



# International Journal of Sanskrit Research

अनन्ता

ISSN: 2394-7519

IJSR 2020; 6(5): 14-16

© 2020 IJSR

[www.anantaajournal.com](http://www.anantaajournal.com)

Received: 12-06-2020

Accepted: 15-08-2020

**Biswarup Chatterjee**

Assistant Professor, Department  
of Sanskrit, Rampurhat College,  
Rampurhat, West Bengal, India

## Glimpses of the administrative system and land transaction procedure of the Gupta Empire in Bengal as reflected in the Gupta copper plate charters from fifth to sixth-century C.E

**Biswarup Chatterjee**

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22271/23947519.2020.v6.i5a.1084>

### Abstract

This paper attempts to presents the administrative system as well as the land management and land transaction procedure of Ancient Bengal (Undivided) from 5<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> century C.E. During this period, a huge part of Bengal and some other part of India was ruled by the imperial Gupta rulers. This forms an essential part of Indian history and others. The discussion was made on the basis of the Land grant inscriptions issued by the Gupta rulers. The sources of the imperial Gupta history are of four classes: literary works, inscriptions, coins, and monuments. The inscriptions are the reliable sources of the Guptas. These inscriptions are incised on stone, metal, and in the copper plates. Usually, these inscriptions reflect the entire history of land transaction procedure mainly land sale, donation as well as the administrative system of the contemporary society and social structure of the said period. The donative inscriptions are more on the number. The overall analysis of the land donation charters in the chronological order will help us to observe the changes in the way of writing land grant documents from time to time. These became the invaluable sources for the reconstruction of the history of Bengal. The study is made to evaluate the most effective administrative system of the contemporary period.

**Keywords:** Gupta Empire, copper plate, vastu, mahāmahattara, khila

Land grant charters of the Gupta period discovered from different parts of Bengal are of great importance from the historical point of view. The whole administrative system, the procedure of land donation, and the emergence of independent kingdoms of this period are reflected in these charters, which help us to reconstruct the socio-political and religious history of that time of Bengal (Undivided).

The administrative system of the Gupta period, as viewed from copper plate charters of those periods, supply the essential features, fascinating details of the administrative system of Bengal during the said period. It appears from the record that a part of Bengal though not the whole, which was directly administered by the Gupta emperors were divided into a series of well-defined units, such as Bhūkti, Viṣaya, Maṇḍala, Naya, vīthi, Grāma etc.

“paundravarddhanabhuktādūparika dakṣiṇāṃśakavītheya nāgirattamāṇḍalika,  
vaṭagohallā grāma<sup>[1]</sup>, koṭivarṣaviṣaya<sup>[2]</sup>”

Bhūkti and Viṣaya may be taken to be somewhat, similar with the ‘Division’ and ‘District’ of the modern period and the officials’ designations like Uparika (provincial Viceroy) and Kumāramātya, mentioned in the copper plate charters correspond to modern commissioner and collector. The district officer Kumāramātya was appointed by the divisional commissioner Uparika “...uparika chīrātadattenānubalavānaka...tanniyuktaka kumārāmātya vetravarmmana<sup>[3]</sup>” The designation Mahārāja (king) is distinctly mentioned in the Damodarapur (Dinajpur, East Bengal) copper plate charters.

“mahārājādhīrāja śrīkumārāgupte pṛthivīpattau...<sup>[4]</sup>”

**Corresponding Author:**

**Biswarup Chatterjee**

Assistant Professor, Department  
of Sanskrit, Rampurhat College,  
Rampurhat, West Bengal, India

The lowest administrative unit was village (*grāma*). Some changes in the title of the local ruler, officials and the procedure of sale of land are noticed in later grants. Thus, the title Uparika is changed to Uparika-Mahārāja, Kumāramātya substituted by āyuktaka etc “...uparikka mahārāja brahmadatte samvyavaharati”<sup>[5]</sup> Damodarpir Copper-plate grant of Budha Gupta, 482 CE.

“... paunḍravarddhanādāyuktkā ...”<sup>[6]</sup> Paharpur Copper-Plate grant of the Gupta year 159 (479 C.E.).

The land transaction procedure, as we find in Damodarpur copper plate grant of the time of Budha Gupta, dated 483 C.E. (Gupta year 163), there is no reference to the district officer at all and the officials like mahattaras, the astakuladhikaranas, the village heads (gramikas), the householders (Kutumbins), being approached by the intending buyer for the land and after receiving a report from the record keepers whether the land is fit for sale or not, the officials informs the habitant, householders, Brahmanas of the respective land which is going to sale or donate, that the land applied for sale and after final inspection of Mahattaras and other officials, the transaction was completed.

“...mahattarādyaṣṭakulādhikaraṇa grāmika  
kuṭumbinaśca...”<sup>[7]</sup>

This indicates that in some localities, even villages and some other units smaller than Viṣaya (district) exercised independent administrative authority.

We learn from the Damodarpur copper-plates that the Viṣayapati or the district officers had a regular office (*adhikaraṇa*) “*viṣayādhikaraṇa*” and staff working under him among whom the pustapalas (record keepers) played an essential role in the land transaction “*pustapāla riśidatta jayanandi bibhudattānāmavadhāraṇāyā ...*”<sup>[8]</sup> It seems clear from the record that the District officer was aided in his administrated work by the Board of Adviser which is found to have constituted of four members representing the various vital interests of those days, viz, (1) Nagaraśreṣṭhin ( the most wealthy man of the town) (2) the Sārthavāha (the chief merchant) representing various merchant (3) the Prathamakulika (the chief artisan) representing the various artisan (4) the Prathama kayastha (the chief scribe) who may either have represented the kayasthas as a class or have been a government official in the capacity of a chief Secretary of the present day.

“...nagaraśreṣṭhidhṛtīpāla sārthavāhavandhumitra  
prathamakulika dhṛtimitra prathamakāyastha  
śāmvapāla...”<sup>[9]</sup>

The existence of such advisory board of four members attached to the district officer seems to be aimed for the smooth running of the administration through public relations. The principal, governing the transfer of land, was known as nīvīdharmā “*nīvīdharmena dātumitī*”<sup>[10]</sup> which has been explained as a perpetual grant but not transferrable.

It seems, however, that this limitation might be avoided by destroying the nīvīdharmā at the time of purchase, i.e., with the right of alienation but the term akṣaya nīvīdharmā “...akṣayanivīmāyādāyā dātumitī..”<sup>[11]</sup>, seems to indicate a perpetual restraint from the transfer.

The applicants, who want to purchase the lands had to specify whether they want cultivable or homestead land. Some area describes as aprada (not given, unoccupied), aprahata and khila (fallow) were exempted from customary dues and extra

taxes “*apradākhilakṣe traṃ tra traī*”<sup>[12]</sup>. Lands were of three varieties, viz, kṣetra (a field under cultivation), Khila (west or fallow land), and Vāstu (a dwelling site). According to Narada smṛti (XI, 24) a tract of land which has not been cultivated for a year is called Khila (waste land).

We found in all the Gupta copper plates the performance of Dinara coins (gold coin) as the price fixed for the land to be sold. Sometimes the price was set at two dinaras “*dvidinārikya kulyavāpena*”<sup>[13]</sup> or three dinaras for one Kulyavāpa (measuring unit of land) “*tridinārikya kulyavāpena*”<sup>[14]</sup>. Besides dinara the word Rupaka also occurs in the Baigram copper plate inscriptions, Gupta year 128, (448 C.E.) as the price of stipulated land. The term rupaka which may denote the silver coins in the charters “*rūpakānāyīkṛtya*”<sup>[15]</sup>. In Kautilya Arthasastra the word Rupa seems to mean a coin which may be silver or copper, i.e., rupyarupa (silver coin) and tamra rupa (copper coin). the name Dinara is the foreign word, and it is derived from the Latin dinara which may indicate gold coin.

As regards the difference of price of khila (waste or fallow land) and vāstu (homestead ) land we find that in some of the Damodarpur copper plates the rate was three dinaras for a kulyavāpa “*tridinārikya kulyavāpa*”, where as, in the paharpur copper plates inscription, we found the rate of two dinaras for a kulyavāpa “*dvidinārikya kulyavāpa*”.

The difference in price was undoubtedly due either to the quality of the land or the prevalence of different rates in different localities.

The term Kulyavāpa, as a measure of land donated, literally means as much land as could be sown with a kulya a measure of grain. According to various authorities, kulyavāpa was equivalent to eight dronas (another land measuring unit), and this is proved by the Paharpur grant in which twelve dronas are regarded as equivalent to one and half kulyavāpa [16].

It is clear from the land grant records of the Gupta period that there was a regular system of land measurement. Two nālas (measuring tools), nine and eight cubit long, were used for measuring respectively, the length and width of the area. It was taking the average measurement of a hasta (hand) “*hastanaparimita*” To be 19 inches. The area would be 19x18x9 or 25992 square inches. it is possible to determine how many times this area a kulyavāpa contained.

**The Ownership of Land:** Regarding the ownership of land in ancient India, there is a sharp division of opinion among the scholars, some scholars accepted the ownership of the state over the land, and some others rejected the theory of state ownership of land. Dr. R.G. Basak rejects the theory on the ground that the state could not alienate lands, without the consent or approval of the people representatives, such as mahattaras, kuṭumbins. Brahmanas etc. But Dr. UN Ghosal rejects the opinion of Dr. Basak, stating that the people representative as understood by Mr. Basak were more lightly the minor officials. The Brahmanas, Mahattara and the kuṭumbins (the head of the family) mentioned in the grant merely received information of the application for purchase probably for the hearing of any possible objections on their part; in any case the idea of consent or approval of persons being necessary for the sale of land is not express by the evidence.

According to U.N. Ghosal<sup>[17]</sup>, the question arises, what was the object or necessity of this complicated process of summoning leading men and other individua if it were purely transaction of sale of land by the state which owned. It may be concluded with Dr. Basak that grants belong to a period

when the crown began to be recognised of the absolute owner of all land instead of the people who were the original proprietor. Perhaps the people as represented by the village assembly had at least some limited right in the ownership of the land so as to accept or reject a new comer (done) in occupation of the land within its jurisdiction. It is for this reason that they were informed before the grant of land was actually done.

Finally, it can be said in the concluding part that the above discussion reflects a clear picture of land transaction procedure from circa 5<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup>- century C.E. of Bengal (undivided) and some other part of the country. From the above discussion, we can able to know about the element related to the land sale or donation, such as different types of

land measuring units, tools, various types of official designation, etc, which enriched us about the land system in early period. The records of the later period have been gradually elaborated, which reaches its height in records of Pala and Sena ruler. An overall analysis of the land donation in a chronological order (Gupta, Post Gupta, Pala, Chandra, Varman, Sena) will help us to observe the changes in land transaction procedure from time to time and on the other hand it become these become the invaluable sources for reconstruction of the history of ancient Bengal. In fact, these land grant charters throw a plethora of light on the political and socio-religious condition of the then Bengal on the one hand and cultivation of high slandered Sanskrit literature on the other.

**Table 1:** List of some land-grant records of Undivided Bengal. record of the Gupta Rulers

Date	Findspot	Name of The Ruler	District
circa. early 3 <sup>rd</sup> -century CE, Gupta year 120.	Sultanpur copper plate.	Kumāragupta 1	Naogaon, Bangladesh.
circa. 5 <sup>th</sup> -century CE., Gupta year 113.	Dhanaidaha copper plate.	Kumāragupta 1.	Rajsahi, Bangladesh.
Circa. 5 <sup>th</sup> -century CE., Gupta year 124.	Damodarpur copper plate #1.	Kumāragupta 1.	Dinajpur, Bangladesh.
circa. 5 <sup>th</sup> -century CE, Gupta year 128.	Jagadishpur copper plate.	Kumāragupta 1.	Rajsahi, Bangladesh.
circa. 5 <sup>th</sup> -century CE, Gupta year 128	Baigram copper plate.	Kumāragupta 1.	Dinajpur, Bangladesh.
circa. 5 <sup>th</sup> -century CE, Gupta year 129.	Damodarpur copper plate # 2.	Kumāragupta 1.	Dinajpur, Bangladesh.
c. 5 <sup>th</sup> -century AD, Gupta year 159.	Paharpur copper plate.	Budhagupta.	Rajsahi, Bangladesh.
circa. 5 <sup>th</sup> -century CE, Gupta year 163.	Damodarpur copper plate #- 3.	Budhagupta.	Dinajpur, Bangladesh.
circa. 5 <sup>th</sup> -century CE, Gupta year 169.	Nandapur copper plate.	Budhagupta.	Lakhisarai.
circa. 5 <sup>th</sup> -century CE. last quarter.	Damodarpur copper plate #4.	Budhagupta.	Rajsahi, Bangladesh.
Early part of 6 <sup>th</sup> -century CE, Gupta year 188.	Gunaighar copper plate.	Vainagupta.	Tipperah.
circa.6 <sup>th</sup> -century CE, Gupta year 224.	Damodarpur copper plate # 5.	Viṣṇugupta?	Rajsahi, Bangladesh.

## References

1. Cprpus of Bengal Inscriptions Bearing on History and Civilization of Bengal. Ed. Ramaranjan Mukherjee and Sachindra Kumar Maity. Calcutta (now Kolkata): Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1967 (1<sup>st</sup>ed.). p. 59.
2. *ibid.* p. 47.
3. *ibid.* p. 45.
4. *ibid.* p. 47.
5. *ibid.* p. 59.
6. *ibid.* p. 54.
7. *ibid.* p. 59.
8. *ibid.* p. 46.
9. *ibid.* p. 47.
10. *ibid.* p. 45.
11. *ibid.* p. 46.
12. *ibid.* p. 45.
13. *ibid.* p. 42.
14. *ibid.* p. 45.
15. *ibid.* p. 51.
16. *ibid.*, 54-55.
17. Gopal, Lalanji. The Economic Life of Northern India: c. A.D. 700-1200. Delhi: MLBD, 2013 (Reissued). (1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1965.; Rev. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1989, 3.