

**POLITY FORMATION IN SURMA BARAK VALLEY DURING
5th TO 13th CENTURY A.D.**

ABSTRACT

INTRODUCTION

The process of polity formation in Surma Barak Valley (Barak Surma Valley) region during the period under review was influenced by its geo-political situation which absorbed Pan-Indian traditions and the development in neighbouring areas of the region. In the past, it has been proved that the region experienced a fine blending of these two traditions represented by the Indo-Aryans and the Indo-Mongoloid tribal communities. The emergence of states from the indigenous and immigrant tribal social bases was a significant development in the pre-colonial history of the region. It has been further observed that the social and polity formation processes in the Surma Barak Valley during the period under review were influenced by the geographical, historical and sociological factors. On the one hand, it was an outlying area of 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 geographical area that forms the Surma Barak Valley extends over a region now divided between India and Bangladesh. During the British regime, the region was an administrative unit under the province of Assam reorganized in 1874 and for a period covering more than half of a century it had been called the Surma Valley for administrative purpose and as such this identity of the region was very popular bounded by the ridges of the Borail Hills on the north, the Hills of Tripura and Mizoram on the south, lofty mountains of the Angami Naga hills and Manipur on the east and the plains of the East Bengal, more specially the Meghna Valley (Dhaka-Mymensingh-Comilla), the geographical formation of the region clearly shows that it forms the eastern most continuation of the Bengal plain. It may be mentioned here that

the geographical formation of the valley excludes the modern district of North Cachar Hills which constitute the part of the administrative Surma Valley organized by the British Rulers. The main river of the region is the Barak, which flowing through Cachar, divides itself into two major streams, viz – the Surma and the Kushiya, which again meet to the Brahmaputra, which in turn merges with the Meghna and finally flows to the Bay of Bengal.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The Indian portion of Barak Valley region is now popularly known as the Barak Valley, covering the geographical area of the modern Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi of the Assam state. But the Bangladesh portion continues an administrative unit of the country in the form of ‘Sylhet Division’ constituted with Sylhet, Moulvibazar, Habiganj and Sunamganj Districts. So, the appellation of Surma Valley, so popularly current during the British period has become an historical entity since independence in 1947 when the district of Sylhet, the major portion of Surma Valley was portioned following a referendum. But the geographical formation of the region clearly indicates that the region forms a valley of the rivers Barak and Surma. So, the geographical name of the Valley as “*Barak-Surma Valley*” – following what Nihar Ranjan Roy prefers in his ‘*Bangalir Itihas*’ (Vol – I, P – 80, 3rd Edn., Calcutta – 1980).

The history of the ancient period in the Surma Barak Valley has some special importance in the historical process of the region. The ancient period of the region is obscure; the late ancient period is a period of transition in respect of population pattern, socio-cultural development and political undulation. With all these characteristics, the valley entered into the medieval period of Indian history and attracts a researcher to study the history of the region systematically and with a scientific outlook.

METHODOLOGY

Methodology is a set of idea or guidelines about have to proceed in gathering and validating knowledge of subject matters. The present study is based on analytical and empirical research. This study critically uses both primary and secondary data. The source materials of the ancient period of Surma Barak Valley under review are scanty, yet some materials are available which may be studied under the following heads, i.e., Literary sources, Epigraphic sources and Oral sources.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The basic objective of the proposed work is the study of polity formation in Surma Barak valley during 5th to 13th Century A.D. Besides this, other chief objectives are:-

1. To identify out the major political centers during the period between 5th to 13th century A.D.
2. To find out the factors responsible for the formation of political centers and the cultural development.
3. To examine the nature and characteristic features of the social formation and political development with the help of extant archaeological remains and literary sources.
4. To find out social assimilations occurred in the valley during the period under review.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What were the influences of Polity Formation in the society of Surma Barak Valley during 5th to 13th century A.D?
2. Is the political development in the western part of the valley is same as the neighbouring Bengal province?
3. Is the social assimilation was a continuity of the process that started in the ancient period?
4. Is the socio-political development in the eastern part of the valley is a part of neighbouring North-East Indian states?

UNIVERSE OF THE STUDY

The universe of the study is erstwhile Surma Barak Valley. In studying the proposed region it has been noticed that the location of the region forms the eastern most extension of the Bengal Plain bounded by the ridges of the Borail Hills on the North, Hills of Tripura and Mizoram on the South, lofty mountains of the Angami Naga Hills, and Manipur on the east and the plains of East Bengal, more specially the Meghna Valley, on the west it is connected with the Bengal Plains without any natural barrier. The location of the Valley shows that the geographical boundary coincides with its social boundary and ethnic area which includes modern 'Sylhet Division' of Bangladesh, comprising Sylhet, Moulvibazar, Habiganj and Sunamganj district and Karimganj, Hailakandi and Cachar districts of Barak Valley in Assam (India). Though the valley is geographically a single unit, its political development during the ancient period did not occur under the single political authority. The eastern portion of the upper valley went successfully under the rulers of Tripura, the Koch and the Dimasa Kings, during the same period. In spite of political differences, the socio – cultural development of the region continued almost under the same process. For the convenience of study, a common name of the whole region is imperative and consequently the geographical appellation 'SURMA – BARAK' seems to be appropriate.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The Subject matter of the study as the title indicates is to deal with the polity formation of the undivided valley, during the period from 5th to 13th Century. The political development in the superstructure of a region or a country generally to large extent casts its influence on the social changes occurred in the infrastructure. But in case of Surma Barak Valley, a researcher encounters with a problem of different nature. The social changes occurred during the period under review about the results of the political influences. Some extra political forces might be so alive that it brought even the ruling family at least in the case of eastern portion of the region to undergo

changes along with the process of development came from within. So, an investigation in social changes would also form a sine – quanon of the proposed study.

ORGANISATION OF THE STUDY (Chapterisation)

For the convenient study of the proposed subject, the entire thesis is divided into six chapters, namely – 1) Introduction, 2) Social Formation, 3) Political Formation, 4) Economic Structure, 5) The rise and fall of Srihattarajya, and 6) Conclusion.

CHAPTER – 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter attempts to study the Polity formation in Surma Barak Valley (Barak Surma Valley) during 5th to 13th century A.D. which is now-a-days known as India and Bangladesh. The introductory chapter of the entire research work includes: 1.1) The Geographical Background, 1.2) Statement of the problem, 1.3) Review of Literature, 1.4) Objectives of the study, 1.5) Research questions, and 1.6) Methodology.

CHAPTER – 2

SOCIAL FORMATION

This chapter deals with the process of social formation of Surma Barak Valley region during the period under review. There are three sub-chapters under this chapter. The sub-chapters are: 2.1) Origins of the Social formation, 2.2) Socio-political development, and 2.3) Problem of reviewing Ancient history. At that remote past, the society of the region was hierarchically organized on the basis of caste and the unequal groups in the society survived through mutually obligatory services. Some of the Brahmanas gave up their hereditary priestly professions, engaged in the management of their lands and they became powerful in the state politics. The practice of land grants resulted in the rise of powerful intermediaries and in the fragmentation of the soil. In return of these grants, the donees were obliged to render certain specific services to the state. This entire social phenomenon is discussed in this chapter.

2.1 Origins of the Social formation

The process of social formation in the Surma Barak Valley region of Assam (India) and Bangladesh 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*'. The region is boarded almost on three sides by the hills ranges, viz. The Khasi-Jaintia hills, North Cachar hills, Mizo hills and the Tipperah hills, leaving the fourth exposed to Bengal. Geographically it is a distinct territory and the indigenous people here share a common ethnic, linguistic and the cultural heritage.

2.2 Socio-political development

During the long period of the known history of the ancient period of the region starting from 5th century A.D. and ending with 13th century, the socio-political development occurred in the Surma Barak Valley, centering round racial assimilation and cultural synthesis between the early settlers of presumably from Austric and Mongolian stock and Aryan or Aryanised new comers from the west. The epigraphic discoveries corroborated by some literary evidences bear the testimony of this fact.

The political history of the period shows that at the earliest stage, the Aryanised Mongolian king of Kamarupa rules the region for about two centuries. Thereafter, the eastern portion of the region was ruled by the Mongolian kings for the whole period, even during the medieval period also. But on the western portion forming Sylhet division of the British period, the Aryanised rulers, either from the west or rose indigenously ruled for centuries ending with the beginning of the medieval period. In spite of these political differences, the social formation including social stratification and cultural development proceeded under the influence of Bengal.

2.3 Problem of reviewing Ancient history

The sources for the history of Surma Barak Valley during ancient period have not been properly explored. Historical materials, on which a reliable framework of the history of ancient Surma Barak Valley can be built, are as meagre as confused. History and myths, traditions and tales, facts and fictions are curiously intermingled to create a great obscurity for the period under review. The source materials of the ancient period of Surma Barak Valley under review are scanty, yet some materials are available which may be studied under following heads, i.e., Literary sources, Epigraphic sources, and Oral Sources.

CHAPTER – 3

POLITICAL FORMATION

This chapter covers the political phenomenon of the region during the period under review. There are seven sub-chapters under this chapter. The sub-chapters are: 3.1) Origins of the formation of polities, 3.2) Varman rulers of Kamarupa, 3.3) Samanta rulers of Samatata, 3.4) Seventh Century A.D, 3.5) Harikela State, 3.6) Chandra rulers of East Bengal, and 3.7) Tripuri Formation.

The political structure of the Surma Barak Valley in the ancient period was determined by the political organizations in the neighbouring areas of Bengal. Situated, as it was on the North-East corner of Bengal and surrounded on all other three sides by the hills, the early migrations and settlements in the Valley was possible only from Bengal by logic of geography. This environmental factor dominated the political, social and cultural development of this farthest enclave of Bengal. The political structure of the Valley was, therefore, essentially a Bengal phenomenon. It was the creation of those who moved from Bengal in their eastward march to the farthest limit of the alluvial Indo-Gangetic plains. All these political developments are consulted in this chapter.

3.1 Origins of the formation of polities

The epigraphic evidences on the political structure of the Surma Barak Valley are available from the 6th century A.D, but the pre-six century period remains completely uncharted. Two eminent Bengali scholars of the late 19th century, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya and Ramesh Chandra Dutta felt that the Sylhet-Cachar region passed through the process of Aryanisation much earlier than many other regions of Bengal. In their opinion, the Sylhet-Cachar region formed part of ancient '*Pragjyotisha-Kamarupa*' along with neighbouring districts of eastern and northern Bengal. The fact of Aryanisation at an early stage has been noticed by others also.

An important clue to the early political organization in the Barak Valley is found in Panini's *Ashtadhyayi* which refers to '*Suramasa*' as a *Janapada*. V.S. Agarwal identified this *Janapada* with the Surma Valley (Cachar-Sylhet) of Assam. Panini described *Janapada* as a monarchical state and defined bhakti as loyalty of the citizens to his state or *Janapada*. The noted grammarian, Panini was an alumni of the Taxila University in 6th – 7th century B.C. This suggests that the Barak Valley experienced the monarchical state formation as early as 7th century B.C and the Aryan settlement in the Valley proceeded that period.

3.2 Varman rulers of Kamarupa

The fact that the rule of the Varman rulers of Kamrupa extended to the Barak Valley is known from the Nidhanpur Copper plate of Kumar Bhaskaravarman. This inscription was discovered in the year 1912, the village Nidhanpur of *Panchha-khanda* pargana in Beanibazar Thana of the undivided Sylhet district; it was found in seven copper plates together with a seal. One of the plates was lost subsequently, before the text was deciphered or published. The inscription is undated, but in all probability it was issued between 620 and 643 A.D. The inscription describes the renewal of a perpetual revenue free land grant by the king Maharaja Bhaskaravarman of the original grant made by his great grandfather Maharaja Mahabhuta Varman (alias Bhutivarman) who ruled in the beginning of the 6th century A.D.

The debate was open till the discovery of the Paschimbhag Copper plate inscription of 10th century A.D. in Sylhet a few years later. This inscription also refers to Chandrapuri Vishaya, the boundary of the donated land in the Vishaya is almost identical with that of Nidhanpur inscription, and the titles of the Brahmana donees are also similar. Moreover, the Paschimbhag inscription clearly stated that the Chandrapuri Vishaya was in Srihattamandala of *Pundravardhana bhukti*. Moreover, a village near Nidhanpur is still known as Chandpur and according to tradition, it was earlier known as Chandrapur (*Chandra/Chand* = moon). The land granted in the Chandrapuri vishaya of Sylhet by Bhutivarman and the renewal of the grant by Bhaskaravarman, as stated in the Nidhanpur Copper plate inscription of Bhaskaravarman, is definite historical evidence that the Chandrapur area of Srihatta was under the rule of the Varmans of Kamarupa. However, it is said that the whole of the Barak Valley was under the Kamarupa rulers at that point of time.

3.3 Samanta rulers of Samatata

The Tipperah Copper plate inscription of Samanta Lokanatha mentions the grant of a plot of land in a forest region (*atabibhukhande*) called Suvanga vishaya within Jayatungavarsa for the construction of a temple of Anantanarayana (*Vishnu*) and for the settlement of more than one hundred Brahmanas versed in four Vedas. The inscription gives a short history of a few generations of Samanta (feudatory) chiefs of Samatata (East and South-East Bengal). The identification of '*Suvanga vishaya*' with Suvang area of Cachar brings out two significant facts about the political and social structure of the Barak Valley in the middle of the seventh century A.D. Firstly, the Cachar plains including the Jatinga Valley formed part of the territory of the Samanta rulers of Samatata. The Jatinga Valley (*Jayatunga*) was a province (*varsa*) of Samatata and Suvang (*Suvanga*) was a district (*vishaya*) in that province.

The Kalapur Copper plate of Samanta Marundanatha makes it clear that the Samanta line of rulers were feudatory chiefs under the Guptas. The language of the text is Sanskrit and the character of the letters is Devanagri of the 7th century A.D. Most of the letters are similar to those of the Nidhanpur Copper plate of

Bhaskaravarman. However, the legends Kumaramatyadhikarana and Sri Marundanatha are written in relief in the character of the early Gupta age. Some of the Devanagiri letters bear strong resemblance to those of the Afsad Inscription of Gupta Emperor Adityasena of Magadha of 7th century A.D.

The Copper plates of Lokanatha and Marundanatha show that in the second half of the seventh century A.D., the Barak Valley was ruled by a line of Samanta rulers. They were basically the rulers of Samatata which then included East and South-East Bengal. The dominion of these rulers extended from Tripura first to the upper region of the Valley, then moved northwards to the Jatinga Valley, and finally penetrated deep into the western and southern heartland of the undivided valley. The Barak Valley was, therefore, integrated in this period in the realm of the Samanta rulers of Samatata. Since these Samanta rulers were feudatories under the Gupta dynasty of Magadha, it may be concluded that the Barak valley then formed part of the Gupta Empire.

3.4 Seventh Century A. D.

The Seventh Century A.D seems to be a landmark in the evolution of political structure of the Barak Valley. On the strength of standard historical evidences, it can be said that there were more than one political system within the valley in that century. The description of '*Shi-li-cha-talo*' by Hieun Tsang in his account has convinced some scholars that Sylhet or Srihatta at the time of visit of this Chinese pilgrim in the seventh century A.D was an independent state. The mention of both Silichatal and Srihatta in the medieval Vaishnava literature interchangeably leaves no doubt that in the early period Srihatta was known as Silichatal and that both Srihatta and Silichatal were concurrently in popular use till medieval period. Hieun Tsang mentioned about Srihatta, sometime between 629 and 645 A.D, on his way to the capital of Kumar Bhaskaravarman of Kamarupa. He identified Srihatta as an independent territory. This Srihatta of the Chinese traveller, however, did not cover the whole of the Barak Valley. The epigraphic, numismatic and other historical evidences conclude that segments of this valley under different political formations at about the same time in

the seventh century A.D. The Nidhanpur inscription of Kumar Bhaskaravarman (7th century A.D), for example, clearly shows that at least from the time of his great grandfather, Bhutivarman, to his own time a portion of Srihatta (*Panchha-khanda*) area was ruled by the Varman rulers of Kamarupa. Equally clear is the evidence of the Tipperah Copper plate inscription (650 A.D) of Lokantha which suggests that the Jatinga (North Cachar) and Suvanga (Cachar) areas of the valley were under Samanta rulers of Samatata. The literary and numismatic evidences, on the other hand, prove beyond doubt the existence of Harikela state in the valley from 6th to 9th century A.D. The boundary of the Tripuri state must have considerably shrunk in this period. However, on the basis of the epigraphic and other evidences, it states that Mangalpur (Karimganj), where a Tripura Raja performed a sacrifice in 641 A.D, was then included in the Tripuri state. In the seventh century, Kamarupa, Samatata, Tripura and Harikela states extended and co-existed in the Barak Valley.

3.5 Harikela State

The historical evidences suggest the existence of a state in South East Bengal, including the Barak Valley and Tripura plains region during 7th to 13th century A.D. The boundary of the state, of course, changed from time to time and its epicenter moved from place to place. The Chittagong Copper plate (8th century A.D.) seems to indicate Kanti-Deva's sway over the whole of Harikela roughly corresponding to the present-day Sylhet. This inscription provides the names of three successive rulers of a Buddhist family, each begin the son of his predecessor, viz. Bhadra-Datta, Dhana-Datta and Kanti-Deva. Similarly, the name of one Ranavankamalla Harikela-Deva is known from a Copper plate of Saka 1141 (1239 A.D.) discovered in the Mainamati hills.

Harikela has found mention in some ancient and medieval literary works also. In '*Aryamanjusrimulakalpa*' (8th century A.D.), Vanga, Samatata and Harikela have been mentioned as neighbouring independent *Janapadas*. In two medieval texts published by the Dacca University, '*Rudraksha mahatmya*' and '*Rupa chintamani kosh*', Srihatta and Harikela have been used as synonymous. '*Rajashekara's Karpuramanjari*' (9th -

10th century A.D.), praises the qualities of the women of Harikela in the east. Hemachandra's '*Abhidhana chintamani*' also mentions Harikela as a *Janapada*. Another text, *Dakarnava* calls it one of the 64 tantrik pithas. In four other lexicons also Srihatta Janapada has been referred to as Harikela, *Harikeli* or *Harikel*. A Chinese traveller, I-tsing noted that Harikela was situated on the eastern frontier of India.

On the basis of literary evidences, N.R. Roy found that Harikela flourished as an independent state in 7th – 8th to 10th – 11th century A.D in the closest proximity of Vanga and Samatata. However, Harikela primarily denoted the region now known as Sylhet, though its boundaries and political status as an independent country underwent changes in the course of centuries.

3.6 Chandra Rulers of East Bengal

The political sway of the Chandra rulers over the Barak Valley is known from the Paschimbhag Copper plate of Maharaja Srichandra of the 10th century A.D. It was discovered in the village Paschimbhag under the Rajnagar Thana in Moulvibazar. The text gives the genealogy of the Chandra kings from Purnachandra to Srichandra who is described as a worshipper of *Sugata* (Buddha) and known as a *Paramesvara*, *Parambhattaraka*, and *Maharajadhiraja*. By this Copper plate, Maharaja Srichandra granted lands in three vishayas, i.e., Chandrapura, Garala and Pagora, within Srihattamandala under *Pundravardhana bhukti*. The grants in three vishayas are described in three different parts of the document. The rivers *Manu* (Mani) and *Kushiyara* mentioned in the plate still flow through the Barak Valley. The *vrihat kottali* or huge ridge with a fort is interpreted to suggest the *Pathariya* or the Duhalia hills of Karimganj as one of the boundaries. The mention of Brahmaputra creates the impression that the donated land extended upto Khaspur (which was known as Brahmapur in ancient time) in Cachar. The description of Chandrapur shows that it included Kailashahar-Dharmanagar area of Tripura. Indresvara still exists by this name in western Sylhet.

3.7 Tripuri Formation

The earliest recorded state in the Barak Valley was founded by a Tipperah or Tripuri chief. The formation of this state started sometime before the fifth century A.D and survived till the modern period, although the boundary of the state changed from time to time. As stated in the *Raj-mala*, the royal chronicle of Tripura, the Tripuri Raja ruled first in the Kapili Valley (Assam) and then in the Cachar plains. In Cachar, *Khalangma* was the capital of the state. The extent of the Tripuri state from Cachar gradually extended to Sylhet, then to Comilla and finally to present Tripura when Agartala became the capital. In the beginning of the 15th century, the state extended to Chittagong and its ruler Chengthung Pha (alias Maha-manikya) was a contemporary of Raja Ganesha of Bengal.

It should however be remembered that the Tripuris did not maintain an uninterrupted rule over whole of the Barak valley during 5th to 12th century A.D. 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 leadership of the tribe had passed into the hands of a single personality on hereditary line during the migrations and attempts at establishing a principality of their own. The initial settlement in the wet rice cultivation area predominated by the Indo-Aryan Bengalis exposed the tribe to Hindu influences that resulted in the social stratification and legitimization of the status of the ruler by the Brahmins who established divine origin of the royal clan and thereby enlisted the loyalty of the people.

CHAPTER – 4

ECONOMIC STRUCTURE

This chapter deals with the economy and the economic activities of the region that could not be anything but agriculture, which would suggest the presence of the peasants. There are two sub-chapters under this chapter. The sub-chapters are: 4.1) Origin and 4.2) Society and Economy. The occupations must have cut across the

racial boundaries, although the professional specializations of the emerging social groups might not have fully matured to assume the character of economic classes. It is not sure about the extent of surplus, the extraction, or the type of the methods of appropriation or redistribution. But a type of state mentioned in the Copper plates inscriptions could be based only on surplus. That it was wealthy enough is beyond doubt. In this chapter, a description of all these developments is attempted.

4.1) Origin

In the 7th century A.D., the Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang described Barak Valley (Srihatta) as '*Shi-li-Cha-talo*' and located it to the north-east of Samatata among the hills near the sea. In the 9th century A.D., the Arabian traveller Solaiman Sariafi while crossing the Bay of Bengal came across 'Sylhet', the famous port of Bengal. In the 10th century it was mentioned as *Srihattamandala* in the Copper plate of Maharaja Srichandra, and in the 11th century it was named as the Kingdom of Srihatta in the Copper plate of Govinda Kesavadeva. The ancient period has been defined as the time beginning from the remote past to the arrival of the Sufi Saint Hazrat Shah Jalal in Sylhet in the early 14th century. In the remote past, excepting the hilly region and the north-eastern and southern elevated lands, the greater parts of the present day Barak Valley (Srihatta) were under water and included in the Bay of Bengal.

The identity of the ancient people of Barak Valley (Srihatta) is still under speculation. However, it is generally believed that the *Austric* people used to live in this region in the remote past. After the Austric, came the Mongoloids. It is generally known that the principal source of livelihood of the Austric was agriculture. On the plains and on the steps by the side of the hills, they cultivated wild paddy and made it agricultural commodity of human settlement. In addition, banana, brinjal, pumpkin, lemon, betel-leaves, coconut, pamel, kamranga (a kind of sour fruit), fig, betel nut, pomegranate etc. were also produced by them. The Austric speaking people were basically cultivators, the taming of animals was unknown to them. Among them some people lived in the forest and their source of livelihood was hunting. They were adept in hunting animals and birds on land and fish in water. They knew the technique of

producing dry fish. The popularity of dry fish in Barak Valley (Srihatta) is nothing but the old Austric tradition. They used small boats or canoe made of log as well as floats as means of transport in rivers or in the sea and they even built up sea trade. They knew the use of cotton cloth. Counting was done by the Austric on the basis of score (twenty). Even now fish and some other articles are bought and sold in *hats* or bazaars of Barak Valley (Srihatta) on that basis.

4.2 Society and Economy

The society and economy of the region pertaining to the period under review is concerned with its socio-economic formation which represents the combination of the productive forces, production relation corresponding to them and the super structure. Since the productive forces of Surma Barak Valley during the period had been under the influence of different super structure, the socio economy of the region was also changed in different dimension from time to time. On the other hand, marked changes also occurred in the subaltern productive forces during the period under review. Prior to the colonial rule, they were formed by the Aryanised Bodo-sub tribe of the Tibeto-Burman ethnic group of the Mongolian stock who had absorbed the earlier Austric cultural group of the people originally inhabiting the region and the Aryanised settlers who were materially more advanced than the earlier Mongolian settlers. Though the socio-economic formation of the region developed during the early medieval period along with other parts of Bengal, the distinct local variations caused by the geo-physical condition of it and presence of prominent pre-Aryan elements in the productive forces is unmistakable. Though the changes occurred in the superstructure and process of assimilation in the productive forces of the region continued throughout the period under review, the main basis of economy founded by agriculture remained the same during the whole period.

CHAPTER – 5

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. There are two sub-chapters under this chapter. The sub-chapters are: 5.1) Origin of Srihattarajya, and 5.2) Rise of petty states. 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.

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 name of the kingdom of the kings of Bhatara plate I is clearly mentioned as ‘Srihattarajya’ or the kingdom of Srihatta. 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 four kings who ruled the state for generations. These kings were generous, valiant and valorous. In addition to these, there were small kingdoms in and around the Srihatta region, and the Deva rulers were the overlords for those rulers. It can, therefore, reasonably be said that the Cachar-Sylhet region, or in other words, the whole of the Barak Valley,

formed the core area of the Srikhattarajya while the tributary states could have been spread over the neighbouring areas of Mymensing, Tripura and even Chittagong.

5.2 Rise of Petty States

The decline of the Srikhattarajya 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 mentions Maharaja Dharmadhara, a Tripura king who 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. The boundaries of this Manukulapradesh 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 Kushiya”.

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. Tales and fables of these two rulers are still popular in the locality. Another legendary rulers was Porha Raja of Deorali, who ruled in 13th -14th century. 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.” Pratapgarh, Deorali and Banugach areas were conquered in the 14th century A.D by one Mirza Malik Muhammad who came from Persia.

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. 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 Lakhichandra of Maibong in 1745. The capital of the Dimasa state (Maibong) was shifted to Khaspur in 1750. 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.

CHAPTER – 6

CONCLUSION

This chapter deals with major findings and conclusion of the study. This study draws a conclusion which will help to know about the polity formation in Surma Barak Valley (Barak Surma Valley) by the teachers, researchers, students and the others not only in India but also in other parts of the world. In other words, this concluding chapter contains the summarization of the whole work. The polity formation processes in the ancient Surma Barak Valley were influenced by the then geographical, historical and sociological factors. It was an outlying area of the Bengal plains. The extension of the Indo-Aryan settlements from main land Bengal in early times inaugurated the social formation process, while the contacts and intermingling of the races reinforced the process and perpetuated the growth of a distinct culture group in the region.

The earliest reference to a political organization in the valley was a *Janapada* called Suramasa referred by Panini in the 6th century B.C. There are descriptions about the social and political structure of this *Janapada*. Equally unknown is the structure of

Silichatal 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 Kamarupa in a portion of the valley in 6th-7th century A.D. The seventh century A.D presented a complex political structure in the valley. Besides the independent state of Srihatta and a *vishaya* or district (Chandrapur) in the Kamarupa state, there were districts (*vishayas*) and province (*bhukti*) of Samatata. viz. Suvanga and Jayatunga under the Samanta rulers of South-East Bengal who were feudatories to the Gupta emperors of Northern India. The rule of the Samanta rulers extended from South-East Bengal (Samatata) 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 Surma Barak Valley and South-East Bengal and its epicenter was mostly in Srihatta. In the 10th century A.D, Surma Barak Valley formed a part of the Chandra state of East Bengal. The whole of the valley then formed Srihattamanadala within the *Pundravardhana bhukti* (province) of the Chandra state. The Surma Barak Valley or 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, Jayantia, Gaur and Laur states co-existed in the Surma Barak Valley.

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.