

MAJOR FINDINGS

- The polity formation processes in the Surma Barak Valley in the Pre-colonial period were influenced by the geographical, historical and sociological factors. On the one hand, it was an outlying area of the Bengal plains and on the other; it was flanked by the hill tribal regions. The extension of the Indo-Aryan settlements from mainland Bengal in early times inaugurated the social formation processes, while the contacts and intermingling of the races reinforced the process and perpetuated the growth of a distinct culture group in the valley.
- The epigraphic evidences on the political structure of the Surma Barak Valley are available from the 6th century A.D, but the pre-sixth century period remains completely uncharted. However, five major epigraphic evidences are discovered in the valley. These are:
 - a) Nidhanpur Copper plate grant of king Bhaskaravarman.
 - b) Kalapur temple inscription of Samanta Marundanatha.
 - c) Paschimbhag Copper plate of Srichandra of Vikrampur.
 - d) Bhatara Copper plate issued by Govinda Keshavdeva of Srihatta; and
 - e) Second Bhatara Copper plate issued by Ishanadeva of the same dynasty.
- The geographical extent of the Surma Barak Valley covers three districts of Assam, viz. Cachar, Hailakandi and Karimganj, and four districts of Bangladesh, viz. Sadar Sylhet, Moulvibazar, Habiganj and Sunamganj. As a matter of fact, these seven districts have emerged out of the two districts, viz. Cachar and Sylhet of the British period.
- Sylhet which was the most important town in the undivided valley is situated on the bank of Surma, a branch of Barak. The British Government therefore, named the administrative division as Surma Valley. Ever since the major part of the Sylhet district (leaving only Karimganj to India) was transferred to East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) at the time of partition of the country in 1947, the name Surma Valley

has fallen into disuse. Only the Indian portion of the valley is known today as the Barak Valley after the principal river of the tract.

- The process of social formation in the Surma Barak Valley region, which in the ancient period was known as Srihatta or Sylhet in ancient times denoted the territory now covered in the Sylhet district of Bangladesh, Karimganj, Hailakandi and Cachar districts of Assam (India) and the adjoining Kailashar-Dharmanagar areas of Tripura (India). It is a single valley formed by the river Barak and its branches, viz. Surma and Kushiya with uniform physical features that make it a distinct geographical division and the homeland of a homogenous group of people who speak in a common dialect of Bengali, called '*Srihatti*' or '*Sylheti*'.
- During 5th to 12th century A.D., it should be remembered that the Tripuris did not maintain an uninterrupted rule over whole of the Barak valley. In fact, the boundary of the Tripuri state changed from time to time. A study of the history of the Tripuri state formation reveals the factors and process that helped the elevation of the Political system from a tribal base to a well-developed monarchy.
- The Seventh Century A.D. seems to be a landmark in the evolution of political structure of the Barak Valley. The description of '*Shi-li-cha-talo*' by Hieun Tsang in his account mentioned that Sylhet or Srihatta at the time of seventh century A.D. was an independent territory. In the early period, Srihatta was known as Silichatal and both Srihatta and Silichatal were concurrently in popular use till medieval period.
- The decline of the Srihattarajya 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. 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 society, economy and polity experienced major changes in the 13th century after the fall of the indigenous Srihattarajya. The lower part of the Surma Barak Valley passed under the successive rule of the Turko-Afghans and then Mughals, and finally, the East India Company with the rest of Bengal, while only the upper

portion of the region, namely, the Cachar plains, formed part of the Tripuri state, Khaspur state and the Dimasa state in rapid succession before the British annexation. These factors generated indirect motivation and specific influences in matters of administrative and institutional changes within the region.

- During ancient period, feudal system was introduced in Surma Barak Valley (Srihatta). Under this system, agriculture was the main source of production. Together with agriculture small cottage industries also existed. The villages were self-sufficient. Production for market was not in practice and as such agriculturists used to exchange their crops against necessary services or works of others. Similarly, the economy and the economic activities of the region could not be anything but agriculture.
- The Cachar-Sylhet region or the whole of 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 during the ancient period.
- The Surma Barak valley had trade relation with the neighbouring territories including Tripura and Bengal. Both the river and land routes were used for communication and trade. The river Barak served the main routes for trade. Besides, rice and other agricultural products, the chief exports were forest products including ivory, wax, cane, bamboo and timber. Traces of development of trading centres are unmistakable. A floating market held regularly on boats on the stream of the Barak at a place named Shialtek had been a famous centre of trade selling different crops and commodities produced in the valley.
- Oral or traditional sources have been literarily used in the two books; “*Srihatter Itivritta*” and “*Cacharer Itivritta*”. Both the works are used as additional source materials as because these sources are very much known and useful for explanations to build up the history of the ancient period of Surma Barak Valley.