

Reconstructing the Political History of Chittagong (up to the Sixteenth Century)

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Abstract

This study reconstructs the political history of Chittagong, a region marked by significant natural beauty and strategic geopolitical importance. Known for its natural harbor, which has served as a critical port since the first century CE, Chittagong has attracted attention from neighboring powers, including Arakan, Tripura, and Bengal. These powers frequently sought dominance over the area due to its value as a gateway to Bengal, although none achieved sustained control over the entire region. By analyzing the divisions between northern and southern Chittagong, this research explores the region's political instability from ancient times to the seventeenth century. Using historical and analytical methods, this work employs a range of primary sources, including coins, inscriptions, and architectural artifacts from Chittagong's archaeological heritage, alongside contemporary Bengali literature and secondary historical sources. Early human settlements in Chittagong are traced back to the Neolithic period, with the discovery of tools dating from eight to ten thousand years ago. Subsequent periods witnessed the influence of kingdoms like the Kirat, Chandra, and Khadga, with evidence of Chittagong's integration into the broader geopolitical fabric of Bengal and Arakan by the seventh century. This study aims to address gaps in the current literature and contribute to a more accurate and cohesive understanding of Chittagong's rich political history from antiquity through the sixteenth century.

Introduction

Chittagong is a region of remarkable natural beauty, characterized by its mountains, vast blue sea, rivers, and verdant forests, contributing to its unique ecological diversity. Its natural harbor has earned it a reputation as one of the world's significant sea ports, with its international prominence dating back to the first century CE. Situated at the border of eastern Bengal and northern Arakan, Chittagong's strategic location as a gateway to Bengal has long rendered it a region of considerable importance.

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Due to its geopolitical significance, powerful rulers from neighboring regions—Arakan, Tripura, and Gauda Bengal—sought to dominate Chittagong from early times. Although none of these powers could maintain consistent control over the entire region, they frequently managed to assert dominance over portions of it. Historically, Chittagong can be divided into two main areas of political influence: northern Chittagong, extending from Chittagong city and the Karnaphuli River to the southern bank of the Feni River, and southern Chittagong, encompassing the southeastern bank of the Karnaphuli River and the area that later became the Cox's Bazar subdivision.¹

Chittagong experienced sustained political instability from ancient times until the seventeenth century, marked by repeated conflicts and territorial disputes among competing powers. This study seeks to reconstruct the region's political history during this turbulent period, shedding light on the dynamics that shaped its development.

Aims and Objectives

The political history of any region plays a crucial role in constructing a comprehensive historical narrative. Several notable historians, such as Ahmad Sharif, Sunitibhushan Kanungo, and Abdul Karim, have written on the political history of key areas, including Chittagong. However, significant discrepancies are evident in parts of the existing literature. Furthermore, recent research, including the discovery of coins and artifacts in the region, has contributed new insights into Bengal's ancient history. These developments present an opportunity to reexamine and reconstruct the political history of Chittagong. Therefore, the need for a more accurate and cohesive reconstruction of Chittagong's political history is evident. This study aims to address that need by reconstructing the region's political history from ancient times up to the sixteenth century.

Research Methodology

This essay employs historical and analytical methods in its historiographical approach. One of the primary challenges in writing local history is the scarcity of sources, but recent discoveries have significantly contributed to this research. Primary sources such as coins, inscriptions, and architectural remains from Chittagong's archaeological heritage have been utilized to provide a foundation for the study. Additionally, contemporary Bengali literary works, including the *Rajamala*² and *Laili-Majnu*³ have been incorporated as literary sources. The study

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1. Abdul Hoque Chowdhury, *Chattagramer Samaj O Sanskriti*, Pashchim Bakalia, Chittagong, December, 1980, p. 3
 2. Sri Kaliprasanna Sen Bidyabhushan (Ed.), *Rajamala*, 1st, 2nd, & 3rd Lahar, Tribal Research & Cultural Centre, Tripura, Agartala; Sree Kailashchandra Singho, *Rajamala*, Gatidhara, Dhaka, January 2009
 3. Ahmad Sharif (Ed.), *Laili-Majnu*, Bangla Academy, Dhaka, December, 1996

also draws upon secondary sources, such as the histories of Bengal, Arakan, Tripura and Chittagong, alongside various research articles relevant to the topic. These sources have been critically analyzed and assessed to support the reconstruction of Chittagong's political history.

From Ancient Times to the Seventh Century

The recognition of Chittagong's ancient history, located at the eastern border of Bengal and a notable port city, is relatively recent. Evidence of early human settlement was uncovered in 1886 with the discovery of several Neolithic tools from the Sitakunda Hills, situated 20 kilometers from Chittagong City.⁴ These tools are currently preserved in the British Museum, the Calcutta Museum, and the Dhaka Museum. Additionally, in 1958, a Paleolithic stone Batali was discovered in Rangamati, and in 1963, a hand axe was found alongside a stone tool in the Amjadhatt Union of Chagalnaiya police station in Feni, near the northern border of Chittagong.⁵ These findings indicate that human settlement in Chittagong dates back to prehistoric times.⁶ However, little is known about the nature of these settlements or the region itself during this early period, estimated to be between eight and ten thousand years ago.

According to the *Rajamala*, a genealogical history of the kings of Tripura, Chittagong was once part of the ancient Kirat kingdom.⁷ The geographer Ptolemy similarly references the region in *The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*,⁸ identifying Kirat as comprising Assam, Tripura, Chittagong, and Arakan.⁹ Legend also suggests that during the era of the *Mahabharata*, Chittagong was part of the Sukshma kingdom.

The *Radzawang*, an ancient history of Arakan, records that in the middle of the second century (around 146 CE), Chandra Surya, a king from the Chandra dynasty of Arakan, established a unified kingdom that encompassed both Chittagong and Arakan.¹⁰ In contrast, Tibetan scholar Lama Taranath suggests that Chittagong served as the capital of the Chandra dynasty during the reign of Gopi Chandra, the fourth ruler of the Chandra dynasty in Bengal.¹¹ The Chandra dynasty is known to

4. A. H. Dani, *Prehistory and Prehistory of Eastern India*, Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, Calcutta, 1960, p. 87
5. Ahsanul Hoque, *Chattagramer Itihas O Oitijha*, Chittagong, 2014, p. 22
6. A. H. Dani, *op.cit.*, 1960, p. 87
7. Sri Kaliprasanna Sen Bidyabhusan (Ed.), *Rajamala*, 1st Lahar, Tribal research & Cultural Centre, Tripura, Agartala, June 2020, pp. 85-86
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 85-86
9. Sunitibhusan Qanungo, *Chattagramer Prachin Itihas*, Batighar, Chittagong, 2018, p. 18.
10. Arthur P. Phayre, *History of Burma*, Trubner & co. London, 1883, p. 44; Ahmad Sharif, *Chattagramer Itihas*, Agami Prakashani, February, 2001, p. 20
11. S. C. Das, 'Antiquity of Chittagong', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. LXVII, Calcutta, 1898, p. 22

have established a significant kingdom in southeastern Bengal during the seventh century.¹² Lama Taranath's descriptions further indicate that southern Chittagong remained under the control of the Arakan Kingdom during this period.¹³

Recent archaeological discoveries, such as a silver coin of Rajabhatta, a king of the Khadga dynasty, near Chittagong city,¹⁴ provide additional insights into the region's history. According to the chronology of Khadga kings by D. C. Sircar, Rajabhatta reigned between approximately 675 and 700 CE.¹⁵ While no other coins from the Khadga dynasty have been found in Chittagong, this discovery suggests that Chittagong fell under Khadga control only during Rajabhatta's rule. Thus, it can be inferred that following the period of the Kirat kingdom, Chittagong was under Arakanese rule from the second century until the sixth century. By the seventh century, northern Chittagong was under the control of the Chandra dynasty of Bengal, and for a brief period, under the reign of Rajabhatta of the Khadga dynasty. Nonetheless, Arakanese authority over southern Chittagong appears to have remained intact during this time.

Eighth to Tenth Century

A copper vase inscription (picture 1) of Harikela King Devatideva (circa 715 CE) was discovered in a shop at Dhamrai, near Dhaka. According to Chittagong researcher Shamsul Hossain, this inscription was originally found in Chittagong.¹⁶ The inscription documents a land grant in favor of Dharmashabha Vihara, intended to promote the worship of Buddha, Dharma, and the Arya-*Bhiksu-Sangha*, as well as to support the repair of the monastery.¹⁷ Additionally, three copper plates from King Kantideva,¹⁸ along with several silver coins inscribed with "Harikela", were unearthed in Chittagong (picture 2, 3).¹⁹ Historians date Kantideva's reign to the latter half of the ninth century.²⁰ Beyond these artifacts, a bronze Buddha statue (picture 4) and a stupa from the time of the Harikela kingdom were discovered in 1927 in Jhiuri village, Anowara Upazila, Chittagong.²¹ The presence of Harikela rulers is confirmed across various

12. *Ibid.*, p. 22; Shariful Islam, 'Emerging Political Entities in South-East Bengal (Vanga-Samatat-Harikela)', *History of Bangladesh: Early Bengal in Regional perspectives (up to c. 1200 CE)*, Edited by Abdul Momin Chowdhury & Ranabir Chakravarti, Vol. 1, Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, Dhaka, 2018, p. 666

13. S. C. Das, *op.cit.*, p. 22

14. Shariful Islam, *op.cit.*, p. 586

15. *Ibid.*, p. 594

16. Shamsul Hossain, *Eternal Chittagong*, *The Daily Star*, Dhaka, November, 2012, p. 8

17. *Ibid.*, p. 8

18. A copper plate dated 1920 was discovered in a temple at Bara Uthan village in Patia police station and two copper plates were discovered in 1978 from Salimpur village in Sitakunda police station.

19. In 1980, some silver coins were found in Jobra village of Hathajari upazila. The name 'Harikela' is engraved on the coins in Brahmi alphabet. The coins received were of different denominations.

20. Shariful Islam, *op.cit.*, p. 664

21. 61 Buddhist statues, 2 miniature Stupas and 3 clay blocks were discovered in the said village.

parts of Chittagong, including Anwara, Patia, Sitakunda, and Hathazari, establishing that Chittagong was firmly part of the Harikela kingdom.

Recent research suggests that a dynasty known as the 'Akara dynasty' ruled Tripura, Chittagong, and Arakan from the 8th to the 10th century. Numerous coins belonging to this dynasty have been discovered in these regions.²² Coins (picture 5) of four rulers from this dynasty—Kalyankar, Appakar, Anandakar, and Attakardeva—have been found in Chittagong and Mainamati.²³ One copper plate (picture 6) of Attakardeva features the inscription 'Catta-Samvat', which scholars believe indicates the early use of the name 'Chattagram' for the region.²⁴ Historians consider the Akara dynasty to be an offshoot of the Harikela kingdom, confirming that the hilly areas of Tripura, Arakan, and Chittagong were part of the Harikela state.²⁵

In the latter half of the 10th century, Chittagong once again came under Arakanese control. According to Arakanese researcher A. P. Phayre, the ninth king of the Chandra dynasty of the Vaishali Kingdom,²⁶ Tsu-la-taing, conquered Chittagong in 953 CE and declared, 'Test-Ta-gaung', which translates to 'war should not be fought'.²⁷ This phrase is believed to be the origin of the modern name 'Chittagong'. However, after Tsu-la-taing's reign, Arakan experienced political instability due to internal conflicts and external attacks, leading to temporary chaos. Seizing this opportunity, Chengthumpha, the king of Tripura, briefly conquered Chittagong at the end of the 10th century, though his control was short-lived.²⁸

Thus, it is evident that from the early 8th century to the mid-10th century, Chittagong was predominantly under the rule of the Harikela kingdom. However, in the latter half of the 10th century, both Arakan and Tripura vied for dominance over the region.

Eleventh to Fourteenth Century

According to Arakanese history, by the mid-11th century, the neighboring Pagan kingdom had risen to considerable power. During this period, the great Pagan king Anawrahta (1044-1077 CE) extended his authority over a vast area, including

22. Shariful Islam, *op.cit.*, p. 665; Shamsul Hossain, *op.cit.*, p. 14

23. Shamsul Hossain, *op.cit.*, pp. 13-14

24. Shariful Islam, *op.cit.*, p. 666.

25. Abdul Momin Chowdhury, *Prachin Banglar Itihas O Sanskriti*, Barnayan Prokashani, Dhaka, March, 2002, p. 31; Shariful Islam, *op.cit.*, p. 662.

26. Arakanese King Mahateing Chandra (788-810 C.E) went to Vaishali in Trihut and established the capital according to astrology. These nine lunar kings ruled from 788-957. Note that Vaishali was a famous port at that time. Merchants of Bengal, Persia, Arabia, China, and India used to travel to this port. Arthur P. Phayre, *op.cit.*, p. 45

27. Arthur P. Phayre, 'On the History of Arakan', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. XIII, Part. 1, 1844, Calcutta, p. 36

28. Ahmad Sharif, *op.cit.*, p. 30

Chittagong and southern Bengal.²⁹ The fifty years following the conquest of Chittagong by the Pagan ruler Anawrahta, after the Tripura king Chengthumpha, remain unclear in terms of governance. Ahmad Sharif suggests that during this period, Chittagong may have been ruled by the Chandra feudatories, with the Jatavarmans playing a dominant role.³⁰ Recent research indicates that the reign of Jatavarman can be dated to somewhere between 1050 and 1075 CE.³¹

On the other hand, Arakanese scholars Phayre and Harvey report that the violent Sang dynasty ruled Arakan for about eighteen years in the early 11th century,³² wreaking havoc through looting and destruction, including the demolition of Buddhist temples. It is likely that the Sang dynasty extended their dominance over Chittagong, where they may have also caused significant destruction. However, following the collapse of the Sang dynasty, King Anawrahta worked to restore order in Chittagong by promoting Buddhism and establishing Buddhist temples, which helped solidify his reputation as a benevolent ruler. As a result of his governance, Chittagong remained under Pagan control during the reigns of his successors.³³ The revival of Buddhism in both Arakan and Chittagong during this period further supports this conclusion.³⁴

While Arakan remained under Pagan rule from 1044 to 1287 CE, the Pagan kingdom did not maintain uninterrupted control over all of Chittagong. A copper plate (picture 7) of the later Deva dynasty, discovered in Chittagong in the mid-thirteenth century, suggests local rulers continued to assert their influence. This copper plate, found in Nasirabad, Chittagong city, belonged to King Damodar Deva and dates to 1243 CE (1165 Shaka).³⁵ The inscription refers to Damodar Deva as ‘Sakal-Bhupati-Chakravarti’ (Lord of All Kings), indicating his assertion of power over Chittagong. Similar copper plates from Damodar Deva have been discovered in Comilla and Tripura, suggesting that northern Chittagong was under the control of the Deva dynasty, a conclusion supported by historian R. C. Majumdar.³⁶ The spread of Hinduism during this period further corroborates the Deva family’s influence, as they were known to be Hindu rulers.³⁷ However, there

29. Arthur P. Phayre, *op.cit.*, pp. 37, 46

30. Ahmad Sharif, *op.cit.*, p. 30

31. Shariful Islam, *op.cit.*, p. 655

32. Arthur P. Phayre, *op.cit.*, p. 46

33. *Ibid.*, p. 70

34. Arthur P. Phayre, *op.cit.*, p. 46

35. Nani Gopal Majumdar, *Inscription of Bengal*, Vol. 3, The Varendra Research Society, Rajshahi, 1929, p. 158

36. R. C. Majumdar, *History of Bengal*, Vol. 1, The University of Dacca, 1943, p. 254; Sree Kailashchandra Singho, *op.cit.*, p. 58

37. Kamollesh Dasgupta, *Prachin Chattagram O Sekaler Hindu Samaj*, Khadrymatti Prakashni, Chittagong, 2018, pp. 14-15

is no evidence of their rule in southern Chittagong, which likely remained under Pagan control.

In the late 13th century, the Mongol invasion of 1287 led to the collapse of the Pagan kingdom, creating an opportunity for the resurgence of the Arakan kingdom. The powerful Arakanese king Mengdi (1279-1374/1385 CE) extended his rule over Chittagong, and according to Harvey, even the Sena king of Sonargaon paid tribute to him,³⁸ suggesting that Mengdi's kingdom stretched as far as the Brahmaputra River. However, while Mengdi was expanding his control over southern Arakan, Kadal Khan Ghazi, the commander of the independent Sultan Fakhr al-Din Mubarak Shah of Sonargaon, conquered Chittagong in 739-749 H. (1338-1339 CE).³⁹

After the conquest of Chittagong, Sultan Fakhr al-Din established Mosques and tombs in this predominantly Hindu-Buddhist settlement.⁴⁰ Historian Talish corroborates this view, as he personally observed the mosque and tomb built by Fakhr al-Din, although these structures no longer exist. Fakhr al-Din also constructed a road connecting Chittagong with Sonargaon, known as 'Haddin's Hath' (Fakhr al-Din's Road).⁴¹ Chittagong came under Muslim rule roughly 150 years after the beginning of Muslim rule in Bengal. The uninterrupted use of Chittagong's port by the Sultans of Bengal,⁴² along with the discovery of inscribed

38. G. E. Harvey, *History of Burma*, Longmans, Green and Co, London, 1925, p. 138; Mahbub Ul Alam, *Chattagramer Itihas*, Nayalok Prakashani, Chittagong, 1965, p. 44

39. Suniti Bhushan Qanungo, *A History of Chittagong*, Vol. 1, Signet Library, Chittagong, 1988, p. 127

40. Jadunath Sarker, *Studies in Mughal India*, M. C. Sarker & Sons, Calcutta, 1919, p. 122

41. Abdul Karim, *Banglar Itihas (Sultani Amol)*, Jatiyo Grantho Prakashan, January, 1999, p. 175

42. At that time Chittagong port controlled the entry and exit of various commercial ships and foreign envoys coming to Bengal. Between 1405 and 1433, seven diplomatic missions were sent from the Chinese emperor to South-east Asia and the coastal regions of the Indian Ocean. These missions also travel to Bengal. According to the accounts of Kung Cheng, Fei Xing and Ma Huan, after entering the sea port of Chatigaon, they reached Sonargaon by small boat and from there proceeded to the capital Pandaya. Sultan Ghiyas al Din Azam Shah sent various gifts to the Chinese emperor through this port in 1405, 1408, 1409. Sultan Saif al Din Hamza Shah (1410-1412) sent envoys to the Chinese emperor Yunglu in 1412, Sultan Shihab al Din Bayezid Shah (1412-1414) sent various valuable gifts including giraffes and horses to the Chinese emperor. Jalal al Din Mahmud Shah (1418-1432) sent envoys from Chittagong port to the Chinese emperor in 1420. At that time, the ambassador of the Chinese emperor went to Goud via Chittagong port. Besides, he exchanged ambassadors with Persian Emperor Shah Rukh (1404-1447), Egyptian Caliph Ashraf Barbasai. During the reign of Sultan Nasir al Din Mahmud Shah (1433-58), gifts were sent to the Chinese emperor from Chittagong port twice in 1438 and 1439. Details: Muin-Ud-Din Ahmad Khan, *Social History of The Muslims of Bangladesh Under The British Rule*, Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, June, 1992, pp. 5, 7; Abdul Karim, *op.cit.*, 1999 pp. 216-218, 254

coins (picture 8, 9, 10),⁴³ provides evidence that from 1338 until the reign of Sultan Rukn al-Din Barbak Shah (1459-1476 CE), the entirety of Chittagong remained under the rule of Gauda Bengal. Historian Sunitibhushan Kanungo extends this period to 1487.⁴⁴

However, according to Harvey, the region remained under Arakanese control until 1666, when Basawpyu Kalima Shah (1459-1482 CE), the son of Arakan King Ali Khan (also known as Mengkhari, r. 1434-1459 CE), captured Chittagong.⁴⁵ AP. Phayre similarly asserts that Chittagong was under Arakanese rule for the subsequent half-century.⁴⁶ Despite this, Harvey and Phayre's claims are debatable. Basawpyu appears to have failed to fully dominate Chittagong, as evidence of Mosques, inscriptions (picture 11), and water reservoirs (dighi) built by Majlish-e-Ala Rasti Khan and Sultan Shams al-Din Yusuf Shah (r. 1476-1480 CE), the representative of Sultan Rukn al-Din Barbak Shah in Chittagong, is found in Hathajari, northern Chittagong.⁴⁷ Thus, Chittagong was governed by both Rukn al-Din Barbak Shah and his son, Shams al-Din Yusuf Shah.⁴⁸

It is, therefore, evident that during the early reign of Rukn al-Din Barbak Shah, southern Chittagong was taken over by the Gauda Sultan in 1459, while Basawpyu captured this part of Chittagong. Northern Chittagong remained under Gauda Bengal until 1482.

The political history of Chittagong between 1482 and 1493 is, however, quite obscure. Historian Abdul Karim offers no details about this period, while Ahmad Sharif suggests that Arakanese rule may have been in effect.⁴⁹ However, following the death of King Basawpyu, Arakan was plunged into political turmoil due to weak succession. Given this unrest, it would have been difficult for the Arakanese to launch a new campaign in Chittagong. Moreover, the accounts of Arakanese researchers Harvey and Phayre contain no mention of any new Arakanese expeditions to Chittagong during this time. Thus, southern Chittagong likely

43. Coins of Ghiyas al Din Azam Shah, Jalal al Din Mahmud Shah, DanuyMardan Deva and Mahendra Deva were issue from the Chatgaon mint. Abdul Karim, *Corpus of the Muslim Coins of Bengal, Down to A. D. 1538*, Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, Dhaka, November, 2013, pp. 161-162

44. Suniti Bhusan Qanungo, *op.cit.*, pp. 136-155

45. G. E. Harvey, *op.cit.*, pp. 100, 140

46. Arther P. Phayre, *op.cit.*, pp. 71, 79; G. E. Harvey, *op.cit.*, p. 140

47. During the reign of Barbak Shah, the ruler of Chittagong, Rasti Khan, built a paved mosque and dug a Dighi in Jobra village of Hathazari. An inscription of Barbak Shah is also found in the mosque. Besides, Sultan Shams al Din Yusuf Shah (1476-1480) built a mosque with a dome at Hathazari. Shamsuddin Ahmad, *Inscription of Bengal*, Vol. IV, p. 91; Abdul Karim, 'Two Hithero Unnoticed Sultanate Mosques of Chittagong', *Journal of The Asiatic Society of Pakistan*, Vol. XII, Dacca, 1967, pp. 322-324

48. Shamsuddin Ahmad, *op.cit.*, p. 91; Shuniti Bhusan Qanungo, *op.cit.*, p. 151

49. Ahmad Sharif, *op.cit.*, p. 35

remained under the successors of Basawpyu, while northern Chittagong stayed under Gauda Bengal, as Sultan Shams al-Din Yusuf Shah was succeeded by Sikandar Shah and Jalaluddin Fateh Shah, who ruled until 1486.

During the years 1487 to 1493, Bengal was ruled by four successive Abyssinian rulers. However, during this period, the governor of Chittagong, Rasti Khan, and his son Paragal Khan, ruled the region independently.⁵⁰ In 1493, Alauddin Hussain Shah (r. 1493-1519) ascended to the throne of Gauda Bengal, ending Abyssinian rule. Paragal Khan continued to govern Chittagong as Hussain Shah's representative.

Therefore, it can be concluded that Chittagong remained under the uninterrupted rule of Gauda Bengal from 1338 to 1458. From 1459 onward, Gauda Bengal maintained control over northern Chittagong, while Arakan asserted dominance over southern Chittagong.

The sixteenth century marked a period of significant instability in Chittagong's history. Starting in the early second decade, a tripartite conflict emerged between the Kingdom of Tripura, Gauda Bengal, and Arakan over control of the region. This conflict persisted throughout the latter half of the century.

According to the *Rajamala*, during the reign of Sultan Alauddin Hussain Shah (1493-1519), the Tripura king Dhanyamanikya (1463-1515) repeatedly sought to dominate Chittagong. The *Rajamala* informs that Dhanyamanikya and Hussain Shah clashed three times over Chittagong. Before his campaign to capture Chittagong, Dhanyamanikya had already seized parts of Gauda Bengal. However, Hussain Shah swiftly recovered these territories.⁵¹ Dhanyamanikya successfully conquered Chittagong in 1513, as confirmed by silver coins he issued that bear the inscription *Chattigrama Bijoyee Sree Sree Dhanyamanikya* ('চাট্টিগ্রাম বিজয়ী শ্রী শ্রী ধনমাণিক্য')⁵²

The *Rajamala* further records:

তারপরে শ্রীধনমাণিক্য নৃপবর ।
চাট্টিগ্রাম জিনিলেক করিয়া সমর ।।
চৌদ্দশ পাঁচত্রিশ শকে সমর চিনিল ।
চাট্টিগ্রাম জয় করে মোহর মারিল ।।
গৌড়ের যতেক সৈন্য চট্টলেতে ছিল ।
শ্রীধনমাণিক্য তাকে দূর করি দিল ।।⁵³

Despite this victory, Dhanyamanikya was unable to maintain control over Chittagong. By the end of 1513, Hussain Shah re-established his dominance over

50. Shuniti Bhusan Qanungo, *op.cit.*, p. 154

51. Abdul Karim, *Catalogue of Coins in The Cabinet of The Chittagong University Museum*, July, 1979, pp. 23-24

52. Abdul Karim, *op.cit.*, p. 23, 94; N. G. Rhodes & S. K. Bose, *The Coinage of Tripura with notes on the seals, orders, decoration and medais of the state*, Library of Numismatic Studies, Kolkata, September, 2002, p. 15

53. Sri Kaliprasanna Sen Bidyabhushan (Ed.), *Rajamala*, 2nd Lahar, Third Edition, Calcutta, June, 2020, p. 22

the region, defeating Dhanyamanikya.⁵⁴ In 1515, the Tripura king once again recaptured Chittagong, even extending his control into parts of Arakan.⁵⁵ However, this victory was short-lived, and after Dhanyamanikya's death, Alauddin Hussain Shah reconquered Chittagong in 1516. The capture is recorded in an inscription (picture 12) from a Mosque in Postarpar, Chittagong, dating to the Hussain Shahi period (921H/1515-1516 CE).⁵⁶

However, according to the Portuguese merchant João de Barros, Chittagong fell under Arakanese control in 1517,⁵⁷ likely while Hussain Shah was preoccupied elsewhere. Following this, Prince Nasrat Shah (1519-1532), Hussain Shah's son, was tasked with leading a campaign to recover Chittagong. Nasrat Shah successfully recaptured Chittagong from the Arakanese in 1517 and renamed it *Fateyabad*.⁵⁸ This new administrative center was located eight miles away from the present Chittagong city in Hathazari.

To solidify his control over Chittagong and protect the region from future attacks by Arakan and Tripura, Nasrat Shah developed Fateyabad extensively, building ponds, Mosques (picture 13), and palaces. Although these structures no longer exist, they earned the area the reputation of being the capital.⁵⁹ The city is mentioned in the poem *Laili Majnu* by Daulat Wazir Bahram Khan in its 'Self-Introduction'⁶⁰ and 'Peer Stuti' episodes.⁶¹ Other structures, such as the Paragali Canal, the village of Paragalpur, its dighi (large pond), Chuti Khan Mosque, and various residences, still preserve the memory of Nasrat Shah's rule in the region.⁶²

54. Shuniti Bhushan Qanungo, *op.cit.*, p. 157; Abdul Karim, *op.cit.*, p. 329

55. চৌদ্দশ সাদ্রিশ শকে চাট্টিগ্রাম জিনে।

গুনিয়া হোসেন সাহা মহাক্রোধে মনে।

Sri Kaliprasanna Sen Bidyabhushan (Ed.), *Rajamala*, 2nd Lahar, p. 24

56. Abdul Karim, *Corpus of Arabic and Persian Inscription of Bengal*, 1992, pp. 320-323

57. J. J. A. Campos, *History of the Portuguese in Bengal*, R. N. Bhattacharya, Calcutta, 1960, p. 28

58. J. N. Sarkar, *History of Bengal*, Vol. II, The University of Dhaka, 1943, p. 150

59. Ahmad Sharif also named Fateyabad as the capital in his book. *Chattagramer Itihas*, p. 37

60. “নগর ফতেয়াবাদ দেখিয়া পুরএ সাধ

চাট্টিগ্রাম সুনাম প্রকাশ।

মনোভব মনোরম অমরা নগর সম

সাধু সৎ অনেক নিবাস।

লবণাসু সন্নিহিত কর্ণফুলী নদীতট

গুভপরি অতি দিব্যধাম। Ahmad Sharif (Ed.), *Laili Majnu*, 2019, p. 12

61. “বঙ্গদেশ মনোহর, তার মধ্যে শোভাকর

নগর ফতেয়াবাদ নাম। *Ibid.*, p. 9

62. Nasrat Shah's provincial governor of Chittagong Paragal Khan dug a canal in Hathajari police station known as 'Paragali Canal'. The canal is still constricted. Besides, there is 'Paragalpur village' named after him in Mirsarai police station. He built a residence and a pond to live in this village. Apart from this, there is also a Dighi named after his son Chuti Khan. There is also a mosque built on the banks of this lake. Sree Kailashchandra Singho, *op.cit.*, p. 190; Ahmad Momtaz, Chuti Khan, *Banglapaedeia*, Vol. 3, p. 414

Following the death of the Arakanese king Basawpyu, his successors proved to be weak, allowing Hussain Shah to annex southern Chittagong as well. Thus, by 1517, Hussain Shah controlled the entire Chittagong region, bringing it fully under the dominion of Gauda Bengal.

From 1517 to 1538, Chittagong remained under the control of Bengal, specifically under the rule of Ghiyas al Din Mahmud Shah. However, the *Rajamala* suggests that in 1522, Dhanyamanikya's son, Devamanikya, managed to recapture Chittagong and established a garrison there.⁶³ This view is supported by historian S. M. Ali, though the exact date of Chittagong's capture is not specified.⁶⁴ Sri Kailasachandra places Devamanikya's reign from 1522 to 1527, and it's plausible that Devamanikya briefly seized Chittagong during his rule.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, Nasrat Shah of Bengal likely regained control shortly afterward.

The political landscape of Bengal changed dramatically in 1538 when the Afghan ruler Sher Shah Suri defeated Ghiyas al Din Mahmud Shah and took control of Gauda Bengal.⁶⁶ Following his victory, Sher Shah sent his general, Nizam Shah, to capture Chittagong, which was under the governorship of Khodabkash and Amirza, both of whom were loyal to Mahmud Shah.⁶⁷ Their internal disputes facilitated Nizam Shah's conquest of Chittagong in March 1538. This event is referenced in the poetry of *Laili Majnu*, which confirms Nizam Shah's authority.⁶⁸

Afghan rule over Chittagong persisted from 1538 to 1580. However, during this period, Chittagong remained a point of contention between the Afghan rulers, Tripura, and Arakan. According to the *Arakanese Chronicle*, King Meng Beng (also known as Jabuk Shah, 1531-1560) of Arakan seized Chittagong and Ramu in 1540.⁶⁹ He even issued coins from Chittagong,⁷⁰ indicating Arakan's dominance

63. দেবমাণিক্য মহারাজা অতি শুভাজন।

ভুলুয়া আমল করি সমুদ্র গমন।।

মোহর মারিল তথা দান ধর্ম যতি।

... ..

এ তীর্থ করিয়া রাজা ফিরিল তখন।

চাট্রিহামে থানা রাখি রাজ্যে আগমন। Sri Kaliprasanna Sen Bidyabhushan (Ed.), *Rajamala*, 2nd Lahar, p. 33

64. S. M. Ali, 'Arakan Rule in Chittagong (1550-1666)', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Pakistan*, Vol. XII, Dacca, 1967, p. 337

65. Sree Kailashchandra Singho, *op.cit.*, p. 184

66. J. N. Sarkar, *History of Bengal*, Vol. II, B. R. Publishing Corporation, Delhi, Reprint 2003, p. 187

67. Khodabatsh and Amirza were the rulers of north and south Chittagong respectively under these two Sultans.

68. "চাট্রিহাম অধিপতি হইলেন্ত মহামতি

নুপতি নেজাম শাহা সুর। Ahmad Sharif (Ed.), *op.cit.*, p. 12

69. Suniti Bhusan Qanungo, *op.cit.*, p. 188

70. Arther P. Phayre, *op.cit.*, p. 80

before Shamsuddin Muhammad Shah Ghazi, the Afghan ruler of Bengal (1553-1555), reconquered the region. Muhammad Shah Ghazi not only regained Chittagong but also extended his control over parts of Arakan.⁷¹ His son, Ghiyas al Din Bahadur Shah (1555-1560), maintained this control, ruling from Jaunpur to Chittagong and continuing to assert dominance over portions of Arakan, as evidenced by coins issued from the Arakan mint.⁷²

During Ghiyas al Din Bahadur Shah's reign, Chittagong once again came under Tripura's rule. The *Rajamala* details how Vijayamanikya, the king of Tripura (1528-1570), captured Chittagong and clashed with Mamarak Khan (also known as Muhammad Khan), the commander of Bengal.⁷³ After an eight-month struggle, Vijayamanikya eventually prevailed, sending his general Kalanajir, the conqueror of Sylhet, to lead the final assault. Vijayamanikya's conquest of Chittagong is further confirmed by a coin issued in 1557 CE, which marks the year of his victory.⁷⁴

Vijayamanikya ruled Chittagong until his death in 1570. After his passing, Chittagong once again fell under Afghan control. The *Rajamala* describes this transition, indicating that despite the various changes in rule, Chittagong remained a contested territory throughout this tumultuous period.⁷⁵

গৌড়েশ্বর গুনে বিজয়মাণিক্য মরণ ।

চৌদ্দশ চৌরানব্বই শকে উদয় রাজন ।।

রাজবংশ নাহি কেহ অন্য হেল রাজা ।

চাট্টিগ্রাম পাঠাইল সৈন্য মহাতেজা ।

According to the history of Bengal, Sulaiman Karrani ruled Gauda Bengal from 1567 to 1572. Evidence from an inscription on the Mosque wall in 'Ilsa' village of Bashankhali (975 AH/1568 AD) confirms that Chittagong was under Sulaiman Karrani's control by 1568, as highlighted by historian Abdul Karim.⁷⁶ By comparing *Rajamala* data with Karrani's inscriptions and the timeline of Vijayamanikya's death, it seems plausible that Sulaiman Karrani initially took over southern Chittagong and, after Vijayamanikya's death in 1570, fully occupied the region. Following Udayamanikya's accession to the throne of Tripura, he launched an attack on Chittagong in 1572 CE (1494 Shakabda).⁷⁷ At the time, Bengal was under Daud Khan Karrani, and Chittagong was governed by his feudatories Firoz Khan

71. Abdus Sayed, *Banglay Afghan Shashon (1538-1576)*, Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 2016, p. 104

72. H. N. Wright, *Catalogue of Coins in The Indian Museum Calcutta*, Vol. II, The trustees of the Indian Museum, Oxford, 1907, p. 180; M robinson & L.A. Shaw, *The Coins and Bank Notes of Burma*, Manchester, 1980, p. 52

73. Sri Kaliprasanna Sen Bidyabhushan (Ed.), *Rajamala*, 2nd Lahar, pp. 47-50

74. *Ibid.*, p. 130

75. *Ibid.*, p. 69

76. Abdul Karim, *Chattagramme Islam O Oitijho*, Jatiyo Shahitto Prakash, Dhaka, February, 2018, p. 142

77. Sri Kaliprasanna Sen Bidyabhushan (Ed.), *Rajamala*, 2nd Lahar, pp. 69-71

Anni and Jamal Khan Panni.⁷⁸ *Rajamala* chronicles a war that lasted for five years, concluding in 1576 (1498 Shakabda) with Udayamanikya's death.⁷⁹ Shortly after, the Afghan ruler Daud Khan Karrani was defeated and killed, leading to the decline of Afghan control and the collapse of centralized Mughal power in Bengal. This allowed regional rulers and landlords to assert their independence, and Jamal Khan Panni declared himself independent over Chittagong.

In 1581, Arakanese King Min Phalaung (1571-1593) exploited the political instability in Bengal and defeated Jamal Khan Panni, capturing Chittagong, Noakhali, and parts of Tripura.⁸⁰ Despite an attempted raid by Tripura's Amaramanikya, Chittagong remained under Arakanese control. Min Phalaung was succeeded by his son Min Razagi (Salim Shah, 1593-1612), who maintained Arakanese authority over Chittagong. Both kings issued coins (picture 14, 15) from Chittagong's mint, symbolizing their rule.⁸¹

During the early 17th century, the Mughals expanded their influence up to the Feni River, which alarmed Min Razagi. In response, Razagi adopted a defensive strategy, constructing a formidable fort on the south bank of the Karnaphuli River, known as 'Chatgaon Fort'.⁸² This fort was heavily fortified and equipped with various weapons to guard against Mughal advances.

Throughout Arakanese rule, Chittagong's port and city were largely controlled by the Portuguese, who were close allies of the Arakanese. The Portuguese established a reign of terror along the coastal regions of Bengal, including Chittagong, which is documented in contemporary Bengali poems like *Nasar Maalum*, *Nurunneha*, and *Kabarar Katha*.⁸³ This Portuguese-Arakanese control lasted until 1666, when Mughal general Shaista Khan recaptured Chittagong, bringing it back under Mughal control.⁸⁴

78. চট্টলের গড়ে গেল পাঠান সত্ত্বর ।।
গৌড়েশ্বর শুনিলেক এসব বৃত্তান্ত ।।
হরষিতে বহু সৈন্য পাঠায় সামন্ত ।।
পীরোজ খাঁ আন্নি আর জামাল খাঁ পন্নি ।
চট্টলে পাঠাইল গৌড়ে তারা যোদ্ধা জানি ।। pp. 71-72

79. পঞ্চ বৎসর যুদ্ধ ছিল জামাল পন্নি সনে ।।
চৌদ্দশ আটানব্বই শকেতে তখন ।
... ..
পঞ্চ বৎসর রাজত্ব করিয়া শাসন ।
এই মতে মরিল উদয়মানিক্য রাজন ।। p. 72

80. J. N. Sarker, *op.cit.*, p. 243; Arther P. Phayre, *op.cit.*, 1883, p. 174

81. Arther P. Phayre, *op.cit.*, pp. 79-80; Mahbub ul Alam, *Chattagramer Itihas (Purana Amol)*, Chittagong, 1965, p. 127

82. Father Fernao Guerreiro, *Jahangir and the Jesuits*, (Trans: C. H. Payno), George Routledge & Sons, LTD. London, 1930, p. 185

83. Sree Dineshchandra Sen & Rai Bahadur (Compiled), *Purbabanga Gitika: Chattagram-Noakhali*, Tasikul Islam (Ed.), Vol. 4, Anondadhara Prokashani, Dhaka, February, 2012, pp. 126-143, 210-213.

84. Abdul Karim, *op.cit.*, p. 46

Conclusion

In conclusion, Chittagong, once part of the ancient Kirat kingdom, evolved into a significant seaport as early as the first century CE. It became a hub for international trade, with merchants from regions such as Greece, the Middle East, Java, Sumatra, Malacca, and Sri Lanka frequenting its ports. Beyond trade, Chittagong also held prominence as a center for Buddhist education and culture. Its geographical and strategic importance, being located between the southern borders of Bengal and the northern borders of Arakan, made it a coveted region for various rulers over the centuries.

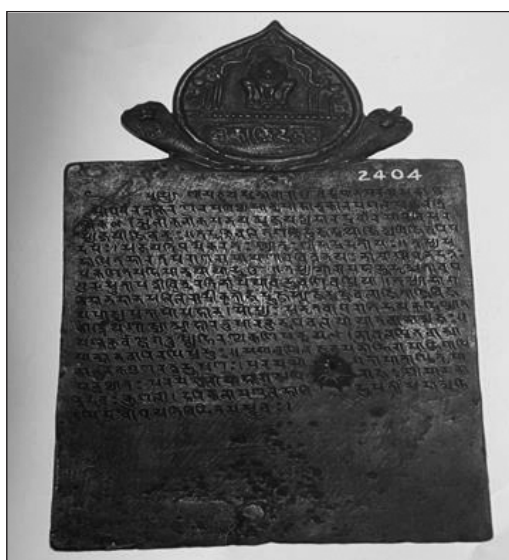
The political instability in Chittagong, dating back to the sixth century, intensified during the sixteenth century due to the tripartite conflict between Bengal, Tripura, and Arakan. These three powers struggled for control over the region, with Chittagong often changing hands between them. Bengal and Arakan, for most of the time, managed to assert their dominance, while Tripura's control, though significant during Vijayamanikya's reign, was short-lived.

The underlying reasons for the struggle over Chittagong were its immense geopolitical and economic importance. Strategically located at the confluence of the Meghna River, one of the primary routes to Gaud Bengal, Chittagong's control was essential for maintaining the security of Bengal's southeastern borders. Moreover, its seaport played a crucial role in controlling the flow of goods, diplomats, and foreign visitors to Bengal. As such, both Bengal and Arakan viewed the region as vital for their defense systems and economic prosperity.

The intense competition for dominance over Chittagong ultimately reflected its dual role as both a critical defensive outpost and a gateway for trade and diplomacy. These factors, combined with the ambitions of regional powers, made Chittagong one of the most contested regions in the subcontinent, shaping its history for centuries.



Picture 1: Copper Vase Inscription of Devatideva



Picture 2: Copper plate of Kantideva



Picture 3: Harikela Coins



Picture 4: Buddha in Bhūmiparāsāya-mudrā



Picture 5: Silver coin of Attakardeva (Obverse and Reverse)



Picture 6: Copper Vase Inscription of Attakaravedva



Picture 7: Nasirabad copper plate Inscription of Damodaradeva



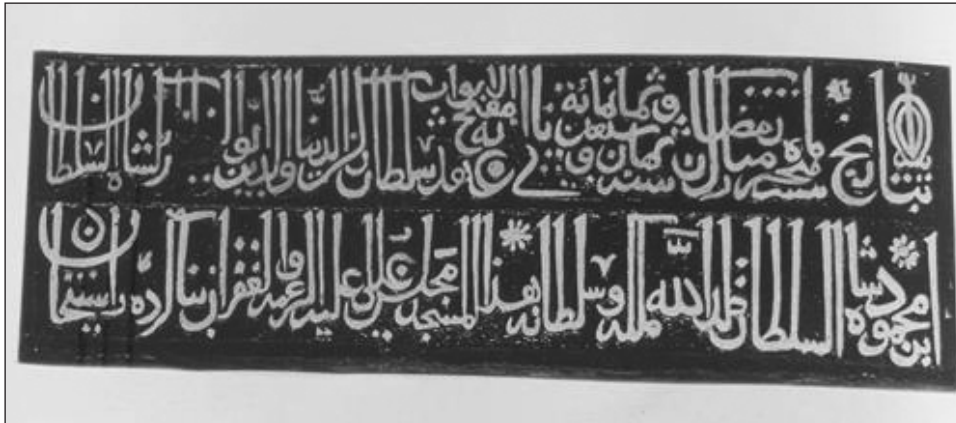
Picture 8: Coin of Ghiyas al Din Azam Shah (Obverse and Reverse)



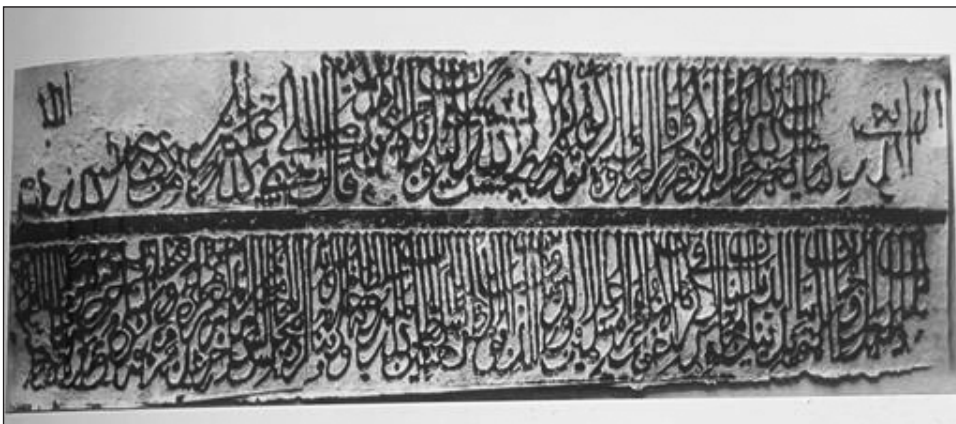
Picture 9: Coin of Sultan Jalal al-Din Mahmud Shah (Obverse and Reverse)



Picture 10: Coin of Danuy Mardan Deva (Obverse and Reverse)



Picture 11: Inscription of Rasti Khan (Alaol Mosque, Hathazari)



Picture 12: Inscription of Postarpar Mosque



Picture 13: Pillar of Nasrat Shah's Mosque



Picture 14: Coin of Salim Shah



Picture 15: Arakanese Governor Maha Thirathura