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**Environmental Features of Subbuṅga (Subong) as
recorded in the Tipperāh Copper-plate of
Lokanātha [circa 7th Century AD]**

The epigraphic records of early India, including those of the Northeast, are generally very informative about the ecological aspects of the relevant areas and thereby they offer between them interesting data on the environmental changes that substantially affected the ecosystem over the centuries, since such records, particularly the land grants, in most cases, are dated and they do contain description of the donated land with its artificial and natural boundaries and physical features and the flora and fauna.¹ The Tipperāh Copper-plate inscription (*circa* seventh century AD)² is one such epigraphic record which provides significant ecological details of the area where land was donated by king Lokanātha of Samataṭa for the construction of a temple (*matha*) of Bhagavān Anantanārāyana and settlement of more than one hundred Brāhmanas. The donated land was in the Subong (Subbuṅga) area of Cachar in the Barak-Surma valley. It needs to be mentioned that this inscription was named Tipperāh Copper-plate by the epigraphists, because it was recovered in 1903 from the Comilla area which was then a part of the Tipperāh district of Bengal, although by its content the Copper-plate is related to the Cachar district (of modern Assam).³

Lokanātha, who is mentioned in the Tipperāh Copper-plate as a *Sāmanta*, i.e. feudatory, is believed to have been one of the three feudatories, namely, Lokanātha, Jivadhāraṇa and Jayatuṅgavarṣa,⁴ who are said have come into prominence in the Samataṭa region after the decline of the Gupta empire. The said Samataṭa region, according to the noted Indologist N. K. Bhattasali, was formed by the areas covered in the modern districts of Noakhali, Tipperah, Sylhet and Cachar.⁵ The three feudatories had a common suzerain, mentioned in the inscription only as *Parameśvara* (supreme lord or overlord), who had suffered heavy losses in the prolonged wars against two rebellious feudatories, namely, Jivadhāraṇa and Jayatuṅgavarṣa. Thereafter, the war was taken up on behalf of his suzerain (i.e., *Parameśvara*) by Lokanātha, who was in possession of a *Śrīpaṭṭa* (royal charter) granting him the author-

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ity of the governor or viceroy of Samatāta. The refractory feudatories, namely, Jivadhāraṇa and Jayatuṅgavarṣa, were completely defeated and Lokanātha became the ruler (though still referred to as *Sāmanta* or feudatory ruler) of the entire region of Samatāta.⁶ Lokanātha made a land grant in the Subbuṅga (Suvvuṅga) *viṣaya* by the said Tipperāh Copper-plate inscription, possibly after Jayatuṅgavarṣa had been eliminated in the war and Lokanātha's own position as the ruler of the Samatāta region had been fully consolidated. The inscription says that a pious Brāhmaṇa, named Pradoṣāsarmana, who held the high office of *Mahāsāmanta* in the kingdom of Lokanātha, approached king Lokanātha, through the latter's son, Lakṣminātha, as *dutaka* (messenger or ambassador), for the grant of a plot of land in the Subbuṅga *viṣaya* for the construction of a temple of Bhagavān Anantanārāyana and for the settlement of more than one hundred Brāhmaṇas who were well-versed in the four Vedas. The prayer was granted and the land was donated to those Brāhmaṇas by the copper-plate charter individually, and in some cases, collectively. The donees included the *bhogin* or headman of the village, and the *pāchaka* (cook) and *vāchaka* (reciter) of the temple.⁷ The Copper-plate is dated in 'the year 44', which, according to Radhagovinda Basak, was equivalent to 650 AD.⁸ That Lokanātha and his successors continued to rule in the Cachar-Sylhet region is definitely known from the Kālāpur Copper-plate of *Sāmanta* Maruṇḍanātha (*circa* seventh century AD), the successor of Lokanātha, which was discovered in the last century in a village (Kālāpur) in the Maulavibazar subdivision of the then undivided Sylhet district.⁹

N. K. Bhattasali identified Subbuṅga (Suvvuṅga) with (Subhang) Subong - a place, a river and a tea estate of that name in the same locality - in the Barkhola area of modern Cachar (Kāchār) district of Assam.¹⁰ As Bhattasali says,

This grant (Tipperāh Copper-plate) speaks of a battle in Jayatuṅgavarṣa and the grant itself was made in the *Viṣaya* of Subbuṅga. These names sound like the Jaṭiṅgā and the Subong rivers in the region north of Silchar in the Kāchār district and Jaṭiṅgā river and Jaṭiṅgā station are well-known to travellers by the hill section of the B. A. Railway. I have elaborated this identification, which has puzzled scholars for the last forty years, in an article of mine in the Pujā number (1351 B. S.) of the *Ānandabāzār Patrikā*, and would refer the enquirers to that article. If my identification is accepted, it would appear that in the northern part of the kingdom of Samatāta, in and about the present Kāchār district, one Lokanātha had made himself supreme, as Devakhaḍga had made himself in Tippera. We hear even of another king called Kāntideva, making himself king of Harikela or the Chittagong district about the same time.¹¹

Bhattachali thus identified Subbuṅga *viṣaya* with the Subong area in Cachar district and Jayatuṅgavarṣa with Jatinga valley which is spread over the adjoining portions of Cachar-North Cachar (Dima Hasao) districts.¹² This identification of Subbuṅga (or Suvvuṅga) with Subong, was strongly supported by Raj Mohan Nath, a well known historian and archaeologist of Assam, who reinforced the views of Bhattachali by referring to a site in Subong where according to local traditions there was an ancient *Vishnu* temple and concluding that this might be the temple mentioned in the Tipperāh Copper-plate of Lokanātha.¹³ The historians of the Barak Valley, like J. B. Bhattacharjee¹⁴ and Sujit Choudhury¹⁵ as it appears from their writings, seem to have accepted the identification of Bhattachali. As a matter of fact, that the Cachar-Sylhet area (Northeast corner of traditional Bengal) formed part of the political framework of Samatāṭa is established not only by Tipperāh Copper-plate of Lokanātha but also by the Kālāpur Copper-plate of Maruṅḍanātha.¹⁶ The existence of Jatinga and Subong till today and the description of the *viṣaya* as a forest region are strong pointers to the possible correctness of the identification. What remains to be academically resolved is possibly the identity of Jayatuṅgavarṣa, as to whether Jayatuṅgavarṣa was the name of a territory or of a person. Radhagovinda Basak¹⁷ and R. C. Majumdar,¹⁸ while naming 'Lokanātha, Jivadhāraṇa and Jayatuṅgavarsha' in the same breath, looked upon Jayatuṅgavarsha also as a feudatory chief or ruler like Lokanātha and Jivadhāraṇa, while N. K. Bhattachali¹⁹ and Raj Mohan Nath²⁰ believed Jayatuṅgavarṣa to be the name of a territory or a feudatory state. However, Radhagovinda Basak, who was the first to decipher the Tipperāh Copper-plate and whose work has been used by R. C. Majumdar, had made it clear that the plate was "not in a good state of preservation, having suffered a good deal from corrosion."²¹ In fact, R.C. Majumdar regarded Jayatuṅgavarsha as a title (*birudha*) rather than a proper name.²² But Radhagovinda Basak, even many years after the publication of his reading of the inscription, maintained that, "it is very difficult to identify this Jayantuṅgavarsha, a contemporary of Lokanātha, and we shall have to await future discoveries for the final settlement of the questions."²³ On the other hand, N. K. Bhattachali, who was himself an epigraphist of great repute, read it to be "in Jayatuṅgavarṣa".²⁴ In this context it may be mentioned that the word *varṣa* generally means a country, territory or a state (e.g. Bhāratavarṣa). This might mean that king Lokanātha's attack on Jayatuṅgavarṣa was an invasion against the feudatory state of that name and the person he eliminated was the feudatory ruler of that state or territory, whose name is not mentioned in the inscription (as in case of the

Parameśvara). If that be the case, Jayatuṅgavarṣa was a state or state-like politico-administrative formation and Subbuṅga, a *viṣaya* (district) within that state or political entity.²⁵

As regards the environmental features, with which we are concerned here, some interesting data on the Subbuṅga (Suvvuṅga) *viṣaya* in *circa* seventh century AD are found in the following passages of the Tipperāh Copper-plate of *Sāmanta* Lokanātha, as translated by Radhagovinda Basak, by which charter the *Sāmanta* ruler of Samatata granted a tract of land in that *viṣaya* or district:

(LI. 21-26) "In the *vishaya* (district) of **Suvvuṅga**, in the forest-region, having no distinction of natural and artificial, having a thick network of bush and creeper, where deer, buffaloes, boars, tigers, serpents, etc enjoy, according to their will, all pleasures of home-life ... I have caused a temple to be made and have had set up therein (an image of) the infinite Lord Ananta-Nārāyaṇa, who has shown favour to me. There, for the perpetual maintenance of *aṣṭhapuṣhpīkā, bali, charu, satra* to Bhagavān Ananta-Nārāyaṇa, whose person is adored by the chief gods, the *Asuras*, the sun, the moon, *Kuṣṭhāra*, the *Kinnaras*, the *Vidyādhara*s, the chief serpent (-gods), the *Gandharvas*, *Varuṇa*, the *Yakshas*, and (also for the residence of) *Brāhmaṇas* versed in the four *Vēdas*, who have a community there, an endowment in this forest region, having no distinction of natural and artificial, has been granted with full title, for the increase of the merit of my father and mother and myself, by king [**Lōka**]nātha by a copper-plate grant."

(LI 27-33)"..... In the year **44**, in the month of **Phālguna**, the forest, having no distinction of natural and artificial, in (the district of) **Suvvuṅga**, of which the four boundary lines were thus defined, viz. on the east the **Kaṇāmōṭīkā** hill, on the south the limit-line of the two villages **Paṅga** and **Vāpikā**, on the west portion of the *tāmra-pathara* (?) of **Jayēśvara** and on the north the tank of the *mahattara* **Ranaśubha** – was recorded in the copper-plate grant and given for the increase of merit to **Pradōshaśarman** and his parents and for the performance of the ceremonies of worship for the god Bhagavān Ananta-Nārāyaṇa in the *maṭha* made by him."²⁶

It was in such a forest region (*aṭavi-bhūkhaṇḍa*) that king Lokanātha granted land for the construction of the temple (*matha*) of Bhagavān Anantanārāyaṇa and the settlement of more than one hundred *Brāhmaṇas*, who were well

versed in the four Vedas. The lines thirty-three to fifty of the said copper-plate contain the names of the “Brāhmaṇa-dwellers on the granted plot of land, numbering over one hundred, and a definite statement of the measurement of land which they should individually or jointly occupy.”²⁷

The passages quoted above from the Tipperāh Copper-plate inscription clearly mentioned that the land donated by king Lokanātha in the Subbuṅga *viṣaya* (district) was in a forest region which was without any distinction of natural and artificial boundaries. The said forest region had a thick network of bush and creepers, and in that thick network of bush and creepers the animals like deer, buffaloes, boars, tigers, serpents, etc. freely enjoyed all pleasures of their home-life. In other words, the donated tract was the home of the wild animals. As regards the boundary of the donated tract, the inscription recorded the Kanāmotikā hill (*parvata*) on the east, two villages called Paṅga-grāma and Vāpikā grāma on the south, portion of the *tāmra pathara* of one Jayeśvara on the west, and the tank of Ranaśubha (a *mahattara*) on the north. On basis of this information, Nalinikanta Bhattasali searched for many years for the location of Subbuṅga in the region covered within ancient Samataṣa. Ultimately, he encamped in the Barkhola area of Cachar for several days and walked through the difficult terrains and villages in 1942-43, comparing physical descriptions provided in the Tipperāh Copper-plate and the possible spatial and cultural (place-name) changes over the centuries. He was eventually convinced that the Subong (Subhang) area formed a part of the Subbuṅga *viṣaya* in the seventh century AD. Bhattasali then wrote down his experience and the justification for identification of Subhang with Subbuṅga, in a long essay in Bengali which was published in 1944 in the *Shārādiya Ānandabāzār Patrikā*. He found that about fourteen miles to the north of Silchar town, which is situated on the bank of Barāk, a branch of the river Dulu is known as Subhang. Six miles to the north-west of the town the river Jātingā that originates in the northern hills, confluences with the Barāk. Two and half miles to the north-east of that confluence the river Subhang joins the Jātingā. A place about eight miles to the north of Silchar is called Ābhang, the place eleven miles to the north of Ābhang is called Jātingā, and another village two miles to the south-east of Ābhang is still known as Bāmonipārā. Bhattasali concluded that the name Bāmonipārā reminds of an ancient Brāhmaṇa settlement, while the modern Jātingā is ancient Jayatuṅga and Subhang is ancient Subbuṅga. He also argued that this identification is supported by the fact that the donated land in Subhang (*dronas* put together) amounted to two to three square miles, while Pancakhanda, where Bhāskaravarman renewed the grant of land to the Brāhmaṇas by the

Nidhanpur Copper-plate, is thirty miles to the west of Subhang and the Bhuban hills, well known for the ancient cave temples, is twenty miles to the south-east of Subhang.²⁸

B. D. Chattopadhyaya, an eminent historian, observed that the settlement formations took place in the early medieval period (7th century AD onwards) in different parts of Bengal as new settlements were created by the rulers in the forest regions mainly for the purpose of providing space to the communities of Brāhmaṇas. In the specific context of the grant of land by Lokanātha in the Subbuṅga *viṣaya*, he said that it “ provides one such example of the creation of a new settlement for a group of brāhmaṇas in what was obviously forest land (*aṭavi-bhūkhaṇḍa*), inhabited not by human beings but by wild animals.”²⁹ Although it is true that the land in the Subbuṅga *viṣaya*, in which king Lokanātha gifted a plot for the temple of Bhagavān Anantanārāyana and for the settlement of more than one hundred Brāhmaṇas (must be, with their families and kins), was a ‘forest land’, it may be too much to agree with Chattopadhyaya that it was ‘inhabited not by human beings but by wild animals.’ This is because the passage quoted above from the copper-plate document (lines 27-33) very clearly mentions the four boundaries of the demarcated land. As per the demarcation, on the southern end of that land there were already two villages, viz. Paṅga-*grāma* and Vāpikā-*grāma*, and the ‘limit-line’ of those two villages (*grāma*) formed the boundary of the gifted land. Similarly, on the western end was a portion of the *tāmra pathara* of one Jayeśvara and on the north, the *pushkarini* (tank or pond) of Ranaśubha, who was a *mahattara* (noble or high official). It may be presumed that these two individuals were also residents in the localities which were not very far from the *pushkarini* and the *tāmra pathara* of the respective owners. Only on the fourth end (i.e. east), there was a *parvata* (hill or mountain), named Kanāmotikā-*parvata*, which could be the source of the wild animals named in the epigraphic record. Therefore, the place could not be as remote or forlorn as one might think because of the presence of the wild animals. There could be a situation in which the humans and animals lived harmoniously in the safe neighbourhood without harming or disturbing each other. The two villages of Paṅga-*grāma* and Vāpikā-*grāma*, on the southern end of the demarcated land for donation, must have been inhabited by human beings, supposedly with their families and the cattles and other domesticated animals (as different from the wild ones). On two other sides also, there were private properties of two individuals, namely, a *tāmra pathara* and a *pushkarini*, and at least one of those two individuals was a respectable *mahattara*. Besides all these evidences, the inscription also very

clearly recorded that the land was gifted for settlement of the “Brāhmaṇas versed in the four Vēdas, who have a community there.” This information may be interpreted to suggest that there was already a community of the Brāhmaṇas in the region of the gifted land. Basak’s translation, quoted above, that the “Brāhmaṇa-dwellers on the granted plot of land, numbering over one hundred,…” etc might also mean that those more than one hundred Brāhmaṇas to whom land was granted in the Subbuṅga viṣaya by the Tipperah Copper-plate were already dwelling in the same plot of land and the charter only formalized the grant. The information recorded by the inscription that the ‘donees included the *bhogin* or headman of the village’ is a further pointer to the possible existence of the village or settlement. However, what seems to be the realistic scenario is that the boundary of the gifted plot corresponded in one end to the natural landmark provided by the *Konāmotikā-parvata* (mountain or hill), and on two other ends, to the developed land or settlements with privately owned *pushkarini* and *tānra pathara* respectively. More important is the fourth end of the gifted tract where the boundary corresponded to the ‘limit-line’ of the two *grāmas* (villages), namely, *Paṅga-grāma* and *Vāpīkā-grāma*.

In his analysis of the rural settlements in different sub-regions of Bengal, B.D.Chattopadhyaya observed two characteristics which connected the Gupta and post-Gupta settlements. As he says,

The first is that rural settlements, in the way they figure in the inscriptions, had close access to surface water in the forms of rivers, rivulets, channels and ponds. In fact, villages located between rivers and channels are often found to have had ponds (*puskarini*), sometimes privately owned, located in their *kṣetra* areas. In many cases, it is true, rivers or channels do not figure as natural boundaries, but then ponds do as landmarks for the cultivated area. While it is not possible to put together all relevant details from the epigraphs, a few samples may be chosen. Perhaps the most significant details in this regard, for the Gupta period, are those which occur in the Gunaigarh record of AD 507.³⁰

The second feature which also seems to generally characterize the rural settlements and which, again, relates to the contemporary perception of rural space is that rural space, already developed as a *grāma* or even as yet undeveloped, was consistently defined in terms of other rural spaces, usually *grāmas* and at times other categories of inhabited space. This means that one inhabited space, a *grāma*, was an inhabited space in rela-

tion to another inhabited space; in other words, a settlement was essentially viewed in terms of spatial and social interaction, irrespective of whether there was nucleation or clustering of settlements or not. Thus, even before the *aṭavi-bhūkhanda* (forest tract) of the Tippera grant of Lokanātha was transformed into an area of settlement, the reference points for demarcating the area were the limits of two villages, Paṅga and Vāpikā, on one side and the tank of *mahattara* Ranaśubha, obviously located in a settled village, on the other.³¹

Thus, according to Chattopadhyaya also the granted land in the forest region of Subbuṅga *viśaya*, which was yet to be 'transformed into an area of settlement', was bordered by the existing villages and settlements, and transformation was in the same pattern of clustering of settlements as in other sub-regions of Bengal. Chattopadhyaya's own analysis³² is that once recorded in the inscription as *grāma* it has to be understood that each one of them must have been endowed with three major constituents, namely, *vāstu* (homestead), *kṣetra* (cultivated/agricultural land) and *gocara* (grazing ground) to make each one an integrated or self-contained entity. Besides these essential three, there could be a fourth, namely, *khilā* (fallow land), for future growth and expansion. There were also to be the field boundaries that were expected to mark off one *grāma* from another. It is presumed that the Paṅga-*grāma* and Vāpikā-*grāma* were endowed with all those components, since these were recorded in the inscription as *grāmas*. Another requirement of a self-contained rural settlement, namely, the access to source of water, also could not have been a problem, because a large number of the tributaries (rivers, rivulets and channels) of Barak, including Subong (Subbuṅga) river, passed through that area. More over, there is mention of at least one tank or pond (though perhaps, privately owned) in the inscription itself. The demarcated tract was, therefore, essentially connected to a human settlement, ending where the contiguous villages begin, and it should be looked upon as an extension of the habitat within the framework of a socially demarcated new settlement in a vast expanse of an essentially rural landscape. Therefore, it is clear that Chattopadhyaya's comment 'inhabited not by human beings but by wild animals' was only about the donated tract of land, and not about the area or the neighbourhood of the donated tract. What is most important to observe is that the donated tract inhabited by the wild animals touched the limit lines of the established villages and the wild animals and humans lived in such close proximity. It is also evident from the information provided by the inscription that the new rural settlements were fast expanding in an eastwardly direction in that remotest of corner of North-

east Bengal (Barak-Surma valley) in the seventh century AD.

The eminent scholar of ancient Indian history, R.S. Sharma considered this type of land grants in the forests as a method adopted by the rulers for the reclamation of land. He also mentioned that these types of epigraphic records so far known are only two – Tippera and Kaira plates. In his words,

The Tippera Copper-plate grant of lord Lokanātha (A.D. 650) provides an important indication of a policy of reclaiming areas for cultivation in Eastern India. ... The forest area containing the endowed land is described as having no distinction of natural and artificial, having a thick network of bush and creepers, where deer, buffaloes, bears, tigers, serpents, etc., enjoy, according to their will, all pleasures of home-life. Obviously the brāhmaṇa community was brought there for the worship of the god Bhagavān Ananta-Nārāyana installed in the *matha* made by a high-ranking feudatory brāhmaṇa, the *mahāsāmanta* Pradoṣaśarman, at whose intercession the grant seems to have been made. But the real significance of their advent lay in opening the forest area to cultivation and settlement. A similar process can be observed in some parts of Western India. The spurious Kaira plates of Vijayarāja, forged some time after the middle of the sixth century A.D., records shares granted to sixty-three brāhmaṇas in a village, this naturally facilitated mass settlement of brāhmaṇas. Records of this type are not many, but these two broadly indicate the colonization of barren and jungle areas through land grants to temples and brāhmaṇas.³³

Nonetheless, it might be evident from the discussion above that the Tipperāh Copper-plate of king Lokanātha of Samataṭa is in deed a useful document for the reconstruction of the environmental history of the Barak Valley area of Northeast India, like similar epigraphic records pertaining to other parts of the Indian subcontinent or South Asia.³⁴ The data recorded in this inscription are directly relevant to the part of the valley which is located on the north bank of the river Barak in modern Cachar district and was known in the seventh century AD as Subbuṅga *viṣaya* (district). Not far from this Subbuṅga (Subong) area of the undivided Barak-Surma Valley is the Panchakhanda area of Sylhet where, according to the Nidhanpur Copper-plate of Bhāskaravarman of Kāmarūpa, a land grant of *circa* sixth century AD for the settlement of a large number of Brāhmaṇas in the Chandrapuri *viṣaya* was renewed in the seventh century AD with similar environmental details as provided by the Tipperāh Copper-plate.³⁵ Three hundred years later, the Paṣcimbhāg Copper-plate of Mahārājā Śrīcandra of Harikela-Vaṅga

recorded the grant of another tract of land for the settlement of the Brāhmaṇas in Chandrapura-Brahmapura area in Śrīhaṭṭa (Sylhet), the inscription providing interesting environmental data on the new settlement.³⁶ Equally important are the two Bhāterā Copper-plates of the eleventh-twelfth century of Mahārājā Govīndakeśavadeva and Mahārājā Iśvānadeva, respectively, of Śrīhaṭṭarājya, which recorded the donation of land in the villages which have been identified as being scattered over modern North Cachar Hills (Dima Hasao), Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi districts of Assam and Kailasahar-Dharmanagar area of Tripura in India and Sylhet, Maulavibazar, Habiganj and Sunamganj districts of the Sylhet Division in Bangladesh.³⁷ These copper-plates, including other epigraphic records of Sylhet-Cachar and its neighbouring areas of traditional Northeast Bengal, are sure to offer invaluable insights into the process of environmental changes in the region over many centuries. The historical method of comparative analysis of recorded data over space and time can be of immense help in such studies.

Finally, in the instant case of Subbuṅga or Subong area of the Barak Valley it has to be understood that it was a foothill region, low-lying and marshy in patches and often inundated by floodwater of the great river (Barak) and bordered by the hills which were inhabited by the 'wild' races. This explains the densely forested (*aṭavi*) character of the area in early times. The situation in *circa* seventh century AD can be imagined from the physical description of the tract as late as in the nineteenth century. In 1835, R. B. Pamberton, a British officer on duty to prepare a report on the region, found in this sector of Cachar an 'almost inexhaustible forest of timbers, rattans and bamboos'.³⁸ The density of rural population in the Barak Valley today is said to be the highest in the Northeast,³⁹ but the environmental scenario was very different even half a century ago when the wild animals were still seen roaming in parts of the valley, despite the over-flowing human population. The elderly natives in the villages do fondly cherish the memory of the large varieties of fascinating wild animals and birds which freely frequented the area, many do narrate the horror stories of the ravages and wanton destructions caused by the snakes, tigers and elephants to the people, cattles and the paddy fields, and there are still others who are regretful of the supposedly abandoned elephant sanctuary (*abhayāraṇya*) that was about to come up in the area in public sector only a few years ago.⁴⁰ These are in deed things of the past, but the profiling of the harmonious adjustment of human life with environment in the yester years, based on the extant data, might still be helpful in sensitizing the masses of the need of wildlife and environmental

preservations in maintaining the balance of the eco-system for healthy living of the humankind.

Notes & References

¹ The Dāmodarpur Copper-plate of Kumāragupta I (5th century AD), Gunaigarh Copper-plate of Vanya Gupta (6th century AD), Mahābodhi Pillar Inscription of Dharmapāla (9th century AD), Monghyr Copper-plate of Devapāla (9th century AD), Gaya Stone Inscription of Nayapāladeva (11th century AD) in Ramaranjan Mukherji & Sachindra Kumar Maity (eds.) *Corpus of Bengal Inscriptions*, Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, Calcutta, 1967, pp. 45-47, 65-72, 111-114, 114-131, 141-150, respectively, and Nidhanpur Copper-plate of Bhāskaravarman (7th century AD) in Mukunda Madhava Sharma (ed.), *Inscriptions of Ancient Assam*, Department of Publication, Gauhati University, 1978, pp.35-80, are examples of the inscriptions which contain verses describing the ecological features of the concerned areas.

² Radhagovinda Basak, "Tipperah Copper-plate Grant of Lokanatha : The 44th Year", *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XV, 1919-20, pp. 301-15.

³ N. K. Bhattasali, "New Lights on the History of Assam", *Indian Historical Quarterly*, Vol. XXI, 1945, pp. 1-28.

⁴ There is a difference of opinion among the historians as to whether Jayatuṅgavarṣa was the name of the feudatory ruler, or he was the feudatory ruler of the territory named Jayatuṅgavarṣa. In other words, the dispute is as to whether Jayatuṅgavarṣa was the name of a person or of a territory. According to Radhagovinda Basak it was the name of the feudatory chief of a territory, whereas N.K. Bhattasali felt that it was the name of a territory, the chief of which (not named in the inscription) was a feudatory ruler. See Radhagovinda Basak, *op.cit.*; N.K. Bhattasali, *op.cit.*

⁵ N. K. Bhattasali, *op.cit.* p. 26. It may be noted that each one of those four undivided districts of Noakhali, Tippera, Sylhet and Cachar, mentioned in Bhattasali's paper in 1945, are now divided into three and more districts in India and Bangladesh. The Subbuṅga-Jayatuṅga area, i.e. the Jatinga Valley, identified by Bhattasali, is also divided between Cachar and North Cachar Hills (Dima Hasao) districts of Assam.

⁶ R. C. Majumdar, *History of Ancient Bengal*, G. Bharadwaj & Co., Calcutta, 1971, p. 80. It appears that Lokanātha was one of the three feudatories in the Samatāṭa region, but he was a faithful feudatory, who fought against the two refractory feudatories on behalf of the sovereign (*Paramēśvara*) and achieved conspicuous success in eliminating the enemies. This might be the reason why the sovereign granted him the *śrīpattā* appointing him the overall ruler of the entire Samatāṭa region. However, at a later point of time, Lokanātha himself seems to have turned rebellious, defying the sovereign, and ruled as a sovereign king.

⁷ Radhagovinda Basak, *op.cit.*, pp. 35-77.

⁸ *ibid.*, p. 303. In the words of Basak, "The deed seems to be dated (I. 29) in the month of Phālguna, in the year 44, which, I venture to suggest on paleographical grounds, may have belonged to the Harsa era, corresponding, therefore, to 650 A. D., i.e. two years after the death of king Harsa. Some numerical symbols are used in the prose portions of the document (II. 33-52 and again in II. 55-57), where the particulars concerning the allotment of land to different Brāhmaṇas and other persons are mentioned."

⁹ Kamalakanta Gupta (ed.), *Copper-plates of Sylhet*, Published by author, Sylhet, 1967, (see Kālāpur Copper-plate) pp. 68-80.

¹⁰ N. K. Bhattasali, *op.cit.*, p. 28.

¹¹ *ibid*

¹² *op.cit.*, pp. 19-28.

Raj Mohan Nath, *Background of Assamese Culture*, Dutta Baruah & Co., Gauhati, 1949, p. 56; Raj Mohan Nath, *Antiquities of Cachar*, Published by Lopita Nath, Rajvila, Silchar, 1981, pp. 1-2.

¹⁴ J. B. Bhattacharjee, "The Ancient Political Structure of the Barak Valley", *The North-Eastern Hill University Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, Vol. X, No. 2, April-June 1992, pp. 1-38.

¹⁵ Sujit Choudhury, *Śrihaṭṭa-Kāchārer Prāchin Itihās*, (Bengali; Kolkata, 1398 BS) 3rd revised edition Dinkal Press Ltd., Silchar, 1313 BS (2006 AD), pp. 86-89; Sujit Choudhury, "Barāk.Upatyakār Dukhni Barnamālā" (Bengali), *Smaranikā*, Barāk Upatyakā Banga Sāhitya O Samskriti Sanmelan, Silchar, 1397 BS (1990), p. 7.

¹⁶ Kamalakanta Gupta (ed.), *op.cit.*

¹⁷ Radhagovinda Basak, *op.cit.*

¹⁸ R. C. Majumdar, *op.cit.*

¹⁹ N. K. Bhattasali, *op.cit.*

²⁰ R. M. Nath, *op.cit.*

²¹ Radhagovinda Basak, *op.cit.*, p. 302.

²² R.C. Majumdar, *History of Bengal*, vol. I, Dacca University 1943, p. 88.

²³ Radhagovinda Basak, *History of North-Eastern India*, (1st edn. Calcutta, 1934) Second Revised Edition, Firma KLM Pvt. Ltd., Calcutta, 1967, p.171.

²⁴ N. K. Bhattasali, *op.cit.*, p. 28.

²⁵ Observations of the author.

²⁶ Radhagovinda Basak, *op.cit.*, p. 311.

²⁷ *ibid*, pp. 311-18.

²⁸ Nalinikanta Bhattasali, "Lauhitya Purbateerer Pratnakṛti" (Bengali), *Shārādiya Ānandabāzār Patrikā*, Kalikata, 1351 BS (1944), pp. 121-22.

²⁹ B. D. Chattopadhyaya, *Aspects of Rural Settlement and Rural Society in Early Medieval India*, K. P. Bagchi & Co., Calcutta, 1990, p. 28. "mṛgamahiṣa-varāha-vyāghra-sarisṛpādhibhir-ryatheccham-anubhūya-mānagrha-sambhoga-gahana-gulma-latāvītāne" – the inscription says.

³⁰ *ibid*, p. 29.

³¹ *ibid*, p. 33.

³² *ibid*, p. 19.

³³ R.S. Sharma, *Indian Feudalism*, The Macmillan Company of India Ltd., Delhi, 1965, p. 33.

³⁴ *ibid*, pp. 18-19.

³⁵ Kamalakanta Gupta, *op.cit.* (see Nidhanpur Copper-plate), pp. 7-67.

³⁶ *ibid.*, (see Paścimbhāg Copper-plate), pp. 87-152.

³⁷ *ibid.*, (see Bhāterā Copper-plate I & Bhāterā Copper-plate II), pp. 153-180, 181-203. Also see J. B. Bhattacharjee, *State and Wealth : The Early States in Northeast India*, DVS Publishers, Guwahati, 2010, pp. 21-36.

³⁸ R. B. Pemberton, *Report on the Eastern Frontier of British India*, (Calcutta, 1835) Reprinted Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies (DHAS), Gauhati, 1966, p. 206. Pemberton described the area in the following words :

If we examine a map of this portion of the province (Kachar), it will be seen that as far as the Jeeree, it is connected with the district of Sylhet by a continuous plain of exceeding fertility, watered throughout the whole extent from east to west, by a navigable river, into which numerous minor streams flow on the north and south, affording every facility of access to the almost inexhaustible forest of timbers, rattans and bamboos, which have always proved a fruitful source of revenue to the former Rajahs of the country. Beyond the Jeeree, commences the marked change in the character of the country, from plain to mountain, which is scarcely more striking than the difference perceptible among the people by whom they are respectively occupied, the residents in the plains being a peaceable race, devoted to agricultural pursuits, while those of the hills, strong in their mountain fastness, habitually despised the power of the Rajahs of Kachar, and only tendered a trifling acknowledgement of supremacy, to facilitate their intercourse with the frontier bazaars of Banskandee, Casspoor and Oodarbund.”

³⁹ ‘Report of the Techno-Economic Survey of Assam’, Department of Economics & Statistics, Government of Assam, Dispur, 1978.

⁴⁰ These narratives were heard by the author from many during her visit to Barkhola, Subong, Udharband, Khaspur and Kumbhirgram in April 2008.