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Agrarian Expansion and Local Power Relation in the Seventh and Eighth Century East Bengal: A Study on Copper Plate Inscriptions

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As documents pertain to the actual incidents in particular rural space, copper plate inscriptions provide us of a glimpse into rural settlements and societies in a certain period and region. Though the ones discovered from North India have limitations both in terms of number and contents, their strategic readings and interpretations would enable us to capture some aspects of rural history. In this paper, I would like to explore this possibility through readings of the copper plate inscriptions related to a particular area.

The area especially chosen for the present research is East Bengal in the seventh and eighth centuries. In the recent historiography, the appearance of the copper plate inscriptions in periphery is especially connected to the agrarian expansion and state formation in such an area. The similar phenomenon is also discernible in the copper plate inscriptions from the concerned area, which also falls into the category of periphery. However, their minute analysis shows the different levels and forms of agrarian expansion within the area, which is related to the differences in ecological settings and historical processes. It also shows that the state formation in the area is rather related to the making of stratified and complicated local power relations, which are characterised by the activities of subordinate rulers. These aspects will be discussed through the readings of the copper plate inscriptions including the ones of Khadgas and Devas which are yet to be edited properly.