightly urged that the contention that the Ābhīras did actually bring the Christian legend to India and introduced them to the Kṛishṇa saga is not supported by any concrete evidence whatsoever⁵²¹. It is, however, to be noted that the Goālās of Bengal like the Ābhīras are also devout followers of Vaishnavism or more particularly of Kṛishṇa cult. They celebrate the Janmāshṭamī or the festival of Kṛishṇa's birthday with great pomp and grandeur. But in Bihar amongst the Goālās Vaishnavism has not such a strong influence.

¹ The Ābhīras appear to have their own Apabhramśa. Their language has been called Ābhīri⁵²². Daṇḍin in his Kāvyādarśa says that Apabhramśa is the appellation of the speech of the Ābhīras and the like in poetry⁵²³. Since

the Ābhīras have been completely absorbed within the Hindu fold, hardly any distinct remnants of their culture can be at present traced.

(viii) Ethnic Affiliation :

The ethnic features of the Ābhīras have not been particularly described in any early texts. It is from the physical characteristics of their surviving elements, namely, the Āhirs and the Goālās, that it may be possible to form an idea regarding the racial affiliation of the Ābhīras. Physical features of the Goālās differ from region to region because of heavy admixtures with the local peoples. It has been pointed out by Dalton that the Goālās of Mathurā are characterised by high, sharp and delicate features with light brown skin-colour. But the Goālās of Bihar are physically very coarse having dark complexion and large hand and feet. It has been pointed out that these people can be hardly distinguished from the aboriginal Kols of Siṅgbhūm⁵²⁴. Therefore, Dalton thinks that the Magadha Goālās are like the Hos. On the other hand, the Goālās of Mathurā are said to be of the Aryan type. In Bengal, the Goālās and the Gopas are mixed peoples, and it is hardly possible to affiliate them with any particular racial stock. In this connection, it would be profitable to refer to the anthropometric measurements of the Goālās of Bihar and U.P. along with those of Bengal after Risley⁵²⁵. The average C.I. and N.I. of the Bihar Goālās are 76.2 and 76.7 respectively. The average C.I. of the Goālās of U.P. is less than the C.I. of the Goālās of Bihar, i.e., 73.0. But the average N.I. is higher, i.e., 80.9, than the N.I., i.e., 76.7 of the Goālās of Bihar. In regard to N.I. both are, however, mesorrhine. In other words, the Goālās of Bihar and U.P. belong to dolicho-mesorrhine type. That is why perhaps Risley included the Goālās of Bihar and U.P. within his Aryo-Dravidian ethnic type.

So far as Bengal is concerned, Risley has taken measurements of the Goālās of East Bengal and Sadgops of 24-Parganas. The average C.I. and N.I. of the Goālās of East Bengal are 77.3 and 74.2 and the average C.I. and N.I. of the Sadgops of 24-Parganas are 77.6 and 73.9⁵²⁶. It is thus noticeable that both the Goālās and the Sadgops appear to belong to the same ethnic group, i.e., mesocephalic and mesorrhine type. It is in this respect that the Goālās of Bengal are different from those of Bihar and U.P. The anthropometric measurements of Risley on the Goālās are also supported by Mahalanobis. A comparative table showing the results of the measurements of Risley

and Mahalanobis may be stated as :

Goālās			
Risley		Mahalanobis	
C.I.	N.I.	C.I.	N.I.
77.3	74.2	77.3	74.6

From the above, it follows that both the measurements agree considerably, and the Goālās may be said to belong to mesocephalic and mesorrhine type. Risley has included the Goālās and the Sadgops of Bengal within his Monglo-Dravidian type. But hardly there is any clue to the presence of brachycephalic element amongst the Goālās. It appears that the present physical characters of the Goālās have been the results of considerable admixture with other peoples of the land. From the analysis of anthropometric measurements made by Mahalanobis it appears that the Kāyasthas of Bengal show greater resemblance with the Sadgops who have still greater resemblance with the Pods and the Kaivartas⁵²⁷.

The picture that is presented by the results of anthropometric measurements is confusing in the sense that the Goālās of Bengal do not show any resemblance with their counterparts in other areas of Northern India. This shows their considerable admixtures with the local people, which resulted in changing their original physical characters.

(ix) Assimilation and Social Position :

It has been already stated that the Ābhīras with their surviving elements, namely, the Āhirs and the Goālās were originally foreginers and subsequently absorbed within the Hindu caste order. In the usual fashion, the origin of the Ābhīras has been accordingly described as the result of Anuloma union. Further, in the Mahābhārata, the Ābhīras have been described as the Mlechchhas and the Dasyus⁵²⁸. The Mahābhārata describes also the Ābhīras as attacking Arjuna after the great war in the land of the five rivers and carrying away Vṛishṇi women. Again, in the Sabhāparvan of the Mahābhārata, the Ābhīras have been mentioned along with the Pāradas. It is further stated that the Ābhīras were reduced to the status of the Śūdras because of their non-contact with the Brāhmaṇas⁵²⁹. It is, however, to be noted that the Ābhīras did not form a Śūdra sub-caste. Rather, the Ābhīra as a caste distinct from the Śūdra becomes evident from the Mahābhāshya⁵³⁰.

In Bengal, the Ābhīra as a caste has been included in the Bṛhaddharma-purāṇa within the Madhyamaśāṅkara. But the cognate caste groups, namely, the Goālās and the Gopas, have been differently placed. The Gopa caste has been taken to be a Śūdra sub-caste. The Kāmasūtra (1.5.37) mentions a caste named Gopalaka which may be made identical with the Gopa. The Vedasmṛiti includes the Kāyasthas among the Śūdras along with Nāpita, the Gopa, the Kumbhakāra, etc.⁵³¹ The Gopa again has been made identical with the modern Gavli, a Śūdra sub-caste. Yājñavalkya has stated that debts contracted by the Gopa-wives must be paid by their husbands as the latter's professions and earnings depend upon them⁵³². In the Bṛhaddharma-purāṇa, the Gopa has been described as the issue of a union between a Vaiśya female and a Kshatriya male and included within the Uttamaśāṅkara. In the Brahmavaivarta-purāṇa also the Gopas have been placed under the category Satśūdra. Further, according to the Parāśarapaddhati and the Vallālacharita, the Gopa is included within the Navasākha. But in the Jātimālā, the origin of the Gopa has been described as an issue from Manibandha female and Tantuvāya male showing a lower status. Further, according to Parāśara, the Gopa is the issue of a Kshatriya female by a Śūdra male implying thereby a low origin and a degraded social status. If the Gopas are to be identified with the Sadgopas, they may be included within class III of the Bengal caste hierarchy as categorised by Risley.

Thus on the whole, the position of the Gopas appears to be superior to that of the Goālās who have been placed by Risley under category IV. In comparison, the Goālās of Bihar rank with the Kurmis and other castes from whose hands a Brāhmaṇa can take water. In Bengal, the Goālās occupy an inferior position. They are inferior not only to the Navasākha caste group, but also to the Kaivarta caste pursuing agriculture. Thus the social position of the Goālās is quite low in the Brahmanical hierarchy of Bengal.

(x) Observation :

From the above brief discourse on the Ābhīras and their present survivors it may be observed that they were originally a foreign people, perhaps affiliated to other peoples of foreign extractions moving out of Central Asia. The Ābhīras

certainly came in large numbers, and they concentrated themselves in Western India where they could establish their political hegemony as well. It is perhaps after the decline of their political power that the Ābhīras dispersed in different directions, and some of them might have infiltrated into Bengal as mercenary soldiers in the army of the ruling chieftains. The Ābhīras were originally a pastoral nomadic people, but in India they settled down and took up other vocations. But the traditional occupation of cattle-herding and trading with milk-products continued through ages and are still being pursued by their surviving descendants. Most interestingly, the Ābhīras are to be associated with the Kṛishṇa saga and other Puranic legends. In Bengal, the Ābhīras gave up their ancient name and came to be known simply as Goālās and Gopas. The Āhirs are rarely to be found in Bengal as such. The Goālās of Bengal have been fully integrated within the Brahmanical social order, and they have mingled with other peoples of the land, high and low, in such a way that they lost their ethnic homogeneity altogether. The popularity of Vaishnavism and of Kṛishṇa cult in particular in Bengal may be taken as a veritable contribution of the Ābhīras, which is even now jealously guarded by the Goālās who are taken to be the surviving remnants of the Ābhīras in Bengal.

VIII. THE TURUSHKAS

Along with the tribal communities coming to India from Central Asia as already referred to, another tribe originating from that region had also infiltrated into India and might have been in the beginning spread over the borders of the North-western region. But subsequently, they came in a large number as conquerors as well and established political supremacy over different parts of Northern India. The name of this tribal community has been variously given as Tokhara, Tukhara, Tushara, etc., and its Sanskritized form is Turushka or Tushara who has been very often equated with the Yue-chi tribe. Risley has specifically reported that the Hindus called the Yue-chi the Śakas and Turushkas⁵³³. The term Turashka is again a Sanskritized form of the country called Turkey. Derivation or Turkomonistān, perhaps named after the people known as the Turks and meaning or Turkis. Accordingly, the term Turashka denotes the Turks or the Turki people. But all the Turks everywhere may not be of Turki origins.

This term, on the other hand, is applied also to denote persons of other races who at different periods have been converted into Islam. In fact, the term Turashka in Bengal was or is used to connote the Muslims who invaded and conquered Bengal. Even in the records of the 11th century from U.P. and Central India, the word Turushka means the Turks represented by the houses of Ghazni and Ghur⁵³⁴. In reality, Turashka has been / and is used to denote the Muslims in general.

(i) Early references :

The Turashkas as a group of people under varied names occur in both indigenous and classical texts. In the Bṛhatsamhitā, the Tukhāra people have been placed in the North-west division. Kern has translated the word by Tocharian,⁵³ Ptolemy refers to Tokharoi and the Arab writers mention Tukhāristān as the land of Tukhāras. This Tukhāri and Tukhāra appear to be identical. The term Tukhāra again has been taken to be Tushara which may be the same as Turashka. Kālidāsa while describing Raghu's Digvijaya refers to the Turashkas who were defeated by the great conqueror on the bank of the river Vamāshu in the North⁵³⁶. In the Mahābhārata, there are references to Tukhāras and Tushāras (LI.1850; LI.1991; LXV. 2429). The Kishkindhyākāṇḍa of the Rāmāyaṇa mentions the Varied Tukhāras (XLIV.15). The Harivaṃśa groups them with the Śakas, the names in Pahlavas, etc. Besides, Strabo calls these people Tochari or Tukhara. texts In Ptolemy's account, the same people is referred to as Tokeroi. The Periplus also mentions the same people while referring to the warlike peoples of Bactria. In the Mārkaṇḍeya-purāṇa (LVII.39), the Turashkas are mentioned along with the Kambojas, the Daradas and others. The Vāyu-purāṇa (XIV.118) contains references to the Tusharas instead of Turashkas. There is, however, little doubt that they are the same people. It would appear from both indigenous and foreign texts that the Turashkas named variously in literary texts have been referred to along with other foreign tribes of North-western India.

(ii) Original Habitat and Movements :

According to Varāhamihira, the Tukhāras are to be placed in the North-west division⁵³⁷. Stein has located their country in the upper Oxus valley including Balkh and Badakshan⁵³⁸. This is also supported by the description of the land of the Turashkas as given by Kālidāsa in his Raghuvamśa. From the Mahābhārata it would appear that the Turashkas were outside the zone of the Northern peoples bordering on the Himalayas. The Mārkaṇḍeya-purāṇa specifically calls them

Vāhyatonarāḥ, i.e., the outside peoples. That the Turashkas are to be located in a place outside the border of India is also considerably attested to by the Original testimony of the classical writers. Thus Strabo places the Tokharis homeland on the north of the Hindukush, and that they might have come to India from that region on the other side of Jaxartes. Similarly, Ptolemy and the Periplus refer to the Tukhara as an important element in the Bactrian population. While describing Kumārapāla's (Chālukya king) Dvigvijaya-limits it is said : "up to the Ganges on the east, Vindhya on the south, Sindh, on the west and up to the Turushka (land) on the north ...". In other words, the land of the Turushkas was on the North⁵³⁹. But originally they might have come from Central Asia. In fact, the original home of the Turashkas or Tokhāris has been located in western part of Central Asia.

It is from this region that the Turashkas dispersed in different directions, more particularly towards West and South. It is quite likely that they were also present on the peripheries of North-western India. This would be clear from the very fact that the Tukharas or the Turashkas played an important part in the history of Kāśmīr in the 9th and 10th century A.D. The Turashkas again became converts to Islam, and it is only thereafter that they entered Movements into India in large numbers as conquerors, and they swept over the plains of Northern India advancing eastwards as well. The Turashkas entered also into Bengal as conquerors in the 12th century when numerous references to the Turashkas and the war with them occur in various records. From the account of Tārānāth, it is learnt that the later Sena kings were subordinates to the Turashkas⁵⁴⁰. There are also other information regarding the Turashkas in Bengal. As for instance, Abhayākara Gupta, the highly esteemed preceptor living in the Vikramaśīla monastery, refers to the Turashka-war and is said in Bengal to have performed religious rites which resulted in driving out the Turashkas from India. Besides, there are also specific references to the invasion of Bengal by the Turashkas. Ratnākara, the head of the Vikramaśīla monastery, is also said to have uttered at the time of Dipaṅkara's departure to Tibet : ... "numerous Turashkas are invading India"⁵⁴¹. These references to the Turashkas in Bengal are very significant in the sense that they have been referred to as Muhammedans. All these references to the Turashkas relate, however, to a period later than the 12th century A.D.

(iii) Origins and History :

It has been already stated that the Turashka has been identified with the people named variously as the Turk (Tu-Kin), a branch of Aschin (Asona) Huns who after their expulsion from West China by the first half of the 5th century A.D. were given settlements on the southern slopes of Altai. Soon they took the leadership of the Central Asiatic nomads and conquered Sogdiana and occupied East Turkistan. By about 745 A.D., the Eastern Turks as a great power disappeared from history. But the Western Turks became very powerful in Persia, and subsequently, they became subdued by the Arabs. It was thence that these peoples became Muslims. It may be further noted that by about 565 A.D., the Turks annexed the Hūṇa empire, and this eventually led to the Muhammedan conquest of India by about 1200 A.D. preceded by the inroads of Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni. The Turks had established themselves on the Indian frontier by the first half of the 10th Century A.D. and during Sabukṭigīn's rule the Turks began their attack on an ambitious scale, and by 997 A.D. they became masters of Peshawar. This was followed by the invasion of Ghurī. In this connection, it is further to be noted that even in the beginning of the Christian period or before that, the Turks might have also entered into India. The Kushāṇas are also said to be of Turki descent from Bactria⁵⁴². Not only that, the Hūṇas have been also considered as mixed Turki peoples⁵⁴³. If it be so then the Kushāṇas and the Hūṇas who came long before the Turkish Muslims and established powerful kingdoms in India were all Turks. Further, that the Turushkas had been in North-western India for a long time is also proved by the part played by them in the history of Kāśmīr. From the Rājataranginī, it is learnt that Lalitāditya obtained victory over the Turashkas. In the beginning of the 11th century, the Paramāra king Bhoja is said to have successfully withheld the Turushkas who were the successors of Mahmud⁵⁴⁴. Again, the Chāhamāna ruler Arṇorāja is said to have massacred the Turushkas⁵⁴⁵. There are also several other references to the defeat of the Turushkas at the hands of the Chāhamānas. The Chālukyas also claimed victories over the Turushkas⁵⁴⁶. Even the Guhilaputras defeated the Turushkas⁵⁴⁷. All these show that the Turushkas could not make any political headway because of the Rājput rulers till the invasion of the Ghurī conqueror. Prithvīrāja III (c.1179 - 92 A.D) formed a barrier against the advance of the Turks from the Indus valley⁵⁴⁸. All these prove that the Turashkas long before the fruitful Muslim invasion were spread over the border areas of North-western India, and if the Kushāṇas

and the Hūṇas are taken to be mixed Turki people, it may be said that the Turashkas had been in India from very early times, and naturally they did also mingle with other peoples.

(iv) Culture :

Little information is available regarding the cultural complex of the Turashkas. A very interesting information has been, however, furnished by Kalhaṇa in his Rājatarāṅgiṇī. It is said that at the command of Lalitāditya, the Turashkas carried their arms at their back and shaved half their head as a mark of bondage⁵⁴⁹. This is a peculiar habit of their shaving, and there is little doubt that this is an un-Indian practice. Further, it is learnt that they were good fighters. They were great experts in catching and taming elephants⁵⁵⁰. Originally, the Turushkas pursued a nomadic pastoral life-pattern, and it is only after a long time that they could settle down.

(v) Identity and Ethnic Affiliation :

The physical characters of the Turki people have been given by Haddon as : dark hair, much on face, yellowish white skin-colour, medium to tall stature, strongly brachycephalic (C.I. 85-87), oval face, broad cheek bones, prominent nose, thick lips and eyefold present⁵⁵¹. The Turks have been also identified with the Bactrian peasants and the Yue-chi and Yetha ; the former is said to be now represented by the Jāṭs and the latter by the Rājputs. The Rājput Turki : Thākurs (land-owners and feudal lords) trace their genealogy from physical characters the 7th century, i.e., to say after their Hinduization. Again, there are many legends regarding the conflict between the Brāhmaṇas and the Rājputs who are supposed to have entered into India as Turkis. It has been said that the Rājputs are indeed the Turki leaders and the Jāṭs were the peaceful peasants who followed them in India⁵⁵².

The physical characters of the Rājputs and the Jāṭs have been described by Risley as : wavy hair, dark skin-colour and dolichocephalic head. They have been linked with the Caucasian group. In this connection, a particular reference may be made to the opinion of Haddon who has placed the Rājputs under the Indo-Afghan group characterised by black-wavy hair, brown skin-colour, dolicho to mesocephalic head (C.I. 71.3-77.5), long face and leptorrhine nose (N.I. 71.6)

and dark eyes⁵⁵³. Again, it may be noted that the Turki type appears to have played a dominant role in the composition of the people of North-western and Western India, and Risley has explained their ethnic composition as an admixture between the Turks and the Iranians, and the type has been described by him as characterised by broad head, long prominent nose, abundant hair and tall stature⁵⁵⁴.

So far as the Jāts and the Rājputs are concerned it is to be borne in mind that both the peoples are composed of diverse elements contributed by varied peoples coming mostly from Central Asia. It would not be justifiable to describe them as merely of Turki origin. The Turashkas are mostly taken as Mussalmans. Accordingly, many of these peoples are still extant under varied and modified names, all originating from Turashka. As for instance, Turukia is now a subsect of the Telis (oil pressure) of Bihar. Similarly, the Turkia, a subcaste of the Dhobis of Bihar, the Turk-Kumhār (of Bihar), Turknauwa Remnants (a class of barber) and Turk-pasi (a subsect of the Pasis of Bihar⁵⁵⁵). Most significantly, all these sub-castes or classes are Muslims by religion. The very prefix Turki or Turuk or Turk indicates their affiliation with the Turashkas. It shows that many Turashkas survived as oil-men, potter, washermen, barbers, etc., serving the Muslims primarily. It is again to be noted that the Mussalman Turashkas have certainly retained their identity no doubt and some of them might have also mingled with other Hindu castes belonging to the lower orders of the Brahmanical social hierarchy.

(vi) Conclusion :

From the above brief discussion on the Turashkas it would appear that they came from Central Asia, and that they are to be primarily affiliated to the Mongoloid ethnic stock. In Bengal, however, the Turki people or Turashkas came in a very late period, and they have all retained their separate identity to a considerable extent. Even then, it can not be denied that these people had also mixed with other peoples of Bengal and made certain contributions in the ethnic composition and cultural build of the people of Bengal.

IX. GENERAL OBSERVATION

From a general review of some of the extra-Indian tribal communities of foreign extractions infiltrating into Bengal as made in the preceding pages it becomes evident that all these peoples entered into India primarily through two distinct channels of North-eastern and North-western India. Many more tribal peoples had entered into India, but all of them do not appear to have moved further eastwards into Bengal nor made any marked contributions in the composition of the Bengali people and culture. Accordingly, all tribal communities of foreign origins who penetrated into India have not been included in the preceding treatment. Only a selected few of the tribal groups of foreign origins that entered into India and made their respective contributions in the making of the Bengali culture and people have been dealt with. While doing so, the foreign tribal communities entering into India from the aforesaid ^{Extra-Indian} ^{tribes in} ^{Bengal} two directions have been again separately delineated. As for instance, of the most important tribal communities coming from the North-eastern region into Bengal, four tribes, such as, the Kirātas, the Kambojas, the Kōch and the Mēch have been described. Many more foreign tribes did, however, penetrate into India through ^{region of India.} North-western. But all of them have not left any mark on the plains of Bengal. Only seven tribes like the Yavanas, the Mlechchhas, the Khasas, the Śakas, the Hūṇas, the Chīnas, the Ābhīras and the Turushkas have been included in the present discourse because of the simple reason that they made their respective contributions in the ethnic composition and cultural build of Bengal.

All the foreign peoples who entered into India finally settled down, and hardly any one of them did leave the plains of India. These foreign peoples came to India with their respective physical features and cultural characteristics. But none of them could retain their ethnic homogeneity or cultural identity for a long time. In fact, all the foreigners were fully assimilated within the Indian social framework in such a way ~~that~~ almost all of them lost their identity or distinctive characters. In other words, all these foreign communities were completely Indianized and brought within the Brahmanical socio-economic system. What happened in different parts of India in regard to Indianization of the

foreign peoples was not in the least different from that which had taken place Mingling and in Bengal. With the purpose of representing as to how the foreign assimilation tribal communities moved into Bengal and settled down in her fertile plains and also as to how they mingled with other peoples of the land and got fully merged with them that all available details about them have been discussed. It has been also shown as to how all these tribal communities completely lost their ethnic homogeneity and cultural distinctiveness and became indistinguishable integrants of the Bengali people and culture.

All the extra-Indian tribal communities described in the foregoing pages have been also fully or partly described in the early Indian literary texts and epigraphic records. Materials furnished by the available records relating to the foreign tribes have been collated together for the purpose of representing their original habitat, dispersal and movements, ethnic features, cultural patterns, identity, etc. All these treatments have been made with a particular reference to Bengal in order to show as to how these tribes mingled with other peoples and made their respective contributions in the general composition of the Bengali people and culture. It has been found out that in most cases these foreign peoples have lost their both ethnic and cultural distinctiveness, even to the extent of losing the identity of their respective tribal nomenclature as well. This has been possible by a gradual process of Brahmanization through which all these foreigners were brought within the Brahmanical framework. In Bengal, an amalgam on a large scale took place with the progress of Aryanization when most of the indigenous peoples and those who were settled in Bengal before the coming of the Aryans were completely Brahmanized. The force of Brahmanizing the non-Aryan peoples was equally applied with the same vigour or velocity for the assimilation of the foreign tribal peoples who came and settled in Bengal under various circumstances. In this regard, it is, however, to be noted that all foreign tribal peoples excepting a few did not come to Bengal in any considerable number. Excluding perhaps the Kirātas and the Kambojas, other tribal peoples who moved from upper India into Bengal appear to have come in small numbers. The people belonging to the latter group came to Bengal mostly as mercenary soldiers employed in the army of the ruling chieftains of the country. Since their number was small,

and they came mostly being unaccompanied by their womenfolk, there was hardly any other alternative but to take wives from different communities of the country amongst whom they dwelt. This facilitated largely their assimilation with other peoples of the land. This is how they lost even their original tribal appellations and adopted new names within the Brahmanical social framework.

In the case of the Kirātas and the Kambojas, the picture is entirely different. These tribal peoples perhaps entered into Bengal in large numbers, and accordingly, they have succeeded to a certain extent in retaining their identity and distinctiveness. It has been found out that the Kirātas as a principal tribal community do no more exist in the plains of Bengal proper. But the periphery hills on north of Bengal are still the resorts of many tribal peoples, some of whom may be identified as the remnants of the ancient Kirātas. These are the Limbus, the Kirāntis and the Kirārs. The original tribal appellation has been a little changed or modified in course of their transformation. It has been pointed out that the Kirātas were once widespread over the plains of Bengal, and they became mostly mingled with other peoples and were also brought within the Brahmanical socio-economic system. But some of them who did not or could not comingle with other peoples or failed to be assimilated took resort in the neighbouring hilly areas with the purpose of retaining their ^{Kirātas and} ^{Kambojas} individuality and distinctiveness. That is how the ancient Kirātas have succeeded to retain some of their ancient characteristic traits, ethnic and cultural. In respect of the Kambojas, it has been shown that they played a very important role in the political and social arena of Bengal. Since these peoples might have come to Bengal in large numbers, they succeeded all throughout their stay in Bengal in preserving their distinctiveness and identity. Those who were not or could not be absorbed fully had to leave the plains of Bengal, and they concentrated themselves in pockets of Northern Bengal. It has been also found out that the Kambojas who came to Bengal did not move from North-western India to North-east. On the other hand, the Kambojas of Bengal came from North-eastern region, and they are today represented by the Kōch and the Mēch peoples of North Bengal and Assam. A large pocket where they concentrated, perhaps being driven out from the plains, came to be known after them as Coochbihar wherein these peoples were ruled by their own chieftains till

the whole region was amalgamated with the Indian Union. It is in this region that the Kambojas, the Kōch and the Mēch are still retaining their ethnic and cultural characteristics to a certain extent.

It is true that the Kirātas and the Kambojas have to a certain extent succeeded in retaining their tribal appellations, ethnic homogeneity and cultural individuality, but in general, they have also mingled with other peoples of the land, and as such, their original purity and distinctive character have been largely lost. Besides comingling with other peoples, they have been also fully brought within the Brahmanical fold. Accordingly, even these peoples have been given a place in the Brahmanical social hierarchy as separate castes bearing Assimilation their original tribal name or a modified one. Not only that, since and claims these peoples were placed in the lowest bottom of the Brahmanical social structure, they are now making all sorts of claims to affiliate themselves with the Kshatriyas or even with the Brāhmaṇas for the purpose of heightening their social position by placing them in a superior position inside Brahmanical social order. For establishing such claims, they have also gone to the extent of creating many mythological or legendary tales upholding their superior origins and position. The Kochs have put forward their claims of the Kshatriya origins, and stories have been created accordingly. These are all no doubt fictitious claims and bereft of any historical bearings. But the crucial fact that emerges is that they have been all integrated within the Brahmanical system.

Excepting perhaps the Kirātas, most of the foreign tribal peoples came to Bengal in a late period, not before the Christian period. In other words, most of them infiltrated into Bengal when the Brahmanical social system and Brahmanism became deeply rooted on the soil of Bengal. Brahmanism during its vigorous march towards Brahmanization did not exclude the foreign peoples from its purview. Naturally, all foreign peoples coming and settling in Bengal were also brought within the fold of Brahmanism, and Brahmanization was Nature of complete in respect of most of these foreign peoples in the sense assimilation that they lost their tribal names and other distinctive characteristics in such a way that even their very remanants or survivals can hardly be traced at present in Bengal. This happend more so in cases of the foreign tribal peoples who came to Bengal from Upper India, such as, the Yavanas, the Mlechchhas, the Khasas, the Śakas, the Hūṇas, the Chīnas, the Ābhīras, etc. In other parts of India, their remnants or surviving elements have been traced. But in Bengal hardly any trace of the remnants of these people can be found.

In regard to the Yavanas and the Mlechchhas it has been pointed out that they were two distinct tribal groups. But subsequently, these two names continued to be used to denote all foreigners in general. In fact, all peoples coming from West came to be commonly called Yavanas. The term Mlechchha was/is, however, used in the sense of a very low caste or downtrodden or untouchable peoples. It denotes also at the same time foreign peoples outside the pale Yavanas and of the Brahmanical culture. Some have tried to establish the identity Mlechchhas of present Mech people with the Mlechchas. But it has been pointed out that there is no solid ground for establishing such an identity. On the other hand, the term Mlechchha was/is used in the sense of foreigners in general and in Bengal more particularly to denote the Musalmans who established their sway over the country for a considerable length of time.

As to the Khasas, the Śakas, the Hūnas and the Chīnas, no positive remnants/survivals of these communities could be traced in Bengal. Their surviving remnants, however, could be found in other parts of India. The reason for such an absence of any surviving remnants of these peoples in Bengal has been already hinted at. Most of these peoples who came to Bengal as mercenary soldiers became fully amalgamated with the Bengal people and culture within the Brahmanical framework. Regarding the Ābhīras it has been stated that even their Absence of true survivals like the Āhirs in Bihar and Upper India are not to remnants/ survivals be found in Bengal. But representations have been made to the effect that the modern Goālās or the Gopas of Bengal might be recognised as the surviving remnants of the ancient Ābhīras. The non-existence of these foreign tribal communities in Bengal along with their distinctive ethnic and cultural characteristics has been due to their complete assimilation within the Brahmanical social framework and comingling with the other peoples of the land. But the case was different in regard to the later Turushkas who most zealously retained their separateness.

In regard to the Brahmanization of the alien tribal peoples it is to be borne in mind that Brahmanism was not so much abhorrent towards the foreign peoples. Instead, all means were adapted to assimilate them fully. The absorption or integration of the foreign people within the fold of Brahmanism requires their recognition as integrants of the Brahmanical social hierarchy. In other words, each of these foreign tribal communities has to be given a place in the Brahmanical social hierarchy. For this purpose, devices were made

to ascribe a kind of recognition to the effect that they are not different peoples, but parts and parcels of the Brahmanical society. With this end in view, the Śāstrakāras adopted primarily two fold measures : (i) creation of tales narrating their respective mythological origins; (ii) tracing origins from Anuloma and Pratiloma unions.

The first measure was made to trace the origins of these peoples not from any human being, but from various parts of the Kāmadhenu of the great mythological sage Vaśiṣṭha. As for instance, the Kambojas, the Yavanas, the Khasas, the Śakas, etc., have been all described as coming out of the different physical parts of Vaśiṣṭha's Kāmadhenu and fighting against Viśvāmitra. Attempts have been also made to draw certain deductions from this story. It appears that the emergence of these peoples from the Kāmadhenu indicates their pastoral and nomadic life-patterns. This deduction is supported by the very fact that these peoples were primarily hillsmen, and that they swept over the plains of India from the hills. Not only that, in the hills their life-pattern was largely conditioned by pastoralism and nomadism. Thus the very nature and character of these peoples have been indicated by making them parts and parcels of the cattle. Secondly, these pastoral people were very brave and fierce in fighting, and as such, it has been shown that they were redoubtable fighters. That they were good solidiers and fighters is also proved by the very fact that these peoples were mostly recruited as mercenary soldiers in the army of the Pāla and Sena kings of Bengal as recorded in their respective inscriptions. Not only that, it is because of their fighting skill and bravery that these people could establish their political domination over different parts of India. In this respect, a particular reference may be made to the Śakas and the Hūṇas who played significant roles even in the political history of ancient India. It is in all these respects that this mythological tale narrating the origins of these foreign peoples is very significant.

As to the second method, i.e., tracing the origins from Anuloma and Pratiloma unions, it may be noted that this was followed with a view to ascribe to the foreigners distinct places in the Brahmanical social hierarchy. It is quite well-known that in the Brahmanical process of assimilation, the group of people to be assimilated or absorbed must be brought within the Varna-system by ascribing a particular caste order. In the Brahmanical Varna-system there are only three Varnas, i.e., Brāhmaṇa, Kshatriya and Vaiśya and subsequently,

a fourth one was added, namely, the Śūdra drawn from an indigenous tribal community bearing the same name. According to the Varnadharmas, a union Varnadharmas within the same Varna is only permitted to retain the Varna-order. Varnadharmas and formation of new castes A union between a male of a superior caste-order with a female of an inferior caste-order is permitted no doubt, but the issue arising out of this union forms a new caste. Similarly, a union between a male of an inferior caste with a female of a superior caste is not recognised as such, and the issue of such a union also forms a new low caste order. It has been again prescribed that the issue of the Anuloma-union becomes superior in social position to the issue of the Pratiloma-union. This is how the Varnasaṅkara had taken place. Besides, many castes were also formed by unions between males and females belonging to the mixed castes. In fact, most of the foreign tribes have been described as issues springing from unions of persons belonging to the mixed castes. Hundreds of castes within the Brahmanical social framework have been formed by Anuloma and Pratiloma unions. Another significant point to be noted in this context is that all castes thus formed have been placed Anuloma and Pratiloma unions-issues under the fourth caste category only, namely, the Śūdra. Not a single caste thus formed and absorbed within the fold of Brahmanism was, however, included in the Brāhmaṇa community. Again, sometimes even some of these castes formed by the above noted unions have been described as belonging to the Kshatriya order, but reduced to the position of the Śūdra because of the non-performance of the Saṁskāras and non-contact with the Brāhmaṇas. It would follow from a perusal of the methods of Brahmanical absorption that the ascription of the caste order to the foreigners during their assimilation was largely determined by occupations pursued by these peoples concerned.

The above enumeration of the Brahmanical methods of absorption may be exemplified by citing specific instances of foreign peoples who came to India and were duly assimilated. As to the Kambojas and the Kōch it has been stated that in the Dharmaśāstras they were originally Kshatriyas, but reduced to Śūdrahood because of their non-performance of the Brahmanical Saṁskāras and non-contact with the Brāhmaṇas. This ascription of the Kshatriya-hood appears to be a formal one in lieu of the recognition of their skill in fighting or military achievements. But in reality, they have been recognised as Śūdras. In the Brahmavaivarta-purāṇa, the Kōcha (Kōch) has been described

as the issue arising from a union between a Tivara (fisher) female and Māṃsachheda (butcher) male. Here both the male and the female belong to the mixed castes which are again recognised as Patita or untouchable. Thus on the one hand, they have been stated to be degraded Kshatriya, but again branded as a Patita-Śūdra, i.e., a lowest Śūdra. Similarly, the Yavana has been described as the issue of a Kshatriya female and a Śūdra male, and the name of the caste has been retained as such, though not extant as present. Here, the Yavana has been made as the issue of a Pratiloma-union, and accordingly placed at the bottom of the Brahmanical social ladder. Similarly, the Mlechchha has been described as the issue of a Brāhmaṇa female and a Vaiśya male. In the Jātimālā, however, the Mlechchha is said to be the issue of a Tivara father and a Brāhmaṇa mother. Thus in the former record, the Mlechchha is described as an issue arising from a pure Pratiloma-union. In the latter case, the mother belongs to the same Varna, but the father to a mixed caste. In the Brahmavaivarta-purāṇa, the Mlechchhas have been placed in the Patita category. Regarding the Khasas, it has been said that they were Kshatriyas, but reduced to Śūdrahood. Further, they are also described as the descendants of the Vṛātyakshatriyas or degraded Kshatriyas. Again, the Khasa has been also described as a Khallajāti. All these imply that even the Khasa was placed in a very low social order. As to the Śakas, it has been stated that the king Sagara stopped their observances of the duties of the Kshatriyas, and at the request of Vaśiṣṭha saved their lives, but caused them to shave half of their head. It has been observed that it was by shaving their heads certain purificatory rites were observed, perhaps with the purpose of converting and absorbing them fully. Like other foreign peoples, even the Chīnas have been recognised as degraded Kshatriyas. The Ābhīras, however, have been described in the Manusmṛiti as the issue of a Brāhmaṇa female by an Ambaśṭha male. In the Bṛhaddharma-purāṇa, the Ābhīras have been included within the Madhyama-saṅkara, but in other texts they have been equated with the Dasyus and the Mlechchhas.

It would be thus evident that all the foreigners were described as issues of either pure Pratiloma-unions or unions of mixed castes, and accordingly included in the lowest orders of the Śūdra category. In this context, it may be also noted that the ascription of social orders to these foreign peoples has been very often made arbitrarily. Sometimes, the authorities also differ in

respect of the assignment of the social position to the assimilated foreign peoples. The Śaka and the Yavana have been described as Anirvasita or pure Śūdra by Patañjali. But Manu describes them as degraded Kshatriyas. In other texts reflecting the social condition of Bengal, these foreign peoples have of low Social position included within the Patita-category. In other words, it is to be admitted that the foreigners were absorbed no doubt, but they were placed in a very low social position in the Brahmanical social hierarchy. In this connection, a reference has been made to the Śākadvīpi-Brahmins of Bengal who introduced the worship of the Sun in the form of image. These Brāhmaṇas as they came from the land of the Śakas, i.e., Śakasthāna (Seisthan), a foreign land, were not even included within the Brāhmaṇa community, though called as Śākadvīpi-Brāhmaṇas. They have been considered as fallen and untouchable Brahmins occupying such a degraded position that even the superior or Sat-Śūdras shall not take food from them.

The fact that emerges is that the vocations of these foreign peoples and also their nature and character were perhaps used as guide-lines for affiliating them to a particular caste/castes. Some foreigners have been also described as Kshatriyas. Even then, they have been branded as Śūdras. This final branding has been justified by stating that they were reduced to the position of the Śūdra because of their failure to observe the Brahmanical rites and maintain contact with the Brāhmaṇas. But not a single foreign tribal community has been affiliated to the Brāhmaṇa caste order. This shows that the Brāhmaṇas were very particular in preserving their own purity and integrity. Since all Sastric prescriptions were made by the Brāhmaṇas, it is quite but natural on their part to see that no foreign element was admitted into their community and thereby to save it from any sort of contamination.

It has been shown that all the extra-Indian tribal communities have been absorbed/assimilated within the Brahmanical fold and given distinct caste-orders in the social hierarchy. The absorption/assimilation of these foreign peoples has been fully achieved. It is again through their mingling with other peoples inside the Brahmanical fold that the extra-Indian tribal communities have contributed their respective ethnic features and cultural traits in the

general composition of the people and culture of Bengal. An attempt has been made to establish that all the tribes of foreign extractions infiltrating into Bengal through North-eastern India belonged to the Mongoloid ethnic stock.

Mongoloid peoples from North-east The physical features including the results of anthropometric measurements of the Kirātas, the Kambojas, the Kōch and the Mēch have been discussed on the basis of all available data, and it has been found out that all these peoples may in general be affiliated to the Mongoloid racial stock.

Regarding the tribal communities entering into India through North-western regions, it is to be noted that all of them had come to Bengal after traversing a wide area of the plains of Northern India, and in course of their movements, all of them had intermingled with other peoples, which resulted in transforming their respective physical features even before their infiltration into Bengal. If their identity and original ethnic features are taken into consideration, these tribal peoples may be broadly placed under two ethnic groups, namely, Mediterranean and Mongoloid. Most interestingly, excepting the Yavanas who have been identified with the Ionian Greeks, all other tribal communities like the Mlechchhas, the Śakas, the Hūnas, the Chīnas, the Ābhīras, the Turushkas, etc., are to be affiliated to the Mongoloid ethnic stock. The Yavanas might have originally belonged to the Mediterranean racial group, but in India they largely mingled with other tribal and non-tribal peoples and thereby contributed the Mediterranean ethnic element in the Indian population. The Yavanas who came and settled in Bengal might be also recognised as one of the contributors of the Mediterranean ethnic element in the composition of the Bengali people. All other tribal communities that moved into Bengal traversing the vast plains of Northern India belonged to the Mongoloid ethnic group. It has been shown that the Khasas, the Śakas, the Hūnas etc., were all peoples coming from Central Asia, and naturally so, their physical features were predominantly characterized by the Mongoloid ethnic features. These tribal peoples intermixed heavily with several other sections of the people of Northern India and also of Bengal. Accordingly, they have largely contributed the Mongoloid element in the general ethnic composition of many peoples of North-India and more particularly of Bengal. In Eastern Bengal, the Mongoloid traits become apparent ; the people are mesocephalic and mesorrhine (C.I.75.2-79;

N.I. 70.3-80.5). The Rājbañsi-Magh (of Chittagong) is Mongoloid (C.I.83 ; N.I.74.9). Their physical characters appear to have been the results of an admixture of the Mongoloid peoples with others.

During the long and strenuous process of Indianization or rather Brahmanization, all these extra-Indian tribal communities have been fully assimilated, and each one of them has been given a specified caste order in the Brahmanical social hierarchy as well. It has been shown that in Bengal most of these peoples have been relegated to a very low social position, even to a status ^{Social positions} which has been described as Patifā or untouchable caste. Even the Yavāñas have been given a very low social position. In this respect, it has been already pointed out that some of the castes thus formed with the foreign tribal communities have been also described as Kshatriyas, perhaps because of their adherence to military occupations, but again reduced to the status of the Śūdra. It would be evident that certain ethnic elements that are found amongst the peoples belonging to the lower caste orders of the Brahmanical society demonstrate features which may be distinctly equated with those of the Mediterranean and the Mongoloid ethnic stocks. Therefore, the Mongoloid ^{Mediterranean and Mongoloid elements} and Mediterranean ethnic elements that are noticed amongst the low caste groups have been largely contributed by all these tribal communities of extra-Indian origins. It is again to be noted that these tribes have been inextricably mixed with diverse peoples belonging to several other ethnic groups. This admixture was so heavy that almost all of them lost their respective ethnic identity. But sometimes a few characteristic physical traits persist and these are found prepondering amongst certain sections of the people. Such physical traits, if found to be of Mongoloid or Mediterranean affiliations, may be said to have been derived from these tribal peoples of foreign extractions who belonged to these two distinct ethnic stocks.

Not only in ethnic composition of the people of Bengal, the contributions of these foreign peoples in the making of the Bengali culture have been also found to be considerable. In this respect as well, attention has been already drawn to the general nature and character of the cultural patterns of each of these tribes. Several cultural elements which are found today in the main

cultural build of Bengal may be said to have been contributed by these peoples. Here, a particular reference may be made to the subscriptions of the Kirātas Culture : who with their characteristic cultural attributes were once widespread
 Contri- over all parts of Bengal, and they largely intermixed with all other
 butions sections of the Bengali people. An analysis of the Bengali cultural elements demonstrates the presence of many cultural traits amongst all sections of the people of Bengal, more particularly amongst those belonging to the low caste-orders, which may be affiliated to the Kirāta culture complex. A scientific evaluation of the diverse Bengali cultural traits would reveal that many of them are to be directly derived from the Kirātas and their cognates belonging to the Mongoloid ethnic stock.

From a perusal of the discourse on the extra-Indian tribal communities as presented in this Chapter , it becomes evident that all these peoples of foreign extractions along with those already described in Chapter Four made lasting contributions to the general composition of the present diverse ethnic elements and cultural traits of the people of Bengal. It would also appear that considerable contributions in this regard have been made by the people of the Mongoloid ethnic stock coming to Bengal, primarily from the North-eastern region and comingling with many other peoples of the land.

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