

Chapter 5: THE RISE AND FALL OF SRIHATTARAJYA

5.1 Origin of Srihattarajya

5.2 Rise of petty states

THE RISE AND FALL OF SRIHATTARAJYA

This chapter is an elaborate discussion on the rise and fall of Srihattarajya over Surma Barak Valley during the period under review. In the 11th century A.D., it may be found that the sovereign Srihatta kingdom flourished in the whole valley and it also included some areas of the neighbouring districts of Bengal. And this state was in the Brahmanical Hindu state model and represented the Pan-Indian socio-cultural continuum in the valley through Bengal. After that, the decline of Srihatta kingdom started and it was followed by a disintegration of the political structure in the 12th-13th century A.D. when Tripura, Jaintia, Gaur and Laur states co-existed in the Barak Valley region. There are two sub-chapters under this chapter. The sub-chapters are: 5.1) Origin of Srihattarajya and 5.2) Rise of petty states.

5.1 Origin of Srihattarajya

The Srihattamandala of the Paschimbhag Copper plate as discussed coincided with the natural limits of the Barak Valley. Although it was then a *mandala* or division within a *bhukti* or province, called Pundravardhana, of the Chandra state (East Bengal), in the next century there found a full-fledged state, called Srihattarajya, covering the same region and the adjoining areas. The existence of this Srihattarajya is known from two Copper plates discovered in a village called Bhatara in Sylhet. The two Copper plates are, therefore, known as Bhatara plate I and Bhatara plate II.

The first plate opens with a eulogy of *Shiva* and the second of *Vishnu*. The first, which was issued during the reign of Kesava Deva, gives a genealogy of four kings who belonged to the lunar dynasty and each of whom was the son of his predecessor. These four kings were Navagirvana, Gokula Deva, Narayana Deva and Kesava Deva. The second plate, which was issued during the reign of Isana Deva, also gives a list of four kings in the same order and reiterates that they belonged to the lunar dynasty. The four kings named here are Gokula Deva, Narayana Deva, Kesava Deva and Isana Deva. By the first plate, Kesava Deva granted 375 plough measures of land, 296 houses and a large number of slaves for the adoration of Shiva, named as *Vatesvara*. One of the epithets used for this deity is *Srihattesvara* (Lord of Srihatta). The donated lands and houses were scattered in about one hundred villages. The

names of these villages and the location and extent of land donated in each village are mentioned in the text. The second plate announced the erection of a lofty temple of *Vishnu* by Isana Deva on the advice of his minister, named Banamali Kar, who was a *Vaidya* by caste, and the grant of two ploughs of land for the support of the temple with concurrence of his commander-in-chief, named Bira Datta. The first plate does not mention the name of its composer, but the second says that it was composed by one Madhava who belonged to the *Das* community. The five rulers, named by the two plates together, were Navagirvana, Gokuladeva, Narayanadeva, Kesavadeva and Isanadeva and in each case, the son succeeded the father. The scholars like Rajendralal Mitra, Srinivasa Shastri, Achyut Charan Tatwanidhi, R.C. Majumdar and K.M. Gupta have given different dates for the plates which were dated in '*Pandava kuladipalapda*.'¹⁹⁵ Although, the plates may be dated in the pre-fifth century A.D., It is inclined to accept the argument of K.M. Gupta who suggested that the date of the first plate should be read as equivalent of 1049 A.D. and the second plate a few years later. Both the plates are thus to be dated in the 11th century A.D.¹⁹⁶

The name of the kingdom of the kings of Bhatara plate I is clearly mentioned as 'Srihattarajya' or the kingdom of Srihatta. To quote from the text:

*Atha visruta prabhavah, Srihattarajya kamalayah Samajani
Navagirvahnah kharavanah kshrabhujam sresthan* (Now was born
the greatly renowned, sharp in throwing arrows, Navagirvana, the
cause of the existence of prosperity, of the kingdom of Srihatta, the
best among the rulers of the earth.)¹⁹⁷

The two plates supply some important information about the reigning monarchs of Srihattarajya and their predecessors. The first plate, for example, tells us that many valorous kings were born in Bharata (India), they belonged to the race of

¹⁹⁵ Rajendralal Mitra, *Copper-Plate Inscriptions from Sylhet*, Proceeding of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, No. VIII, PP. 141-43, (August 1880); A.C. Choudhury, *op.cit*, PP. 13-19; Kamalakanta Gupta, *op.cit*, PP. 185-89.

¹⁹⁶ J. B. Bhattacharjee, *op.cit*, PP. 41-64.

¹⁹⁷ Kamalakanta Gupta, *op.cit*, PP. 158-167.

Shiva and one of them was Navagirvana who was the noblest of the kings, the issue of the goddess of prosperity and greatly renowned for the fierce of his arrow. The sunlight of the glory of Gokuladeva caused numbness in inimical kings. Narayanadeva was churned from the ocean of antagonistic kings with valient arms. Kesavadeva was of unmeasured merit and glory and his feet were decorated with the jewels of royal crowns. He was the jewel of earthly sovereigns, the destroyer of rival kings, the ultimate of wonderful manliness, the abode of fame, the asylum of beauty, the dwelling place of learning, the shelter of justice, the centre of all light, the source of charity, the home of enjoyment, the jewel of all speeches, the store-house of goodness and the personification of all good qualities. He protected the lands of the dependent kings by his arms, became the protector of the good and revived the festivity of the '*destroyer of Kansa*' (i.e. Lord Krishna). This Kesavadeva whirled his discuss at his enemies; brought to an end, all the children of the race of his antagonist and he brought this earth under one umbrella by vigour of his arms, wishing not to allow the existence of any foreign possession. He had appointed his hands to replace the kalpa tree, his valour to replace the sun, his fame to replace the light of the moon, and his arms in upholding the earth. He effected the gratification of well disposed people, subjugated all sides, cast far away all other kings, and then ruled as the chief of the eastern kings. His well earned white glory had made the earth white, blighted the bud of the inimical lotus and blown the lily of enjoyment. The unrivalled fire of the king's vigour became manifest in the vapour of inimical kings and caused torpidity in hostile potentates. It had enveloped the quarters of the earth and liked the sky. In the battle field, he held by one string his bow and by the other, the host of his enemies. Lord Vatesvara descended on earth from the Kailasa and dwelt on Hattapataka. King Kesavadeva, who was a devotee of Vatesvara Shiva, presented to this Lord of Srihatta, lands in different villages to the extent of 375 ploughs, 296 houses and many slaves of different races. The inscription also mentioned in great detail names and location of the villages where lands and houses were donated, the rivers which traversed such villages, and specified the houses as dwelling, cooking and cattle-sheds.

The second plate begins the genealogy of the kings with Gokuladeva and says that in the race of Krishna was born this '*crest of the earth*' by whose birth, the noble deeds of his race became radiant. He was the all-giving tree to the desire of all who bore arms and the protector of the earth. His son, Narayana was the noblest among the wielders of arms, receptacle of all arts, the home of all merits, the assemblage of valour, the substratum of civility and the ocean of gentleness. He was of prominent beauty, renowned deeds, and the crest-jewel of the universe. His son, Kesavadeva was a lord of mighty vigour, the oppressor of enemies, a hero like Govinda (Krishna), great as the lord of trees, whose feet were adorned with the crest-jewels of kings. His merit attracted hosts of Brahmanas who never thought again of their native places. The kings were anxious to present him most precious wealth. He was the master of an army of innumerable war-boats, infantry, cavalry, and lines of rutting elephants which made the earth glorious of his fame. He presented to Lord Krishna a lofty temple, the discussion on whose towering crest so cut up the clouds of heaven that they fell in showers of rain. He performed the rite of *tulapurusa* in which the Brahmanas got so much wealth that they were covered with golden jewels and they became like to the all giving tree. The reigning king, Isanadeva was the son of that Govinda Kesavadeva. This Isanadeva was of glorious deeds and the moon among the kings. When his mighty army of infantry, cavalry and elephants moved on victory intent the dust raised on earth eclipsed the glory of the Sun. when his war-boats plied on the aqueous highway, the water was so splashed in masses that it soothed his chariot-horse which were fatigued by the oppressive rays of the sun. The inscription then states that this glorious king, Isanadeva, built a temple for Lord Vishnu. This temple licked the cloud and the flags flowing on its towering crests looked like flowers on aerial trees. He had an able minister named Banamali Kar who was a brilliant light in the race of the Vaidyas. On the advice of this minister, King Isanadeva granted two ploughs (two-third of an acre) land with its dwellings and cornfields for the support of the temple of Vishnu which he constructed. The Copper plate, which is a royal charter, enjoined that the grant should be upheld by the kindly disposed, by the childless eldest prince, the virtuous wife of the dead prince and his infant son, and confirmed that the grant has

been consented by the commander-in-chief, Bira Datta, who is the noble lord of the battles, the valiant and the patient, whose fame had spread to the quarters of the earth.

Evidently, the two Copper plates contain a good deal of poetical imagination and attempt at glorifying the reigning monarchs and their predecessors, which was usual for ancient texts, but these conventional historical evidences have introduced us to the existence of a state called Srihattarajya and a lineage of kings who ruled the state for generations. These kings were generous, valiant and valorous. The first two kings, Navagirvana and Gokuladeva ruled peacefully, but the third king, Narayanadeva, had to suppress rebellions and aggressions by dint of arms. The fourth king, Govinda Kesavadeva was a great ruler. He subjugated the rulers in the neighbourhood and protected them against external aggressions. His army consisted of four branches, viz. infantry, cavalry, elephantry and war-boats. In addition to these four kings, Isanadeva possessed war-chariots. There were small kingdoms in and around the Srihatta region, and the Deva rulers were the overlords for those rulers.

The rulers of the Bhatara plates were patrons of art, learning and religion, Kesavadeva was a *Saiva*, but he constructed temples in honour of both *Shiva* and *Vishnu*. Isanadeva constructed another temple in honour of *Vishnu*. Kesavadeva performed *tulapurusa* rite and the Brahmanas, who came from far-off places to attend the ceremony, decided to settle in Srihatta permanently. Education was not confined to the Brahmanas only. Even a *Sudra*, Madhava, could compose the text for the second inscription. The people of various castes formed the society. There were Brahmanas who performed the *tulapurusa*, the kings were Kshatriyas of the lunar race, the minister was a Vaidya, Madhava Das, the composer, was a Sudra, the slaves donated to the temples belonged to different races, and *Dev*, *Datta*, *Kar*, *Das* etc. were among the surnames.

The location and extent of the state emerges from the data provided by the two Copper plates, some directly and some by inferences and interpretations. The discovery of the plates in Bhatara and mention of the state as 'Srihattarajya', the capital city as '*Hattapataka*' and the presiding deity as '*Srihattesvara*' make it abundantly clear that these Deva kings were the rulers of Srihatta area. The texts also

contain certain words which have survived in the contemporary Barak Valley (*Sylheti*) dialect of Bengali, e.g., *gobat* (cattle-route), *hal* (a measure of land), *gam* (village), etc. that the Devas were the rulers of an extensive territory that is clear from the inscriptions, although the mention of sea as the boundary may not mean that the state extended to an ocean but may refer to the big lake of Hiuen Tsang's time which is already discussed. One of the inscriptions says that the king's fame was extent in Bharata (India) and that he was the chief of the eastern kings. It is possible, therefore, that the Barak Valley (*Cachar-Sylhet*) was under direct rule of the Deva kings and the kings in the neighboring areas in eastern and south-eastern Bengal were tributary to them. The Barak Valley is a natural extension of Bengal plains (ancient Vanga-Samatata region), and the Cachar-Sylhet region is one valley formed by the river Barak and its branches. There is no evidence of an independent principality formation either in Cachar or Sylhet alone before the 13th century. The earliest known state in the valley, namely, the Tripuri state, covered Cachar, Sylhet and the Tripura plains and the headquarters moved from Cachar to Tripura through Sylhet. The inscriptions make it clear that the Devas were the sovereignty extended over a large number of protected rulers who paid them tribute. Their forces visited distant places for conquest and for the subjugation of rebellious chiefs. They used war-boats and war-chariots, and the fame of their general, Bira Datta, was felt in far-off places. Such boats and chariots would not be used for short distance campaigns. Moreover, the sustenance of the authority over a large number of tributaries had to be supported by the wealth of the area under direct rule. The authority drawn from the centre only could percolate over the peripheries. That the core area was extensive enough can be presumed from the fact that king Kesavadeva donated lands which spread over one hundred villages. Damchara, Katakhal of Hailakandi, Latu and Longai of Karimganj are among the villages listed in the Copper plates. It can, therefore, reasonably be concluded that the Cachar-Sylhet region, or in otherwords, the whole of the Barak Valley, formed the core area of the Srihattarajya while the tributary states could have been spread over the neighbouring areas of Mymensing, Tripura and even Chittagong.

It is indeed difficult to suggest the dates of the rise and fall of the Srihattarajya. The plate of Kesavadeva gives the genealogy of four kings with Navagirvana as the first and Kesavadeva as the fourth. On the otherhand, the plate of Isanadeva also gives the genealogy of four kings with Gokuladeva as first and Isanadeva as fourth. Gokuladeva who is second in Kesavadeva's plate is first in Isanadeva's plate. This shows that the tradition of the kings of this dynasty was to use the names of three preceding rulers of the reigning monarch in their plates. If a plate of Isanadeva's son was discovered, this might have begun with Narayanadeva, who is third in first plate and second in the second plate. However, still new evidences are there to found. But it should be acceptable that Navagirvana was the founder of the dynasty. On the basis of that, the Copper plate of Kesavadeva is dated in 1049 A.D. The scholars have to allow at least one hundred years for the four generations. On this basis, it may be found that Navagirvana reigned in the middle of the 10th century A.D. This takes us close to the date of the Paschimbhag Copper plate of Srichandra. The Chandra rule in the Barak Valley, therefore, must have come to an end immediately after Srichandra and its succeeding state was the Srihattarajya founded by Navagirvana of the Deva Dynasty. Similarly, the Deva Dynasty might have declined shortly after the death of Isanadeva towards the end of the 11th century A.D. This presumes that there is no information about the successors of Isanadeva and on the otherhand; it is found that there is evidences of the revival of the Tripuri rule in some parts of the Barak Valley and the rise of some smaller states, namely Jayantia, Gaur and Laur, within the valley around that period.

5.2 Rise of Petty States

The decline of the Srihattarajya of the Deva Dynasty in the 12th century A.D. marked the beginning of the Political disintegration of the Barak Valley. The process began with the revival of the Tripuri rule in some parts of the Valley. The fact of the revival of Tripuri rule in South Sylhet is known from the second land grant by a Tripura Raja, which is already discussed. By this grant in 1195 A.D., Maharaja Dharmadhara, a Tripura king, granted a vast tract of land known as Manukulapradesh, later on known as Ita Pargana, to a descendant of Nidhipati, who was one of the Brahmana donees in

Panchha-khanda in 7th century A.D.¹⁹⁸ The boundaries of this Manukulapadesh as mentioned in the original Copper plate grant were “on the east the Langla hills; on the south the river Manu; on the west the river Gopala; on the north the river Kushiara”.¹⁹⁹

The second grant of the 12th century A.D. was a grant of very big tract of land called Manukulapadesh i.e., the territory on the bank of the Manu river (Sylhet District), to a learned Brahmanas Nidhipati (*Vatsya gotra*) of their group, towards the close of the 12th century A.D. Therefore, said Nidhipati, the then leader of this group of Brahmanas, settled in Ita area of Sylhet District, himself retained a large portion of donated land and distributed the remaining portion of Manukulapadesh amongst other Brahmanas of his group. From these facts, it can be naturally inferred that the *pattaka* (i.e., the title deed of the donees, a Copper plate relating to Manukulapadesh area) must have remained in the custody of the leader who retained a large portion of the donated land, and settled in Ita area. The Paschimbhag Copper plate of Srichandra of the 10th century A.D., relating to the grant of a big territory of land to a large number of Brahmanas of the same group (i.e., of the same group of the donees of Nidhanpur Copper plate grant), recently discovered in Ita area.²⁰⁰

Manukulapadesh, more popularly known as Ita, gained the status of a small state under the protection of the Raja of Tripura when one Bhanu Narayan of the family of Nidhipati was given the title of Raja as a reward for his services in the capture of a rebel. His name is associated with a large tank in Rajnagar. His son, Subid Narayan built a fort, the ruins of which have survived the stress and strain of time and circumstances. The famous tanks, *Balda Sagar* and *Sagar Dighi* are supposed to have been excavated under his orders. Ita was occupied by a Pathan chief from Murshidabad in the 14th century.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁸ B. C. Allen, *op.cit*, P. 22.

¹⁹⁹ Kamalakanta Gupta, *op.cit*, P. 60.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid*, PP. 36-40.

²⁰¹ B. C. Allen, *op.cit*, P.23.

A few more petty principalities in South Sylhet were under the Tripura Rajas and then passed under the Pathan-Mughal rulers, viz. Magadh and Pratapgarh. Of these, Pratapgarh state, in the Patharkandi area of Karimganj flourished for a longer time. This state, originally known as Sonai-Kanchanpur, is said to have been founded by one Pratap Singha in the 12th century A.D. The ruins of the forts of Raja Pratap Singha and Raja Jagat Singha are still noticed in Patharkandi and Chargola areas.²⁰² Tales and fables of these two rulers are still popular in the locality. Another legendary ruler was Porha Raja of Deorali, who ruled in 13th -14th century.²⁰³ In the Bhanugach area, there is the ruin of a fort which is attributed to one Raja Chandra Singh who “belonged to the family of the Tippera Rajas and is said to have moved from the hills into the Sylhet plains about the seventh century A.D.”²⁰⁴ Pratapgarh, Deorali and Banugach areas were conquered in the 14th century A.D by one Mirza Malik Muhammad who came from Persia.²⁰⁵

The north-eastern part of the Barak Valley or the Cachar plains was under the Tripura Rajas till 16th century A.D. The Tripuri rule in this sector of the valley also might have been revived in the 13th century after the decline of the Srihattarajya. On the chronicles of ‘*Darrang Raj Vamsavali*’, it is known that after defeating the rule of Maibong (Dimasa state) the Koch general, Chilarai, descended in the Cachar plains with his army. A fierce battle then started with the Tripuris. Tripuri army was defeated and the Raja of Tripura then made peace with the Koch ruler by ceding the Cachar plains.²⁰⁶ The Koch invasion was in 1562 A.D. Naranarayan, the Raja of Cooch Behar, placed the Cachar plains under the governorship of one of his brothers, Dewan Kamalnarayan who later on revolted against the central authority and laid the foundation of independent Khaspur state. This Khaspur state later merged with the Maibong state by virtue of the marriage of princes Kanchani of Khaspur with Prince

²⁰² A.C. Choudhury, *op.cit*, PP. 194-95.

²⁰³ *Ibid*, PP. 196-97.

²⁰⁴ B. C. Allen, *op.cit*, P. 62.

²⁰⁵ A.C. Choudhury, *op.cit*, PP. 190-96.

²⁰⁶ N.C. Sharma (ed.) *Darrang Raj Vamsavali*, PP. 72-94, (1973)

Lakhichandra of Maibong in 1745. The capital of the Dimasa state (Maibong) was shifted to Khaspur in 1750.²⁰⁷ It is therefore clearly said that there was a resurgence of the Tripuri state in southern (South Sylhet) and north-eastern (Cachar plains) regions of the Barak Valley after the decline of Srihattarajya.

The central and western, north-western, and northern parts of Sylhet witnessed the emergence of Gaur, Laur and Jayantia states in the same period. In the 11th century A.D., the ruler of Jayantia was one Kamadeva. According to two Sanskrit works, 'Saraswati Kanthavarana' and 'Raghava Pandaviya', Kamdeva was a contemporary of Bhojaraja of Malava. Kaviraja, the author of 'Raghava Pandaviya', came to the court of Kamdeva from Malava on the invitation of the king. Kamdeva brought some Brahmanas from central India and settled them in his kingdom.²⁰⁸ Jayantia continued under the rule of a Brahmana family, of whom four succeeding rulers were Kedarvar Ray, Dhanesvar Ray, Kandarpa Ray and Jayanta Ray.²⁰⁹ Parbat Ray, the chief of the neighbouring Jayantia Hills, annexed Jayantia in the 15th century A.D. and the capital of Jaintia was since then shifted to Jayantiapur.²¹⁰ This united Jayantia state of the hills and plains survived till the British annexation in 1835 AD.

Laur state was situated on the north-western corner of Sylhet and it was ruled by a Brahmanas family. To quote Allen:

This family traced its origin to a Brahman named Keshab Misra, who had left Kanauj to seek his fortunes in the east. One of his descendants, named Ramnath, had three sons, the eldest of whom remained at Laur, while the second had a palace built for him at Jagannathpur, and the youngest was established at Baniyachung. The eldest son had no descendants, and Durbar Khan, the head of the Jagannathpur branch, seized the whole of

²⁰⁷ U.C. Guha, *Cacharer Itivritta*, PP. 30-39, (1921); K.S.A. Ahmed, *Cooch Beharer Itihas*, (Bengali), Cooch Behar, P. 237, (1926)

²⁰⁸ A.C. Choudhury, *op.cit*, P. 3.

²⁰⁹ E. A. Gait, *op.cit*, P. 314.

²¹⁰ *Ibid*, P. 313.

*laur, much to the disgust of Govind Singh who was ruling at Baniyachong. On Durbar Khan's death, Govind Singh endeavoured to obtain his share of Laur, but Durbar Khan's sons appealed to the Nawab of Murshidabad, who arrested Govind Singh and carried him off to Murshidabad. There he was converted to the faith of Islam, and as a reward was given possession of the estates of Laur through as a feudatory and no longer as an independent princeling.*²¹¹

Laur was ruled by Vijay Manikya in the 12th century and Divya Singha in the 15th century. A coin discovered in the 'Vijay Rajar Bari' at Jagannathpur contains the legend Raja Vijayamanikya Laksmi Devya, Seka 1113 incised in Bengali script. This shows that Raja Vijaya Manikya (whose queen was Laksmi Devi) was ruling in Laur in 1191 A.D.²¹² It may, therefore, be concluded that Laur state was founded by Vijaya Manikya or his predecessor towards the end of the 12th century A.D. after the decline of Srihattarajya. In a Copper plate of 12th century discovered in Mainamati, there is a reference about a king named Madhava. It is opined by scholars that this Madhava was a king of Laur.²¹³

Of all the local states in Sylhet in the 12th – 13th century A.D., the most famous was Gaur. It included the whole of North Sylhet, the Sylhet town and vast areas in the east and south of the town. In the 14th century A.D., Gaur was ruled by Raja Govinda. Gaur was invaded by an army sent by the Sultan of Delhi under Sikander Shah, which was accompanied by the famous Sufi saint Hazrat Shah Jalal, Gaur Govinda was defeated and killed in 1384 A.D. Sikander Shah was appointed as the Nawab of Gaur (Sylhet). He also annexed the small state of Taraf (Habiganj) of Raja Achak Narayan.²¹⁴ Hazrat Shah Jalal finally selected Sylhet as the holy place of his meditation with his 360 disciples. His Dargah at Sylhet is revered by the Hindus and

²¹¹ B. C. Allen, *op.cit*, P. 25.

²¹² Kamalakanta Gupta, *op.cit*, P. 5.

²¹³ *Ibid*, P. 6.

²¹⁴ B. C. Allen, *op.cit*, P. 24.

Muslims of the Valley.²¹⁵ The whole of Sylhet including Karimganj, except the northern bank of Surma and the Cachar plains, was conquered by the Mughals with the rest of Bengal during the reign of Emperor Akbar in the 16th century A.D. The northern bank of Surma formed part of the Jaintia state and the Cachar plains passed through the successive rule of the Khaspur state and the Dimasa state till the British colonisation. Sylhet was one of the Sarkars (district) of Subha Bangala (Bengal province) of the Mughal Empire.²¹⁶

However, from the foregoing discussions, it is clear that the political structure of Srihatta kingdom in the ancient period was determined by the political organization in the neighbouring areas of Bengal. Situated, as it was, on the north-east corner of Bengal and surrounded on all three other sides by the hills, the early migrations and settlements in the sovereign territory was possible only from Bengal by the logic of geography. This environmental factor dominated the political, social, cultural and economic development of this little sovereign state. The political structure of the kingdom was, therefore, essentially a Bengal phenomenon. It was the creation of those who moved from neighbouring Bengal in their eastward march to the farthest limit of the alluvial Indo-Gangetic plains.

The earliest reference to a political organization in Surma Barak Valley was a *Janapada* called '*Suramasa*' referred by Panini in the 6th century B.C. There is no description about the social and political structure of this *Janapada*. Equally unknown is the structure of '*Shi-li-cha-talo*' or Srihatta mentioned by Hiuen Tsang in the 7th Century A.D. It is, however, clear that the name Srihatta was in existence since then.

The epigraphic evidences are unambiguous about the rule of the Varman dynasty of Kamrupa in a portion of the valley in 6th - 7th century A.D. The 7th century A.D. presented a complex political structure in the region. Besides the independent sovereign state of Srihatta and a *vishaya* or district (Chandrapur) in the kamarupa state, there were district (*vishaya*) and province (*bhukti*) of Samatata, viz. – Suvunga and Jayatunga, under the Samanta rulers of South East Bengal who were feudatories to

²¹⁵ A.C. Choudhury, *op.cit*, P.17.

²¹⁶ Abul Fazl, *Ain-i-Akbari*, (1926) Cited in A.C. Choudhury, *Srihatter Itivritta*, P. 127, (1317 B.S)

the Gupta Emperors of Northern India. The rule of the Samanta rulers extended from South East Bengal (Samanta) and that of the Varman rulers from East Bengal (Vanga).

In addition to these states, there was Harikela which consisted of the portions of the Barak Valley and South East Bengal and its epicenter was mostly in Srihatta. In the 10th century A.D, the Surma Barak Valley formed part of the Chandra state of East Bengal. The whole of the Valley than formed Srihattamandala within *Pundravardhana bhukti* (province) of the Chandra state. Srihatta was then a *Mandala* (division) and within this division there were three districts (*Vishayas*), i.e, Chandrapur, Garala and Pogara.

In the 11th century A.D., the sovereign Srihatta kingdom flourished in the whole valley and it also included some areas of the neighbouring districts of Bengal. All these states were in the Brahmanical Hindu State model and represented the Pan-Indian socio-cultural continuum in the valley through Bengal. The decline of the Srihattarajya was followed by a disintegration of the political structure in the 12th – 13th century A. D when Tripuri, Jayantiya, Gaur and Laur states co-existed in the Surma Barak Valley.

The valley represented the Pan-Indian culture continuum since early times. The existence of the ancient religious shrines and the reference in the puranic literature are enough evidences to this effect. On the other hand, there is hardly any evidence of a non-Aryan political or social organization. Some Austric and Tibeto-Burman traits in the racial and linguistic character of the people of the region are found which are the common features in the Bengali society all over Bengal. In case of Srihatta, society and dialect, this could be more visible because of its location in the closest proximity of the Indo-Mongoloid (Austric and Tibeto-Burman) inhabited hill areas in the immediate neighbourhood. As in case of the rest of Bengal, the aboriginal as well as immigrant Indo-Mongoloid might have been completely assimilated in the more dominant Indo-Aryan culture groups in the Valley at a very early phase of social formation.

Infact, the epigraphic evidences cover the valley almost from such times that the patches of land masses gradually emerged from sea. And in these records, there are

references only to persons belonging to either of the various castes and sub-castes of the caste oriented Indo-Aryan society to be found in other regions of Bengal. The foundation of the society must have been laid down in that period. The Bengalis of Srihatta today must be the descendents of *Sarma, Bhatta, Bhati, Svami, Ghosh, Datta, Dam, Dey, Dhar, Kar, Nag, Kunda, Som, Das, Sen, Palit, Pal* etc. mentioned in various inscriptions. A section of them embraced Islam in their own land in the late medieval period, while others have retained their surnames and religious identity, without affecting the ethnic and linguistic character of the region. They speak a common dialect of Bengali and share same cultural traditions. The political organization in the valley in the ancient period were the creations of the early settlers who interacted and admixed to condition themselves in the environment of their adoption, while the change and continuity over the long period of time are the metaphors of history and geography.