The source materials for the study of the origin and growth of political institutions in the Puṇḍra region, or the political framework of the region in early times, are extremely meagre. The data gathered from the available sources are inadequate not only for an attempt to explain the labour process, role of surplus and social stratifications, which are crucial in understanding the nature of social and state formations¹ but also for the empirical reconstruction of a general political history of the region. Moreover, the sources are also silent about the pre-state social and political institutions of the Puṇḍras. The later Vedic sources² (ascribed to the period around the seventh-sixth centuries BC) referred to a people called Puṇḍra and their country identifiable with the modern region of Bengal and adjoining south Bihar.³ They made no mention about any aspect of their social or political organisation. They only spoke of the Puṇḍras as neighbours of the Vangavagadhāh (or Vaṅgamagadhāh),⁴ inhabiting the territories located in the region which later on came to be known as Bengal.⁵ It would appear from the evidence of the Satapatha Brāhmaṇa (dated to third-second century BC) that the Puṇḍras were tribally organized, since the text mentioned the Puṇḍras along with the Kāśis, Kośalas, Videhas, Magadhas, Aṅgas and other eastern ‘tribes’ (janapada) while referring to the cultural differences between the people of the upper and those of the lower Gaṅgā valley.⁶

³ Ibid., p.632.
⁴ R.C. Majumdar, History of Ancient Bengal, loc cit., p.25.
⁵ Aitareya Aranyaka II, 1, 1., Baudhāyana Dharmashastra 1. 1. 14, Aitareya Brāhmaṇa VII, 18., Sankhyāyana Śravato Śātra XV, 26; A.K. Chatterjee, Political History of Pre-Buddhist India, Indian Publicity Society, Calcutta. 1980, p.31.
⁶ Satapatha Brāhmaṇa XII. 3.4. This was the basis of the point made by V. K. Mishra in his work Socio-Economic and Political History of Eastern India, B.R. Publishing Corporation, Delhi, 1977, p.17.
Based on the readings of the Vedic literature, earlier writers had conjectured that the whole of eastern India was possibly called Magadha. They believed that Magadha continued to exist as a mahājanapada or a large principality even in the later periods. This was probably because its influence extended over a very large territory. A part of eastern India was possibly known as Kīrtā to the authors of the Rg Veda. Some scholars had gone to the extent of identifying parts of the sub-Himalayan northern Bengal and almost the whole of northeast India as the homeland of the Kīrtās or Indo-Mongoloids in early times. The evidence however shows that although the names of Āṅga and Magadha were mentioned, the reference to the Pundras was given for the first time only in the Aitareya Brāhmaṇa (dated to seventh century BC). Furthermore, it was only as late as the period of the composition of the Mātsya Purāṇa and the Viṣṇu Purāṇa that legends concerning the rise of kingship among the Pundras appeared in Brahmānical literature. According to the legend, the progenitor of the Pundra kings was Dirghatamas, son of the Vedic rṣi Ucathya and his wife Māmtā. The story goes that Dirghatamas was a blind man who lived in his cousin’s hermitage but was expelled from the hermitage for misbehaving with the wife of his younger brother. He was set adrift in the Ganges and was carried down the stream to a place in the east where he was received by King Bāli of Anga. There, he married the Sudra nurse of Bāli’s wife, the queen. At Bāli’s desire he begot of the queen (Bāli’s wife Sudesnā) five sons, viz.: Āṅga, Vaiṅga, Kaliṅga, Pundra and Suhma. Bāli divided his kingdom among these five sons who were categorized as ‘bāleyā Kṣatriya’ and ‘bāleyā Brāhmaṇa’. Dirghatamas afterwards regained his sight and assumed the name Gata or Gautama. He also became a Vedic rṣi and one of the authors of the Rg Veda. The Harivamsa gave another version of the story of Bāli: Bāli had five sons, viz., Āṅga, Vaiṅga, Pundra, Suhma and Kaliṅga. The father allotted to each of them a part of his territory that came to be known by their names. According to this story,

8 Ibid., p.32.
10 Artharva Veda 5. 12. 14; A.C. Chakrabarti, “Aryanization of North Bengal”, in B.N. Mukherjee & P.K. Bhattacharyya (eds.), op cit., p.31
11 Aitareya Brāhmaṇa, 7. 13. 18; A.C. Chakrabarti, “Aryanization of North Bengal”, in B.N. Mukherjee & P.K. Bhattacharyya (eds.), op cit., p.31
Pundra, the third son of Bali, founded the Pundra kingdom. It is not unlikely that such legends were aimed at endowing Brahmanical origin on the Pundra kings and establishing legitimacy for the institution of kingship.

The social status of the Pundras seems to have gradually improved within the Brahmanical society, as their claim of descent from Bali found general acceptance or the ruling clan established its authority in the territory. This point has been mentioned elsewhere. The Pundras, who had earlier been categorised as ‘dasyu’, came to be regarded as descendants of the Puru race (an ‘Aryan’ group) through Bali. Bali is said to have been adept in all dharmas or righteousness (śarva-dharma-viśārada). His descendants were called ‘bāleyā Kṣatriya’ and ‘bāleyā Brāhmaṇa’. It is possible that by the time of the Harivamśa the Pundras had come within the pale of Brahmanical culture, and they were accorded the Kṣatriya status in the varṇa-based society. If this assumption is correct, it can be surmised that the Pundras who were given the status of Kṣatriya were called ‘bāleyā Kṣatriya’, while the Brāhmaṇas — said to have been settled by Bali within the territory of the Pundras — were called ‘bāleyā Brāhmaṇa’. The word ‘bāleyā’ was possibly derived from the name of Bali (Bāli > Bāleyā). The Mānava Dharmasāstra (dated to first-second century), which had branded the Pundras as ‘degraded Kṣatriyas’ or ‘fallen Kṣatriyas’ (‘patita kṣatriya’) and grouped them with the Drāvidians, Scythians, Chinese and other ‘outlandish’ peoples, did not mention anything about the king of the Pundras. On the other hand, almost all the indigenous tribes of Bengal, including the Vāṅgas, Sumhas, Śabarās, Pulindas, Kirātas and Pundras, were classed as Kṣatriyas in this text. In another context the same text also degraded the Pauṇḍrakas and the Kirātas by assigning them the rank of Śūdras, on the grounds that they had forsaken Brahmanical

13 Harivamśa (Critical Edition – 1.23.5.35); A.C. Chakrabartti, “Aryanization of North Bengal” in B.N. Mukherjee & P.K. Bhattacharyya (eds.), op. cit., p.32.
14 Supra, Chapter II, with reference to Aitareya Brāhmaṇa, VII, 13-18; Mahābhārata, III, 158, 44-49 and Harivamśa (Critical Edition – 1.23.5.35).
17 Manava Dharmasāstra, x.44 cited in R.C. Majumdar, History of Ancient Bengal, loc. cit., p.29.
18 The Manusmṛti, x.44; Mahābhārata, II.51, xiv.29; Viṣṇu Purāṇa, iv.8.1, Matsya Purāṇa, 48.2ff cited in R.C. Majumdar, History of Ancient Bengal, loc. cit., p.415.
rites and customs and had not come into contact with the Brāhmaṇas. The Manusmrti (dated to second century), which also consigned the Pañḍrakas and Kirātās to the rank of Śūdras for the same reason, is completely silent about the political life of the Pañḍras. It is possible that the Pañḍras at some point of time were treated as Kṣatriyas or were given the status of Kṣatriyas, and then, at another point of time they were degraded as ‘fallen Kṣatriyas’. Perhaps their attainment of the Kṣatriya status had been significant from the standpoint of state formation, since the establishment of a royal legend and the Kṣatriya status of the chiefs had meaningful political bearing in the context of the rise of the state in early India. It is also possible that the legend of Pundra (the king) as having actually been the son of a Brāhmaṇa rṣi and the Pañḍras having enjoyed the status of Kṣatriya created the conditions for legitimacy of the institution of kingship in the predominantly tribal region. It follows from the preceding discussion that perhaps Pundra, the third son of Bāli, established a kingdom in the Pañḍra region by way of conquest or by inheritance, since Bāli has been portrayed as having divided his kingdom into five in favour of each of his sons. Thus the origin of kingship has been traced to the time of Bāli.

Bāli, portrayed as the progenitor of the Pañḍras, was the father of five ‘kṣetrajā’ sons sired by the Vedic rṣi and scholar, Dirghatamas Mameya (later on popular as Gautama) through Sudesanā, the wife of Bāli, as desired by Bāli himself. These five sons established one principality each after their own names. The legend also credited Bāli with establishing the four social orders (caturvarṇa or varnāśrama) in the region and his sons are said to have followed this tradition. Dusyanta, the husband of Sakuntalā, is said to have been his contemporary. In his old age, Dirghatamas is said to have consecrated Bhārata, the son of Dusyanta Samvarta, the cousin of Dirghatamas, the great Vedic rṣi and one of the authors of the Rg Veda. is said to have officiated as the high priest of Mārutta, the king of Vaiśāli. The Visnu Purāṇa provided a genealogy of Bāli according

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20 In the context of early India such a point has been made by Romila Thapar, From Lineage to State, OUP, Bombay, 1984, p.11.
21 F.E. Pargiter, Ancient Indian Historical Tradition, CUP, London, 1922, p.163. Y.K. Misra (op.cit., p.53) confirms that Bāli has been repeatedly mentioned in the Mahābhārata and the Purāṇas, e.g., Mahābhārata,
to which Mahāmanas is said to have been one of the kings of the dynasty founded by Anu, son of Yayāti. Titiksu was the younger son of Anu. From Titiksu was born Rusadrāth and the latter's son was Hemā. Sutāpas, the father of Bāli, was the son of Hemā. Hence, Bāli was the seventh king in the dynasty of Yayāti. The Purāṇa then informed that Bāli had five kṣetraja sons — Aṅga, Vaṅga, Pundrā, Suhma and Kaliṅga, who were the founders of five well-known janapadas of eastern India which inherited their respective names. The Viṣṇu Purāṇa and the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, which followed the Mahābhārata, provided details about Pauṇḍraka Vāsudeva who is said to have been the king of the Pundrās at the time of the Kurukṣetra battle. This story attributed Bāli's lineage to the Lunar Dynasty (Candravamsa) and gave him a divine origin. His sons then established kingdoms and they were related to many well-known ruling families of the 'Āryavarta'. Pundrā, one of the foster sons Bāli, is said to have founded the Pundrā kingdom.

The story is very similar to that of Naraka, who is said to have been a foster-son of Janaka of Videha and to have established the kingdom of Prāgijyotiṣa in the land of the Kirātas (i.e., that corresponding to modern northeast India). According to the Naraka legend mentioned in the epics and the Purāṇas as well as the eulogy sections of some of the inscriptions of ancient Assam, Naraka was born of Viṣṇu and Bhūmi (Mother Earth) and he was brought up by Janaka along with his other sons. Bhūmi assumed the form of a nurse named Kātyāyani who was engaged by Janaka to look after Naraka. When Naraka became an adult, he was found to be of better calibre than the other sons of Janaka in the art of war and leadership. So there were doubts about who was to succeed Janaka as the king of Videha. One day Kātyāyani overheard Janaka and his wife talking about the need to take precautions against the possibility of Naraka taking over the kingdom from their real sons. To avoid the danger of a conflict over the throne of Videha, Kātyāyani secretly took Naraka to the bank of the Gangā for a meeting with Viṣṇu. Naraka came to know of his real parents at that meeting. Viṣṇu then accompanied Naraka further east and helped

Ibid., p.128; Rajanikanta Chakraborty, op.cit., pp.3-5.
23 Ibid., p.141-143; Rajanikanta Chakraborty, op.cit., pp.3-5.
him establish the kingdom of Prāgjyotiṣa after defeating the Kirāta king, Mahiranga Dānava. Naraka settled many Brāhmaṇas and people of other varṇas in Prāgjyotiṣa. He was formally elevated to the Kṣatriya rank through the kesavapāṇa ceremony at which Janaka’s priest, Gautama, officiated. Naraka then married Māyā, daughter of the king of Vidharba. The dynasty he founded came to be known as the Bhauma dynasty which is said to have ruled over Prāgjyotiṣa for many generations. Naraka’s son, Bhagadatta, and grandson, Vajradatta, were depicted among the heroes of the Kurukṣetra battle. Prāgjyotiṣa later on came to be known as Kāmarūpa (or Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa). The rulers of the three historical dynasties, namely, the Varman dynasty, Sālāstambha dynasty and the Pāla dynasty, each ruled in succession in Kāmarūpa during the fourth to twelfth centuries. All of them claimed descent from Naraka and their dynasties were known as Bhauma-Naraka. Scholars generally take the founding of the kingdom of Prāgjyotiṣa by Naraka as the beginning of the settlement of the ‘Indo-Aryans’ in northeast India. It appears likely that since Prāgjyotiṣa and Puṇḍravardhana were two contiguous regions (in fact, Prāgjyotiṣa lay beyond Puṇḍravardhana from the Indo-Gangetic plains), the spread of Brahmanical culture in the two areas were at about the same time and the process was on the same line.

Based on the evidence of the Aitareya Brāhmaṇa and the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa some scholars suggested that the ‘Indo-Aryan’ settlements in the Puṇḍra region started before the time of the Buddha. The Śatapatha brāhmaṇa told the story of Aryan migration into the Puṇḍra region: Videghamāthava, king of Videha-Kośala, accompanied by his priest, Rāhūgaṇa, carried fire from the bank of the river Śarasvatī to the bank of the river Sadānirā. The Brāhmaṇas hitherto had not crossed this river, because the fire had not gone beyond it. Sadānirā was the boundary of Videha-Kośala. After Videghamāthava carried the fire to the new region, many Brāhmaṇas are said to have started settling in the land to east of the river. The untilled marshy land then began to be tilled. The story of

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26 Aitareya Brāhmaṇa (VIII. 23) and Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (I. 4. 14-17); A.C. Chakrabarti, “Aryanization of North Bengal” in B.N. Mukherjee & P K. Bhattacharyya (eds.), *op. cit.*, p.32.
carrying the fire beyond the region probably signified the beginning of the migration of
the people belonging to the four-fold social order (catur-varṇa-dharma) to the new
region and their settlement therein running parallel to the beginning of agriculture in that
region. The twelfth century Sanskrit work, Karatoyāmāhātyam tells that Sadānīrā was
the earlier name of the Karatoya.27 The story probably alluded to the large-scale
immigration of the Brāhmanaṣ and the people of other varnas into the Pundra region. In
any case, the story is indicative of the spread of Brahmanical culture — Brahmanisation
or Sanskritisation — into the region.

Factors of Polity Formation

The spread of Brahmanical culture was no doubt an important landmark in the history of
social and polity formations in the Pundra region. It seems to have acted as the catalyst
for creating conditions or reinforcing the process of social stratification, as happened in
other regions of the subcontinent. The varṇa system was superimposed on the
predominantly tribal society. It seems to have augmented the process of social
stratification in a significant way. As Romila Thapar28 put it, ‘varṇa’, the Sanskrit word
for caste, actually meant colour. The colour element of caste was emphasized throughout
the Vedic period and eventually became deep-rooted in north Indian culture. Initially, the
division was between the ‘Aryans’ and the ‘non-Aryans’, wherein the former were the
dvijā or twice-born castes (the first being physical birth and the second the initiation into
caste status through the upanayana ceremony), consisting of the Brāhmanaṣ (the priests),
the Kṣatriyaṣ (the warriors and the aristocracy), and the Vaiṣyaṣ (the producers); the
fourth caste, the Śudraṣ, were the Dāsa (servile groups) and those of mixed Aryan-Dāsa
origin.

Apparently the varṇa system also significantly contributed to economic change. As
Romila Thapar29 observed, a number of factors went into promoting the process of

27 Ibid., p.32.
29 Ibid., p.39.
establishing the caste system. For instance, the process by which the Śūdras were upgraded to the position of the cultivators was inherent in the following factors:

(i) Specialization of labour that gradually became a marked feature of the ‘Aryan’ society with the transition from nomadic pastoralism to sedentary agriculture.

(ii) The emergence of a trading community engaged in the supply and exchange of goods, as vast forest lands were cleared and new settlements were established in those areas.

Social differentiations gradually became visible between the agriculturists who cleared and colonized the land, and the traders who established the economic links between the settlements, the latter belonging to the class of wealthier landowners who could indulge in economic speculation.

The settlement of Brāhmaṇas in tribally dominated areas also seems to have facilitated the spread of agriculture in the region. As R.S. Sharma explained, the practice of land grants played an important role in the colonisation of new areas during Gupta and post-Gupta times. The literary evidence — including that of Kautilya’s Arthasastra — suggests that during the pre-Maurya and especially Maurya times, there had been large-scale reclamation of virgin land partly through land grants. However, the epigraphs are indicative of the initiation of the process of donating land from the beginning of the Christian era. By the Gupta period the ruling groups made deliberate attempts to extend the area of arable land by making grants to priests, monks and religious establishments. In this way vast tracts of unused land were brought under cultivation. The known facts show that the land grants in the Puṇḍra region also were mainly in favour of the religious establishments, priests, monks and scholars. The ranks of the Brāhmaṇa community in Puṇḍravardhana swelled due to immigration of priestly elements from outside the region throughout the period under study.

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30 R.S. Sharma, Indian Feudalism, Macmillan India Ltd., New Delhi, 1965, p.32.
31 *Infra*, Chapter V.
The sources point to the fact that the economic conditions of the Pundra region had been conducive for the rise of states in the early period. The region was endowed with vast natural resources and its geographical location was advantageous for the purpose of trade and commerce. As early as the Maurya and post-Mauryan times, the region seems to have caught the attention of the Greek writers for its flourishing short- and long-distance trade.\(^2\) Their accounts found corroboration in some Brahmanical sources, such as the _Arthaśāstra_, which mentioned the commercial products of Vaṅga and Pundra in detail,\(^3\) thereby indicating the commercial importance of the area. The text particularly singled out Gaṅgāridāi as a considerable place of trade; it expressed special concern for the management of river traffic, since water communications were of capital importance.\(^4\) Gold, diamond and pearls were listed as the important articles of trade associated with the region of early Bengal.\(^5\) The Pundra area had achieved great fame for her textile industry during the Maurya and post-Mauryan times. The _Arthaśāstra_ listed among the best varieties of textiles available in the subcontinent those in Pundra, e.g., the white and soft fabric (diękula), as soft as gem (pauṇḍraka), kṣaumā, patrotna, kārpaśika (cotton fabrics), etc.\(^6\) Other articles included diamonds (it has been suggested that the name Bajrahhūmi probably derived its name from the fact that diamond mines were located there),\(^7\) a variety of sugarcane known as ‘pauṇḍraka’, a variety of sugar called ‘pauria’, ‘pari’ and ‘paura’,\(^8\) all manufactured in Pauṇḍra for the purpose of marketing.\(^9\)

The Chinese traveller Kin-Tau, who travelled in India between AD 785 and 805, described the land route from Tonkin to Magadha via Kāmarūpa, Pundravardhana and

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33 _Kautilyam Arthaśāstram_, 2.11.17, 2.11.18; Amitabha Bhattacharaya, *op.cit.*, pp.56-57; R.C. Majumdar, _History of Ancient Bengal*, loc.cit., p.41; Subhash Mukhopadhyaya, *Bāngāli Itikās*, Paschimbanga Bangla Academy, Kolkata, 1999, p.41. See *infra*, Chapter VI, for further discussion on aspects of Pundravardhana’s economy.

34 *Kautilyam Arthaśāstram*, cited in F.J. Monahan, *op.cit.*, p.267. For further details see *infra*, Chapter VI.


36 _Kautilyam Arthaśāstram_, 2.11.17; R.C. Majumdar, _History of Ancient Bengal_, loc.cit., p.341.

37 _Kautilyam Arthaśāstram_, II. 127-128; Subhash Mukhopadhyaya, *op.cit.*, p.41.

38 A.K. Sur, *op.cit.*, p.79

39 Subhash Mukhopadhyaya, *op.cit.*, pp.47, 43.
Kajangala. He sailed through the Karatoya and the Gangā, which rivers were used as routes for commercial purposes. Hiuen Tsang talked about the flourishing social and economic condition of Pundravardhana; it had many cities and a large number of monasteries, sculptures and paintings. The remains of the archaeological sites dating back to the period between post-Maurya and early medieval times are indicative of the resources of the area. Presumably these developments would not have been possible without the support of powerful regional states.

No doubt the expanding economy of the Pundra region owed its origin to the process of urbanization whose antecedents could be traced back to at least the post-Vedic period. As pointed out earlier, Pundra was one of the janapadas in the east, according to Pāṇini’s Astādhyayī (ascribed to the fifth century BC). Based on the evidence of this source, V.S. Agrawala had observed that during the time of Pāṇini, Mahānagara and Navanagara were the two most important towns in eastern India. He identified Mahānagara with Mahāsthān (now in the Bagura district, Bangladesh) and Navanagara with Navadvīpa (now in West Bengal). Mahānagara was the capital city of ancient Pundra (identifiable with northern Bengal) and Navanagara the capital of ancient Vaṅga (which possibly covered parts of eastern and western Bengal). Agrawala further observed that Navadvīpa had possibly sprung up as a new town when the southern route from Rājagrha to the sea grew in importance. According to him, the earlier route had been along the north bank of the Gaṅgā, from Mithilā and Aṅga to Pundra. Gauḍapura (modern Gauḍa), an important town on the route from Mahāsthān and a trading centre of guda (molasses) manufactured in the Pundra country, lay in between Mahānagara and Navanagara. Agrawala pointed out that in a later section of the text, Pāṇini had also mentioned Sumhanagara and Pundranagara in eastern India. Agrawala thought that Sumhanagara and Pundranagara were the other names for the capitals of the Sumhas and Pundras respectively. He also observed that Pāṇini used the word ‘bhakti’ to denote loyalty of the citizens (Janapadīn) to the territory (janapada), whether a kingdom or an oligarchy, and held out as examples

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42 Ibid., p.75.
such janapadas as Āṅgaka, Vaṅga, Sauhaka, Paunḍraka, Madraka and Vṛjika. The Bhavisya Purāṇa mentioned seven deśas (Gauḍa, Varendra, Niviti, Suhma, Tharikhanḍa, Varāhabhūmi and Vardhamāna) as constituting the larger Paunḍra-deśa. It also referred to Paunḍraka Vāsudeva (or Vāsudeva) as the king of the Paunḍras. According to the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, Paunḍraka Vāsudeva was the ruler of Vanga, Paunḍra and the land of the Kirāṭa; and he sought Kṛṣṇa’s protection against king Jarāsandha of Magadha on the eve of the battle of Kurukshetra. Such references give the impression that Paunḍraka Vāsudeva was a powerful ruler of a large domain.

Paunḍraka Vāsudeva of the Epics

The epics clearly mentioned aspects of political organisation among the Paunḍras and the Vangas. The Rāmāyana mentioned the Vangas as one of the peoples who had political alliance with the rulers of Ayodhyā. This epic also referred to some of the royal dynasties of the Bengal region, and the matrimonial alliances of the royal households in different parts of Bengal. In Book II of the Rāmāyana, King Daśaratha claimed that his pre-eminent position was recognized in several kingdoms of Bhārata including Puṇḍra, Vaṅga, Aṅga, Drāvida, Sindhu, Sauvira, Saurāṣṭra, Dakṣiṇapatha, Matsya, Kāśi and Kośala. However, it was the Mahābhārata that spoke of Paunḍraka Vāsudeva, the famous king of Paunḍra. The Digvijaya section of the Mahābhārata placed the Paunḍras to the east of modern Monghyr and associated them with a king who ruled on the banks of the Kośi. The text described the victorious campaigns undertaken by Karna, Kṛṣṇa and Bhīmasena in the eastern part of the subcontinent. Kṛṣṇa is said to have defeated the...
Sumhas, Pundras and Vaṅgas and to have ruled over the united principality of Vanga and Anga. Kṛṣṇa is said to have defeated the Vaṅgās and Pundras. Paṇḍraka Vāsudeva was his main detractor. However, Bhīma is said to have finally defeated all the local princes of Bengal including Samudrasena, Candrasena and Paṇḍraka Vāsudeva. The Mahābhārata further informed that the Vaṅgas and Paṇḍras brought tribute to the court of Yuddhisthirā. The information given by the Mahābhārata is interpreted by some scholars to suggest that Bengal was possibly divided into a number of kingdoms at that time. The source would have us believe that the Paṇḍavas sent more than one expedition against Vāsudeva, ruler of the Paṇḍras, because the expedition was led once by Kṛṣṇa and on another occasion by Bhīmasena (or Bhīma). The Mahābhārata also mentioned the indigenous tribes or communities of Bengal, including the Vaṅgas, Suhmas, Śabarās, Pulindas, Kirātās and Pundras. It categorised them as Kṣatriyas and mentioned the Pundras and Paṇḍrakas several times. The Sabhāparva clubbed the Paṇḍras, Vaṅgas and Kirātās together. In the Vanaparva, Bhiṣmaparva and Dronaparva, the Pundras are mentioned in connection with the Uḍras, Utkalas, Mekalas, Kalingas and Andhras. However, tribes like the Vaṅgas, Suhmas, Śabarās, Pulindas, Kirātās and Pundras were classified as Kṣatriyas. Perhaps their ranking as Kṣatriyas was because of the fact that they had attained the status of ruling groups.

Buchanon Hamilton had suggested that the figure Bāli of the Mahābhārata ruled over a portion of northern Bengal but not necessarily over the whole of the region. But A.K. Sur presumed that the Bāli legend exerted considerable influence on the descriptions as given in the Mahābhārata. Sur thought that the reference in the Mahābhārata to Pundra, An̄ga, Vaṅga, Kaliṅga and Suhma as the kṣetraja sons of the asura king Bāli by his wife Sudesnā through the Brāhmaṇa sage, Dirghatamas. demonstrated that the northern part of Bengal had come within the ambit of Brahmanical culture by the time the Mahābhārata

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52 Mahābhārata, II. xxx. 16-25; R.C. Majumdar, History of Ancient Bengal, loc. cit., p.27.
54 Mahābhārata, Sabha, 30. 26-29.
55 Mahābhārata, Vaṇa, 33. 2-5; Bhiṣma, 95. 16; Drona, 26.4, 28. 44-45.
56 Mahābhārata, III.167; Ramesh Chandra Majumdar, Bāṅgālaḥer Itihās, loc. cit., p.413.
was composed. Nevertheless, it is clear from the references that in the time of the *Mahābhārata* the prevalent form of government among the Pundras, Vaṅgas, Suhmas and Aṅgas was monarchical. The *Ādirava* of the epic mentioned that one Ariha, who belonged to the family in which Dusyanta was born, married a girl from Aṅga. Of the kings of eastern India mentioned in the *Mahābhārata* as contemporaries of the Pāṇḍava brother Bhima, were the names of Karṇa, king of Aṅga; Vāsudeva, king of Pundra; and Samudrasena, king of Vanga. The list included an unnamed king of Sumha. The *Ādirava* referred to Vāsudeva of Pundra and Bhagadatta of Prāgyotīṣa among the vassal kings of Jarāsandha. It further mentioned that when Yudhīṣṭhira killed Jarāsandha and proclaimed himself as the emperor, Prāgyotīṣa, Čedi, Magadha, Pundra, Tāmralipta and Sumha were among the larger kingdoms which joined his empire. After the death of Jarāsandha, Karṇa is believed to have brought Kaliṅga, Aṅga, Suhma, Pundra and Vaṅga under one unified kingdom. Karṇa declared that Pauṇḍraka Vāsudeva was a powerful ruler and loyal to Jarāsandha. Ultimately, however, Kṛṣṇa is said to have killed Pauṇḍraka Vāsudeva and both Vanga and Pundra are said to have accepted the suzerainty of the Pāṇḍavas.

The *Mahābhārata* portrayed Pauṇḍraka Vāsudeva as a powerful king in the northern geographic division of Bengal, a ruler who maintained connections with the important contemporary rulers of his time. Analysing the information captured in various sections of the great epic, R.C. Majumdar observed that at the time of the *Mahābhārata*, Bengal was divided into a number of political units, at least nine of which were specifically named in the context of encounters with the Kaurava and the Pāṇḍava princes and their allies. The existence of the political entities was definitely known from the military campaigns undertaken by Karṇa, Kṛṣṇa and Bhīmasena against the rulers of those

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58 Ibid., pp.31-32.
59 Ibid., p.67.
63 Ibid.
64 Ibid., p.19.
domains or kingdoms. Paunḍraka Vāsudeva was named as the king of the Puṇḍras during all the campaigns. The first campaign was led by Karna, who was already the ruler of Aṅga. He defeated the Suhmas, Vaṅgas and the Puṇḍras, and united Aṅga and Vaṅga into one visaya (district) with himself as the adhyakṣa (ruler). The status of Suhma and Puṇḍra after the defeat is not specifically stated. The next campaign was led by Bhīmasena in the eastern direction during which he subdued Samudrasena and his son Candrasena of Sumha and the great lord of the Puṇḍras himself, Paunḍraka Vāsudeva. In the meantime, while suffering much humiliation at the hands of the Paṇḍava conquerors the rulers of Bengal decided to avail themselves of the opportunity to wreak vengeance on their tormentors by taking part in the internecine strife of the Kurus and the Pāṇḍus in Kurukṣetra as allies of Duryodhana. Paunḍraka Vāsudeva lost no time to retaliate his defeat at the hands of Bhīmasena by uniting Puṇḍra, Vaṅga and Kirāta into a powerful kingdom and by entering into an alliance with Jarāsandha of Magadha. Finally, it was Kṛṣṇa who vanquished the kings of Vaṅga and Puṇḍra. It is said that Paunḍraka Vāsudeva, the Puṇḍra king, had particularly drawn the wrath of Kṛṣṇa by falsely declaring himself as another Vāsudeva and projecting himself as a rival of the real Vāsudeva. After the end of the Kurukṣetra battle, the kings of both the Vaṅgas and the Puṇḍras had to bring tributes to the court of Yudhīśṭhira. Yudhīśṭhira undertook a pilgrimage to Bengal for a holy dip in the Gaṅgā-Ṣāgara-Sangama (i.e., the estuary of the Gaṅgā in southern Bengal). As R.C. Majumdar then observed, “In many respects Paunḍraka-Vāsudeva was a remarkable figure, and may be looked upon as the epic precursor of the Gauda conquerors of the seventh and eighth centuries.”

Scholars are generally inclined to locate the ‘Paunḍraka’ people of the Mahābhārata in the region of northern Bengal, which was known as Puṇḍra or Puṇḍravardhana in early times. As stated already, the stories in the epics, like those in the Purāṇas, identified Aṅga, Vaṅga, Kaliṅga, Puṇḍra and Suhma as the kṣetraja sons of the asura king Bāli by his wife Sudesnā through the Brāhmaṇa sage Dirghatamas. This seemed to suggest that

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66 Ibid., pp.29-30.
67 Ibid., p.29.
those people formed a largely homogenous ethnic group, although after Bāli the same homogenous ethnic group became divided into five different but neighbouring kingdoms each of which was headed by one of the five sons of the asura king Bāli, whose biological father was the Brāhmaṇa sage Dirghatamas. Further, the Mahābhārata made it clear that Jarāsandha of Magadha had extended his supremacy over the Āṅgas, Vaṅgas, Kaliṅgas and Pundrās. This shows that the Bengal region, including Pundrā, was under the rule of Magadha on the eve of the Kurukṣetra battle. The epic narrated that the Pundrā king, at the head of his allies, was defeated first by Karna and thereafter by Bhīma, before he was finally vanquished by Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa. The Mahābhārata also informed that the rulers of the janapadas of Pundrā, Suhma, Dasarna, Magadha, Videha and Kāśi were defeated by the digvijayin monarch, Pāṇḍu. It further referred to the dangerous enemy of Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa as his namesake (i.e., king Vāsudeva of Pundrā), ruler of Vanga, Pundrā and Kirāṭa. This description suggested that Pauṇḍraka Vāsudeva was the ruler of almost the whole of undivided Bengal, including the submontane region and also perhaps parts of northeast India.

It would further appear from this section of the Mahābhārata that Pauṇḍraka Vāsudeva originally belonged to the Ceḍi race, which, if true, would mean that the Pundrās at that point of time was ruled by a dynasty that belonged to an alien race (meaning, a race other than the one which constituted the indigenous population of the territory under rule). The Mahābhārata also depicted him as the religious rival of Kṛṣṇa. Like Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa, this Vāsudeva of eastern India had also assumed the title of ‘purosottama’ and he had a large number of devotees spread over a large territory. This indicated that Pauṇḍraka Vāsudeva was both a political and a spiritual leader. In the Udyogparva of the Mahābhārata, Drupada was represented as appealing to the Pāṇḍavas to send an envoy to Pauṇḍraka Vāsudeva for the purpose of enlisting his support in the Kurukṣetra battle. But this highly resourceful ruler of the Pundrās is said to have chosen to remain neutral in that

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69 Ibid.
72 Mahābhārata II.13.17; A.K. Chatterjee, op.cit., 141-143.
great conflict. However, according to the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* and the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Paundraka Vāsudeva was killed in the battlefield of Kurukṣetra by Kṛṣṇa.73

The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*74 provided a genealogy of Paundraka Vāsudeva in the following order:

Atithī, a chief, was the predecessor of Nisādhā who was followed by Nāla or Nābhas. He in turn was succeeded by Paundraka or Pundarīka or Vāsudeva (Paundraka Vāsudeva). Paundraka Vāsudeva was the predecessor of Kṣemadhanvan who was succeeded by Devārikā. Devārikā was followed by Āhīnagu. The texts also give the impression that there was no opposition to the faith of Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa after the elimination of Paundraka Vāsudeva.75 It is possible that before the Kuru-Panḍavas came into prominence, Jarāsandha, who is described in the *Ādiparvan* of the *Mahābhārata* as an asura in his previous birth, established his sway in Magadha and those who figured among his vassals were Vāsudeva of Pūndra and Bhāgadatta of Prāgjyotīṣa. The Panḍavas, in order to raise Yudhishthirā to the status of a samrāt, had to deal first of all with Jarāsandha, and when they started their digvijaya, some of the petty chiefs of northern and eastern India are said to have voluntarily submitted to them. Those that are said to have joined their samrājya included Cedi, Magadha, Oḍrā, Tāmralipta, Suhma and Prāgjyotīṣa. The narrative in the *Mahābhārata* also would have us believe that Pūndra was an immediate neighbour of Vanga and that both Pūndra and Vanga were the ruling groups in their respective territories.76 Still, it is not possible to assess the duration of rule of the descendants of Pūndra (or Bāli) or those of Paundraka Vāsudeva in Pūndravardhana, or the rise of successive polities, or even work out a tentative chronology for those ‘kings’ because of the paucity of source material based on which such analysis could have been made. Moreover, the literary sources seem to be silent on the post-epic period. On the other hand, the local traditions referred to a demon king Bāṇa, to whose name the fortified city of Bāngarh (Bāngarh) was attributed and whose wife Kālārāni’s name was associated with a huge tank called Kālādīghi in nearby Gangārāmpur. Bāngarh is still a very

74 *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* V. 34. 4; A.K. Chatterjee, *op cit*, pp.141-143.
important archaeological site in north Bengal. Therefore, the reconstruction of the political or administrative history of the Puṅdra region till the Mauryan period will remain problematic until some alternative, acceptable piece of evidence is unearthed.

**Under the Mauryas**

It was in the context of the rise of Magadhan imperialism that the political history of the northern and eastern parts of the subcontinent emerged from obscurity, when Anga, Vanga and Kalinga of the east were listed among the large territorial states. Each of them contended with the other to attain political paramountcy. As early as the period of the grammarian Pāṇini, among the janapadas to have attracted notice were Sumha, Vanga and Puṅdra. Sumhanagara and Puṅdranagara were mentioned as important administrative centres and Navanagara (Navadvīpa) and Mahānagara (Mahāsthān) as important commercial and urban centres within the deltaic region of Bengal. The sources ascribed to the period thereafter seemed to suggest that the Puṅdra region, along with the rest of deltaic Bengal, from time to time formed part of the larger political formations which emerged and developed in northern India, at least since the third century BC or from the Mauryan period of Indian history. That the Mauryas exercised political authority over the area is known from the evidence of the Mahāsthān Inscription (third century BC), which recorded the royal order issued to the local governor (Gobardhana) of Puṅdranagara to distribute funds, sesame, mustard seeds, paddy, etc., from the imperial treasury and granary during times of scarcity caused by flood, fire and pests. The governor was directed to replenish the granary and the treasury with paddy and gandaka coins at other times. The inclusion of the Puṅdra area in the Mauryan Empire is known from the evidence of archaeological remains of the fortified city of Puṅdranagara (Mahāsthāngarh) in the modern Bagura district, and from the discovery of a large number of Mauryan coins and many other artifacts datable to the period going back to about the fifth and

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77 B.C. Law, op cit, p.246, R C Majumdar, History of Ancient Bengal, loc cit, p.320.
78 V.S. Agrawala, op cit, p 163.
fourth centuries BC.\textsuperscript{80} In fact, the \textit{Arthasastra} referred to Puṇḍra along with Vanga and Gauḍa. It located the Puṇḍra region (identifiable with modern northern Bengal) within the Maurya Empire and described it as commercially important for its various products while also commenting on the major trade routes that passed through it.\textsuperscript{81} Hiuen Tsang quoted some traditions to show that the Mauryan emperor Aśoka had built numerous monasteries in different parts of Bengal.\textsuperscript{82} He had seen some of those monasteries in Puṇḍravardhana, where he resided for a few days. Consequently, Barrie M. Morrison observed that the Delta region, or at least Varendra, was under the Maurya administration. In fact, Puṇḍranagara, which was located at the centre of Varendra, had developed into an important urban centre during this period.\textsuperscript{83}

Hariśena's \textit{Vṛhatkathākosa} informed that Bhadrabāhu, the preceptor of the Mauryan emperor Chandragupta, was the son of a Brāhmaṇa of Devakoṭa in the Puṇḍravardhana country.\textsuperscript{84} However, Hariśena’s work was composed during the period after Chandragupta Maurya’s rule, and, therefore, cannot be regarded as a reliable source on the point of the ancestral home of Bhadrabāhu. Nevertheless, there is no reason to doubt that the Puṇḍra region, including the larger portion of the rest of Bengal formed part of the Mauryan Empire. The Mahāsthān inscription and the archaeological remains recovered from Mahāsthānagṛha as well as the Jaina and the Buddhist literary sources attest to this fact.\textsuperscript{85}

**Puṇḍravardhana: A Bhukti under the Guptas**

After the decline of the Mauryas, a large number of kingdoms are said to have emerged and fallen from time to time in northern India. Some of them seem to have exercised political control over parts of Bengal. After the decline of the Mauryas, Bengal seems to

\textsuperscript{83} \textit{Supra}, 80n.
\textsuperscript{84} Hariśena’s \textit{Vṛhatkathākosa} Cited in A.K. Sur, \textit{op.cit.}, pp.82-84.
\textsuperscript{85} R.C. Majumdar, \textit{History of Ancient Bengal}, \textit{loc.cit.}, p.144.
have come under the rule of the Mournudas, whose sway extended over a considerable part of eastern India, and thereafter under the Devaraksitas, whose suzerainty extended over Puṇḍra, Kośala, Oḍra and Tamralipta. Archæological remains ascribed to the period of the Śungas and the Kuśāṇas (second century BC to first century), have been recovered from parts of Bengal, including the northern division. The evidence is suggestive of the extent of influence that the Śungas and the Kuśāṇas exerted on developments in Bengal, although it is not clear whether they had direct control of the region. The evidence of two votive inscriptions at Sānchi (dated to the second century BC), recording the gifts made by two inhabitants from Punāvada (Puṇḍravardhana) for improvising the Sānchi stūpa certainly points to the linkages between the two places.

There is no doubt that the Guptas controlled some parts of Bengal from about the fifth century. On the basis of the information provided by I-tsing, a Chinese traveller, some scholars have concluded that Śrīgupta (the founder of the Gupta dynasty) was originally the chief of a small principality called Mrgasthāpana (located in modern Murshidabad district) in Bengal. According to the genealogical table of the Guptas, Śrīgupta was succeeded by his son Ghaṭotkacagupta. The next ruler, Candragupta I, declared himself a sovereign and with the help of the Licchavis conquered Prayāga, Sāketa and Magadha. The information recorded in the Mehrauli Pillar Inscription has been interpreted to suggest that Candragupta I prevailed over the coalition of the chiefs of Bengal. The Allahabad Pillar Inscription of Samudragupta (fourth century) mentioned Samatata, Davāka, Kāmarūpa, Nepāla, Kartṛpura, etc., as border kingdoms (pratyanta rājya) of Samudragupta’s empire. There is no mention of Rāḍha, Puṇḍra or Vaṅga in this inscription. The omission of these place-names from the contents of the Allahabad Pillar Inscription of Samudragupta has been taken to mean that Bengal proper was already a

87 *Supra*, 80n
part of the Gupta Empire during the reign of Samudragupta. In fact, Bengal continued to be an integral part of the Gupta Empire under the successors of Samudragupta, viz., Candragupta II and Kumāragupta I up to Buddhagupta. That the region of Pundravardhana was part of the Gupta Empire till about the middle of the sixth century is known from the epigraphic sources. In most of the inscriptions dating to the Gupta period, Pundravardhana was mentioned as a bhukti or province.

The evidence of the Dhanaidaha Copper-plate, the two Dāmodarpur copper-plates and the Bāigrām copper-plate inscriptions show that Kumāragupta maintained a strong hold over the bhuktis (provinces) and vīsayas (districts) of the Gupta Empire in Bengal. These inscriptions also referred to Pundravardhana as a bhukti (province), while Koṭīvarśa was a vīsaya (district) within Pundravardhana. In fact, as many as five Gupta inscriptions have been discovered in Dāmodarpur, a village in modern Dinajpur district. Two of these were issued by Kumāragupta I, and two others by Buddhagupta, while the name of the king in the fifth inscription, between ‘Śrī’ and ‘Gupta’, could not be deciphered. The editors of the Corpus of Bengal Inscriptions tell us that the plates were not like ordinary royal grants of land made to Brāhmaṇas or those dedicated to the gods, but were in the nature of religious sale-deeds, recording transactions between the government and the purchasers, who bought the land at a reduced rate for religious purposes. The sale-rate was calculated in gold dināras, and the transaction was made according to nīvīḍharma, which meant that the land could be enjoyed rent-free, but was not to be sold or transferred to anybody. The grant recorded in the Dhanaidaha copper-plate inscription of Kumāragupta I (dated 113 Gupta Era = AD 433) was also a permanent endowment (according to nīvīḍharma) for a religious purpose. It mentioned the names of eighteen Brāhmaṇas who formed the local governing body. The names of the buyers as given in

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92 Ibid., p.67.
94 Ibid.
95 Ibid., p.45.
the text give the impression that they were Brāhmaṇas hailing from the neighbouring villages.\textsuperscript{96}

The inscription effectively regularized the grant of one *kulyavāpa* of cultivated land in Kāṭāpāḍā viṣaya. The grant was made by an official in favour of one Varāhaśvāmin, a Cāndogya Brāhmaṇa, who hailed from Bhṛatrkaṭāka. The grant also recorded the names of eighteen Brāhmaṇas and others — all officials — constituting the village jury and forming the local governing body of the village. They, along with the tenants, were informed about the grant of the said land and about the terms and conditions of the grant as mentioned in the text.\textsuperscript{97} It further stated that the proposal had been accepted by the ‘neighbouring obedient householders’ and the land was already in possession of the grantee.\textsuperscript{98} Hence it appears that the approval or regularization of the grant by the Gupta emperor was necessary because the region formed part of the Gupta Empire. However, it also seems clear from the text of the inscription that the village had a local governing body, which functioned as a village jury that had to be informed as a necessary requirement according to the prevailing customs. This perhaps indicated that the villages enjoyed some amount of autonomy at the local level.

The first Dāmodarpur Copper-plate Inscription of Kumāragupta I (dated Gupta Era 125 = AD 444) recorded the grant of one *kulyavāpa* of land in the region northwest of Dongrā, to one Karpatika, a Brāhmaṇa. This was consequent on payment of three *dināras*.\textsuperscript{99} This inscription also mentioned that one Ciratadatta was the provincial governor of Pundravardhana-\textit{bhukti}. It mentioned Kumāramātya Vetravarman as the official in-charge of the district administration of Koṭivārsa-\textit{viṣaya}, as appointed by the governor. The official was assisted by the following: Dhṛtipāla, the chief merchant; Bandhumitra, the chief caravan trader; Dhṛtimitra, the chief artisan; and Sāmbapāla, the chief scribe. The grant was made

\textsuperscript{96} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{97} Ibid., pp.41-44.
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{99} Ibid., pp.46-48.
after consulting the keepers of records (viz., Rṣidatta, Jayānandin and Vibhūdatta). The inscription throws interesting light on the structure of administration at the provincial and district levels. It also proved that land records were carefully maintained and the keepers of records in land transfers were consulted as a matter of routine. The second Dāmodarpur Copper-plate Inscription of Kumāragupta I (Gupta Era 129 = AD 448) provided similar information on local administration at the level of the visaya of Koṭivarsa. It informed that a plot of land measuring five dronas (eight dronas = one kulyavāpa), lying in the west of the village of ‘Airāvata-Gorājya’ was granted to a Brāhmaṇa at the established rate of three dināras for each kulyavāpa of land. The grant was issued according to the customary rule of aprāyksayanīvī (the same as nīvīdharma mentioned in the earlier inscription).

The epigraphic records thus make it clear that under the Guptas, and particularly during the reign of Kumāragupta I and his successors up to Buddhagupta, Pundravardhana was a bhukti, in the sense of a territorial unit corresponding to something like the province of the Gupta Empire. The bhukti was ruled through a provincial governor appointed from the centre. The region was probably conquered along with the rest of Bengal by Samudragupta and integrated into the Empire. The bhukti was divided into a number of visayas (usually likened to the modern districts) each under an official (visayapati). Each visaya was sub-divided into other smaller units comprising several village settlements or clusters of villages. The administrative organization within the Gupta Empire was thus elaborate. The villages (commonly called grāmas) were also formally managed by the authority vested in the councils, whose members were drawn from the local elites. This was to look after their day-to-day functioning as per established customs through formal rules and regulations (as the epigraphs mention various forms of dharma or the Brahmanical social code).

100 Ibid., p.46.
101 Ibid., pp.52-53.
102 Ibid.
Gauda under Šašānka

The rise of Gauda under Šašānka was the most significant political development in the history of Bengal during the sixth-seventh centuries. Hiuen Tsang\textsuperscript{103} and Bānabhaṭṭa\textsuperscript{104} referred to Šašānka as the master of Gauda, whose capital was Karṇaṣuvarṇa (identified with the area corresponding to modern Murshidabad district on the fringe of West Dinajpur district in West Bengal). Bāṇa called Śašānka, Gauḍādhāma (‘the vile of Gauḍa’) and Gauḍa-bhūjanga (‘the serpent of Gauḍa’). At that point of time, Gauḍa included within its territorial limits almost the whole of Bengal, including Puṇḍravardhana. The evidence of the Ganjam Copper-plate Inscription (dated AD 619) confirmed the fact of Šašānka’s supremacy over Orissa, since it referred to him as the ruler of Gauḍa, Oḍra and Kaliṅga. Šašānka also seems to have extended his sway over parts of northern India. A significant event in the political history of northern India at that time was the union of Kanauj and Thāneswar brought about by a matrimonial alliance. Šašānka wanted to establish control over Kanauj because of its productive potential and strategic location in northern India. To achieve his goal he formed an alliance with Devagupta of Malwa. Together they attacked Kanauj and defeated and killed its ruler, Graha-varman. Rājyavardhana of Thāneśwar then marched against Devagupta and defeated him. He also marched against Šašānka, but was killed by the latter. Harṣavardhana, the brother of Rājyavardhana, then became the king of Thāneswar. Harṣavardhana forged an alliance with Bhāskaravarman of Kāmarūpa. The allies jointly attacked Gauḍa and succeeded in taking Karṇaṣuvarṇa.\textsuperscript{105} Bhāskara issued his Nidhānpur (Sylhet) grant from his victory camp, Karṇaṣuvarṇa. Some scholars had presumed that Puṇḍravardhana, which was in the vicinity of Karṇaṣuvarṇa, was also under his rule, since Šašānka was the powerful ruler of Gauḍa, Oṛissa and even parts of northern India. But the evidence also indicates that some parts of Puṇḍravardhana had temporarily passed into the hands of Bhāskaravarman after the defeat of Šašānka.\textsuperscript{106} A passage in the Ārya-Manjuśrīmulakalpa spoke of the defeat of Šašānka, king of Gauḍa, at the battle of

\textsuperscript{103} Thomas Watters, \textit{op.cit.}, p.194.
\textsuperscript{104} Harṣacarit, vii.
\textsuperscript{105} R.C. Majumdar, \textit{History of Ancient Bengal, loc.cit.}, pp.52-54.
Puṇḍrapura (Puṇḍravardhanapura). After śaśānka, his son Mānava became the ruler of Gaūḍa but he ruled for eight months and five days only. The text further informed that during the period immediately after śaśānka’s death, several hitherto subordinate chiefs raised their heads. One of them, the Nāga king, Jayānaga by name, became prominent for some time in the submontane region of northern Bengal. It appears therefore that a Nāga king ruled in the Puṇḍra region after the disintegration of Gaūḍa upon the death of śaśānka.

Nevertheless, it is evident from various sources that śaśānka’s death in about AD 637 triggered a period of ‘anarchy’ in Bengal. Tārānatha, who visited Bengal in about AD 638, described Bengal proper as comprising four kingdoms, viz., Puṇḍravardhana, Karnasuvarṇa, Samaṭa and Tāmralipta. Tārānatha located Puṇḍravardhana between Magadha and Vangala. The Rāgholi Copper-plate Inscription of Jayāvardhana of the Saila dynasty recorded that the brother of Jayāvardhana’s great-grandfather had defeated the Puṇḍra king and conquered his dominion. The inscription did not name the defeated Puṇḍra king. It only mentioned that three branches of the Saila family established themselves in Kāśi, Vindhya and Puṇḍra. The conquest of Puṇḍra perhaps took place in about AD 725. This was followed by the invasion of Bengal by the combined forces of Yaśovarman, ruler of Kanauj, and Lalitāditya, ruler of Kashmir. The Rājatarangini narrated that in the course of his romantic enterprise, Lalitāditya entered the city of Puṇḍravardhana, which was then ruled by a king named Jayanta, vassal to the king of Gaūḍa. It narrated that Lalitāditya married Jayanta’s daughter, defeated five Gaūḍa chiefs and made them submit to his father-in-law. Eventually, the Puṇḍra region seems to have been ruled by the Kambojas from whom the Pālas took over the reins of power in the second half of the eighth century.

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109 Ibid., pp.8, 74.
110 Ibid., p.77.
111 Ibid., p.78; Rājatarangini, p.126; Rajanikanta, Chakraborty, op.cit., pp.3-5.
Under the Pālas

The Pāla dynasty, which was founded by Gopāla in about AD 750, restored political stability in Bengal after a long period of anarchy. R.C. Majumdar concluded that Varendra (Varendra or Punḍra) was ‘the ancestral home of the Pālas’.

The Kamauli plate of Vaidyadeva called Varendra the janaka-bhū (fatherland) of the Pālas, and the same expression occurred in the Rāmacaritam of Sandhyākarananandin. However, the Pālas are said to have re-established their rule in northern Bengal or Varendra-Pundra region upon defeating the Kambojas who had risen to power in that part of Bengal after the death of the Pāla king Mahendrapāla in the ninth century. The fact of Kamboja occupying Varendra-Pundra and the Pāla king Rājayapāla recovering the region was not clearly established by the historians of Bengal for a long time. This was perhaps due to the confusion created by the fact that the names of the kings belonging to both the Pālas and the Kambojas were suffixed with ‘-pāla’ and both ruling families had a king each by the name of Rājayapāla. Therefore, D.C. Sircar had suggested (in a paper published in 1987) that the evidence of the Paścimbhāg Copper-plate Inscription of Śrīcandra (dated AD 930) nullified the previous scholars’ contention about the rise of the Kambojas in Bengal in the latter part of the tenth century. He believed that the event occurred at about half a century earlier, i.e., shortly after the death of Mahendrapāla and that prior to the attack on the city of Devaparvata (capital of Saṃatata, situated at the southern end of the Mainamati hill near Comilla) by the forces of Trailokyacandra, it was invaded by the Kambojas in about AD 920. This was the time when Gaudapati Kunjaraghatāvarṣa was probably ruling over north Bengal because the invaders appear to have succeeded in advancing so far in the east from some base in the north. Gaudapati Kunjaraghatāvarṣa was represented as the vanquisher of many enemies including the Cīnas, who were often associated with Tibet and Mahācīna in the Indian tradition. Also the fact that Rājayapāla’s

113 R.C. Majumdar, History of Ancient Bengal, loc.cit., p.118.
114 Kamauli Copper Plate Grant of Vaidyadeva, verse 4; M.M. Sharma (ed.), Inscriptions of Ancient Assam, Gauhati University, Gauhati, 1978, p.283.
116 Supra, 112n.
117 Ibid., pp.61-62.
son Gopāla II granted land in the Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti suggested that it was Rājayapāla
who extirpated Kamboja rule from north Bengal and re-occupied that region.\(^{118}\)

The Kambojas seem to have become powerful in the region during the period of anarchy,
which prevailed at least for a short period after the Saila kings. It is also possible that
either the king of Gauḍa or the vassal king Jayanta, mentioned in the Rājatarangini,
actually belonged to the stock of Kambojas, or that the Kambojas also ruled over one of
the petty principalities in northern Bengal. However, there is no doubt that the Pāla rulers
superseded the petty kingdoms and subjugated those chieftains of northern Bengal. The
Pālas ruled over Bengal, including its northern division, for a long time. Their sway at
times extended over the whole of eastern India and parts of northern India. In fact, the
Pālas rose to great prominence under the leadership of Dharmapāla in the latter half of
the eighth century. They also clashed with the Gurjara-Pratiharas and the Rāstrakūṭas in a
tripartite struggle for mastery over Kanauj. The northern campaigns proved costly for the
Pālas in Bengal, as the Candras asserted themselves in the Harikela-Vāṅga region in the
ninth century. Perhaps the short-lived rise of the Kambojas had taken place during that
period. Nevertheless, the Pālas persisted with their rule in northern Bengal, except for a
short period in the eleventh century, when they lost their hold in Varendra. This was on
account of the Kaivartta revolt led by a powerful chief resulting in the expulsion of the
Pālas from the region. The Kaivartta chief was eventually suppressed by Rāmapāla and
the Pāla rule was re-established in the Varendra-Puṇḍra region. Rāmāvaṭṭī, the last capital
of the Pālas, was located within the Varendra territory.\(^{119}\)

The Rāmācaritam informed that Rāmapāla founded a city, named Rāmāvaṭṭī, at the
confluence of the Ganga and the Karatoya in Varendra. Rāmapāla seems to have taken the
advice of Rājā Candaśvara of Śrīhaṭṭa, and two other friends, Śrīhetu and Kṣesavaśvara
whom he is said to have consulted on the choice of the site for the capital city. Within a
short period of time, Rāmāvaṭṭī was beautified with temples dedicated to various deities,
which were appended with residences for the Brāhmaṇas and Bhikṣus. The great vihāra,

\(^{118}\) Ibid.

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named Jagaddalavihāra, was erected. The city also contained an image of Avalokiteśvara, and nearby there was a place of pilgrimage called Apunarbhava. The city boasted of many gardens; and many large tanks were also excavated. The king himself excavated a tank as large as an ocean, with sides as high as chains of mountains on the seaside. The market places contained merchandise from distant quarters. An ally is said to have propitiated the king with large elephants, chariots, and armour, in gratitude for extending protection to him. Relevant sources credited Rāmapāla with the conquest of Utkala, Kāmarūpa and other territories.\(^{120}\)

The court of the Pālas was adorned by men of talent and political acumen as known from the evidence of the Rāmācaritam: Rāmapāla was served by men known for their eminence in science and literature. For example, Bhadreśvara, the chief medical officer, was both a physician and a poet; Bhīmapāla’s court physician and the son of Bhadreśvara, Sureśvara, authored a Sanskrit dictionary of medicinal plants. Bhadreśvara’s grandfather, Devaṇa, had also served as the court physician of Govindacandra, a local king and well-known composer of Bengali songs. Rāmapāla’s prime minister, Bodhideva, son of Yogadeva, belonged to a line of hereditary prime ministers in the service of the Pāla royal family. Rāmapāla lived at Rāmāvatī, leaving the care of his government to his son, Rājyapāla.\(^{121}\)

Although the political boundary of the Pāla kingdom underwent changes from time to time, they not only ruled in Bengal as powerful sovereigns but also over other parts of eastern and northern India. The Pālas continued to rule in northern Bengal till about the twelfth century, although the Candras had then established their rule in the Harikela-Vaṅga region. It was during the heydays of the Candra kings in the ninth-tenth centuries that the Pāla kingdom became confined to the northern division of Bengal. However, it is evident from the inscriptions of the Pāla rulers that Puṇḍravardhana was a bhukti within the Pāla kingdom. The Khālimpur Copper-plate Inscription of Dharmapāla (AD 770-810) recorded the donation of four villages to the Brāhmaṇas in Mahānta-prakāśa viśaya in

\(^{120}\) Ibid.  
\(^{121}\) Ibid., Canto III, vv.29-32, pp.71-72.
Byāghryatati-mandala within Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti. The Bānagaḍa Copper-plate Inscription of Mahipāla (AD 988-1023) recorded the donation of the Kurāṭapallikā village in Kotivarṣa-visaya in Gokālikā-mandala within Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti in favour of a learned Brāhmaṇa. The Manahāli Copper-plate grant of Madanapāladēva (AD 1130-1191) recorded the gift of a village in Kotivarṣa-visaya in Halāvarta-mandala within Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti to one Śrī Batesvara Svāmiśarman. The inscriptions cited here are only by way of examples. There are several other Pāla inscriptions which mentioned Puṇḍravardhana as a bhukti.

The Kaivartta Kingdom

An interlude in the Pāla rule in the Pundra or Varendra region was caused by the rise of the Kaivarttas, even if temporarily, in the eleventh century. It happened during the reign of Mahipāla II (AD 1072-1075), who had incurred the displeasure of his subjects by his oppressive conduct and by imprisoning his two younger brothers, Sarupāla and Rāmapāla (subsequently rescued by their supporters). Divya (or Dibyoka), a feudatory chief and a high official under the Pāla kings, organized a revolt of the Kaivartta chiefs. Divya belonged to the Kaivartta caste. He raised a large army, defeated and killed the Pāla king, and established a Kaivartta kingdom in Varendra. The Rāmacaritam of Sandhyākāranandin recorded that the Kaivarttas were a very powerful and warlike people. They suffered oppression at the hands of the Pāla kings who ruled over the region for a long time. When the sufferings went beyond the point of toleration, Dibyoka, the Kaivartta chief, raised an army and instigated the Kaivarttas to defy the authority of the Pāla king. He managed the affairs of the Kaivarttas like an independent ruler. Dibyoka was succeeded by his brother, Rudoka, as the Kaivartta chief. Bhīma, the son of Rudoka, took advantage of the popular discontent and led his Kaivartta subjects to rebellion and declared himself as an independent ruler. Mahipāla, the Pāla king, hastily gathered a large but ill-disciplined force and advanced to meet the enemy. In the battle that ensued, Mahipāla’s force was completely routed, his soldiers fled in disorder, and the king

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121 Ibid., pp.209-219
123 R.C. Majumdar, History of Ancient Bengal, loc cit., pp.144-146

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himself was killed in the battlefield. Northern Bengal, which was then called Varendra, fell into the hands of the Kaivarttas. Bhima, the Kaivartta chief, declared himself as an independent king and built a suburban city at a place called Damara.\(^{125}\)

Rāmapāla's subsequent recovery of Varendra is also described in detail in the Rāmacaritam. The text extolled the personal qualities of the Kaivartta leaders — Divya, Rudoka and Bhima — and described Divya as an able and powerful ruler who made his position secure in the kingdom by his popularity. Divya was succeeded by his brother Rudoka. The next king was Bhima, son and successor of Rudoka. The Rāmacaritam also devoted several verses waxing eloquent on the wealth and strength of the Pāla kingdom. It also described how Rāmapāla overwhelmed Bhima, when the latter was busy in consolidating his rule, and destroyed the fortunes of his family.\(^{126}\)

It is evident from the details provided in the Rāmacaritam\(^{127}\) that Rāmapāla had to make elaborate preparations to avenge the defeat and death of the Pāla king at the hands of the Kaivarttas during the reign of Mahipāla. After the Kaivarttas took over the reins of the Varendra region, Rāmapāla and his son Rājyapāla are said to have travelled all over the empire and mustered the support of their feudatories against the Kaivartta usurpers. Rāmapāla sent Śivarāja of the Rāstrakūta family, who was the commander of the palace guards, to reconnoitre Varendra. Śivarāja launched the attack against the Kaivartta chief and assured the Brahmans and other inhabitants of Varendra of protection of their life and property. Among the feudatories who are said to have mobilized their forces against the Kaivartta chief were the following:\(^{128}\)

1. Bhimayaśā (Magadha); 2. Viraguṇa (Koṭā, South India); 3. Jayasinha (Daṇḍabhukti, Bihar); 4. Vikramarājā (Devagrāma, Bengal); 5. Lakṣmisūra (Apara-Mandāra, Bengal); 6. Śūrapāla (Kujavati, Bengal); 7. Rudrasikharā (Tailakampa, Manbhuma, Bihar); 8. Mayagala Sinha (Ucchāla, Balasore).


\(^{126}\) Ibid., Canto I, vv.26-41, pp.18-21; Canto II, vv.21-27, pp.47-50.

\(^{127}\) Ibid., Canto I, vv.26-41, pp.18-21; Canto II, vv.21-27, pp.47-50; Amitabha Bhattacharyya, op.cit., pp.100-101.

Birbhum, Bengal); (9) Pratāpa Sinha (Dhekariya, Burdwan, Bengal); (10) Narasinhārjuna (Kajangala, Bihar); (11) Chandārjuna (Sankatagrāma, Bengal); (12) Vijayarāja (Nidrāvala, not identified); (13) Dvorapovardhana (Kausāmbi, Central India); and (14) Soma (Paduvanvā, Pabna).

The war was mainly commanded by two Rāṣṭrakūta princes, viz., Kāhnara Deva and Śivarāja Deva, who were designated as mahāmāṇḍalika and mahāpratīthāra respectively under Rāmapāla. The allied forces are said to have raised a bridge of boats on the bank of the Gaṅgā, crossed the river and taken Bhīma Kaivartta captive while he was mounted on his elephant in the battlefield.\(^{129}\)

The details provided by the Rāmacaritam not only shows that the Pāla kingdom extended over a large part of the subcontinent and that the feudatories stood by the Pāla king even after he was temporarily dethroned, but also reveals the extent of the prowess of the short-lived Kaivartta kingdom to suppress which so much of mobilization had become necessary. Noticeably, the Kaivartta chief Divya, who led the revolt against Mahipāla, had been a feudatory under the Pāla kings, but he organised the revolt so well that the Pāla king was expelled from the heartland of Puṇḍravardhana, i.e., Varendra or Varendra. The list of fourteen feudatories who supported Rāmapāla in recovering Varendra from the Kaivartta chief shows that none of them belonged to the Varendra region. This perhaps suggests that the other feudatories in Varendra were supporting the Kaivartta chief Bhīma and Rāmapāla had to overpower Bhīma with external support.

**Candras and Varnans**

In the course of disasters that befell the Pāla kingdom, particularly during the reign of Nārāyaṇapāla in ninth-tenth centuries, the Candras of Harikela-Vaṅga (eastern Bengal) rose to prominence and occupied a portion of northern Bengal traditionally subsumed under Puṇḍravardhana. The reign of the Candras in the Harikela-Vaṅga region lasted

\(^{129}\) Ibid.
roughly from the ninth to the eleventh century. At least three inscriptions of mahārāja Śrīcandra (dated to AD 929-975) of the Candra dynasty recorded the grant of land in the Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti. The Rāmapāla Copper-plate of Śrīcandra recorded the grant of one pātaka of land in the village of Nehākasthī in the Nānya-mandala of Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti in favour of a Brāhmaṇa. His Dhūlla Copper-plate recorded the grant of land in three villages in Khāḍravilli-visaya and in two villages in Ikkādāśi-visaya of Yolā-mandala within Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti. The Paścimbhāg Copper-plate Inscription of Śrīcandra recorded the grant of land to some māthas and also to Triratna in three visayas, namely, Garala, Pagara and Candrapura, all located in Śrīhaṭṭa-mandala within the Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti. Similarly, the Mainamati Copper-plate Inscription of Laḍahacandra (dated to eleventh century) of the same dynasty recorded the grant of land in a village in Perāṇatana-visaya in Samaṭāta-mandala within Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti. Other inscriptions of the Candra kings recorded the grant of land in Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti. Śrīcandra seems to have based himself for a brief period in Varendra during his campaigns in northern Bengal, but the seat authority of the Candra kings was in Vikramapura (Vikrampur near Dhaka, eastern Bengal), from where almost all the Candra inscriptions were issued.

The Varmans possibly succeeded the Candras in eastern Bengal towards the end of the eleventh century. The kingdom was founded by Jitavarmaṇ with his headquarters in Vikramapura. The Sāṃantsāra Copper-plate of Harivarman (dated to eleventh century) recorded the grant of land in the Paścavasa-mandala within Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti, while the Belāva Copper-plate Inscription of Bhōjāvarman (dated to twelfth century) recorded the grant of land in a village in Ādhāhpattana-mandala within Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti. However, both these mandalas were in eastern Bengal to which the Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti was extended by the Candras. Moreover, the Varmans were

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130 R C. Majumdar, History of Ancient Bengal, loc cit, p 204
131 R R. Mukherji & S.K. Majty (eds), op cit, pp 221-228
132 Amitabha Bhattacharyya, op cit, pp 75-76
133 K.K Gupta (ed.), Copper-plates of Sylhet, Self Published, Sylhet, 1967, pp 82-89
134 Ibid., p 80
135 See Table 1
136 R C Majumdar, History of Ancient Bengal, loc cit., p 207
137 R R. Mukherji & S K. Majty (eds.), op cit., pp 228-238
subsumed by the Senas before they could make any impact in the heartland of Puṇḍravardhana.\textsuperscript{138}

The Senas

The Sena kings rose to power in Bengal in about the twelfth-thirteenth centuries. Beginning in southern Bengal, they pitched their capital in Gauḍa-Pāṇḍua, in the heart of Puṇḍravardhana or northern Bengal for sometime. The capital came to be known as Lakṣmāṇavatī under the Senas, and Lakhnāuti under the Sultans in the thirteenth century. The Senas extended their sphere of suzerainty to eastern Bengal (the traditional Vaṅga) where they defeated the Varmans and established the capital at Vikramapura. The evidence of their inscriptions proves that Puṇḍravardhana was a bhukti under the Senas as well. The Mādhānīnagar Copper-plate grant of Lakṣmānasena (dated to twelfth century) recorded the gift of the village Dāpaniyāpātaka, situated on Rāvaṇa lake, in the Kāntāpura-vṛtii of Vārendrī-mandala, within the jurisdiction of Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti. The donated land measured one hundred bhākhāḍī and sixty-one khāḍikās, and yielded an income of one hundred puraṇas and sixty-eight kapardakas. The grant was made for the purpose of maintaining the Brāhmaṇas and the deities.\textsuperscript{139} The Sunderban Copper-plate Inscription of Lakṣmaṇasena recorded the grant of a plot of land in the Māndalāgrāma within Kāntaḷḷapura-caturaka in Khāḍī-mandala of Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti.\textsuperscript{140} His Tarpaṇḍīghi grant recorded the transfer of a plot of land in Velāhiṣṭī in Vārendrī-mandala within Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti.\textsuperscript{141} The Ānuliā Copper-plate Inscription of the same ruler recorded the grant of a plot of land in Mātharaṇḍīya village in Vyaṅghrataṭi-mandala within Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti.\textsuperscript{142} By the Madanpaḍā Copper-plate Inscription, Viśvarūpasena (dated to twelfth century) gifted away the Pinjokaṣṭī-grāma in Vikramapura within the Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti.\textsuperscript{143} By the Calcutta Sāhitya Parisāt Copper-plate Inscription, Viśvarūpasena gifted away homestead lands to Brāhmaṇas in

\textsuperscript{138} R.C. Majumdar, History of Ancient Bengal, loc.cit., p.211.
\textsuperscript{139} Ibid., pp.284-289.
\textsuperscript{140} Ibid., pp.290-294.
\textsuperscript{141} Ibid., pp.298-302.
\textsuperscript{142} Ibid., pp.303-320.
\textsuperscript{143} Ibid., pp.312-320.
several villages within Puṇḍravardhāna-bhūkti.\textsuperscript{144} Similarly, by the Edilpur Copper-plate Inscription, Keśavasena (dated to twelfth century) gifted away land in the village Tālapāda in Vikramapura within the jurisdiction of Puṇḍravardhāna-bhūkti.\textsuperscript{145} These inscriptions prove that Puṇḍravardhāna continued to be a bhūkti under the Senas of Bengal throughout the twelfth century.

**Village Administration**

The epigraphic records give an idea about administrative units within the Puṇḍravardhāna bhūkti and also suggest that the nomenclatures of the units and the officials were more or less the same as in other parts of ancient India. The inscriptions recovered from the Puṇḍra region mentioned administrative divisions or units such as bhūkti, maṇḍala, visaya, viṭhī, caturaka, khāṭika, avṛti, bhāga and khaṇḍala.\textsuperscript{146} The bhūkti, which denoted a province in the Gupta period, seems to have carried the same meaning for the subsequent period falling under the scope of study. The inscriptions of Bengal suggest that there were at least three bhūktis, viz., Puṇḍravardhāna-bhūkti, Vardhamāna-bhūkti and Kankāgrāma-bhūkti. Puṇḍravardhanā was part of a kingdom or an empire. And if the evidence of the Mahāsthāṅgarh Inscription is accepted, Puṇḍravardhāna had formed part of the Mauryan Empire. The suffix -bhūkti added to Puṇḍravardhāna was first noticed in the Gupta inscriptions; hence it may have been made a province for the first time under the reign of the Guptas. The legacy apparently continued during the reign of the Pālas, Candras, Senas, etc. As the relevant sources ascribed to the post-Gupta period up to the thirteenth century indicate, the jurisdiction of Puṇḍravardhāna-bhūkti was enlarged to cover parts of eastern, northeastern and southeastern Bengal. In any case, northern Bengal formed the heartland of Puṇḍravardhāna or the Puṇḍra region. The records also show that the bhūktis were subdivided into visayas and maṇḍalas, which seemed to have denoted administrative units likened to districts or parts of a province. Thus Puṇḍravardhāna-bhūkti comprised Koṭivarṣa-visaya, Mahantaprakāśa-visaya, Sthālikaṇṭa-visaya, etc. However, the term maṇḍala has been used differently in different

\textsuperscript{144} Ibid., pp.321-330.
\textsuperscript{145} Ibid., pp.333-348.
\textsuperscript{146} Amitabha Bhattacharyya, op.cit., p.119.
inscriptions. Sometimes, it was larger than a viśaya and included a number of viśayas, while in other cases a mandala was only part of a viśaya. The Khālimpur Copper-plate grant mentioned Vyāghratāṭi-mandala that included the Mahantaprakāśa-viśaya. The Paścimbāg copper-plate grant mentioned Śrihaṭṭa-mandala that included three viśayas, viz., Candrapura, Garala and Pagara, whereas the Bāngarh Copper-plate Inscription of Mahipāla mentioned Gokālia-mandala as part of Koṭīvara-viśaya. Similarly, the Manahāli Copper-plate grant of Madanapāla referred to Halāvrīṭṭa-mandala as part of Manahāli-viśaya. There is also some doubt about the term viṭṭi. The Naihāti Copper-plate Inscription referred to Śivalpadakṣiṇa-viṭṭi as a territorial unit within Uttara-RādhamānAPER. All other units of land mentioned in the inscriptions were undoubtedly smaller than the mandalas and the viśayas.\(^{147}\)

The epigraphic data provides some clues about the personnel involved in the management of the various units within the Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti. According to the Dhānāidāha Copper-plate Inscription of Kumāragupta I (AD 432-433), the bhukti’s jury was made up of Brāhmaṇas, mahattāras and other officials forming the local governing body of the village within the viśaya of Khatapāra.\(^{148}\) The Dāmodarpur Copper-plate Inscription of Kumāragupta I (AD 444) named Ciratadatta as the Viceroy of Puṇḍravardhana under mahārajadhīrājī śrī Kumāragupta, and Kumāramātya Vetravarman as the head of the local government in the district of Koṭīvara, both of whom had been appointed by the emperor. The same inscription named Dhṛtipāla as the chief merchant, Bandhumitra as the chief caravan trader, Dhṛtimitra as the chief artisan, Sāmhapāla as the chief scribe, Karpatika as an influential Brāhmaṇa, and Rṣidatta, Jāyanandin and Vībhudatta as the record-keepers.\(^{149}\) The second Dāmodarpur Copper-plate Inscription of the same ruler (AD 448) repeated the names of the same officials and personages.\(^{150}\) The Bāigrām Copper-plate Inscription (Gupta Era 128=AD 448) addressed the administrative functionaries of Koṭīvara-viśaya, the village householders, including those in charge of

\(^{147}\) Ibid., pp.119-124.


\(^{149}\) Ibid., p.46.

\(^{150}\) Ibid., p.48.
administration, along with the foremost of the Brāhmaṇas and family headmen.\textsuperscript{151} The Pāhārpru Copper-plate (dated Gupta Era 159=AD 479) mentioned the city-council formed by the Brāhmaṇas and the householders, the village-heads, and also a board of record-keepers, presided over by the chief record keeper, Divakaranandin.\textsuperscript{152} The Dāmodarpur Copper-plate Inscription of the time of Buddhagupta (AD 482) referred to mahārāja adhirāja śrī Buddhagupta as the ruler of bhūmi (the Earth, possibly the Gupta Empire). It mentioned that the administering agent or the Viceroy of Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti was mahārāja Brāhmadatta. Here the Viceroy was designated ‘mahārāja’. The inscription also mentioned the leading men of the bhukti, the royal officials, the village-heads and the house-holders, besides the Brāhmaṇas and the record-keeper of Caṇḍagraṇa.\textsuperscript{153} Another Dāmodarpur Copper-plate Inscription of the time of Buddhagupta (AD 476-495) mentioned Jayadatta as the Viceroy of Puṇḍravardhana, Saṇḍaka as the administrator of Koṭivarṣa, Ribhupāla as the chief merchant, Vaśumitra as the chief caravan trader, Varādatta as the chief artisan, and Viṣṇudatta, Vijaynandin and Sthānunandin as the keepers of records.\textsuperscript{154}

The Dāmodarpur Copper-plate Inscription (AD 543), in which the name of the king between ‘śrī’ and ‘Gupta’ could not be deciphered by the epigraphists, informed that Devabhaṭṭaraka, Viceroy of Puṇḍravardhana, was a favourite son of the (Gupta) Emperor. Probably this confirmed the importance of Puṇḍravardhana as a bhukti within the Gupta Empire, since the son of the emperor himself was appointed Viceroy of that province. The inscription further informed that Devabhaṭṭaraka had appointed Svayāṃbhūdeva as the district administrator of Koṭivarṣa, which was prospering under the government of the Viceroy, and could boast of a strong army consisting of elephantry, cavalry and infantry. The administrators managed the affairs of the district with the help of the chief merchant Ribhupāla, the chief caravan trader Sthānudatta, the chief artisan Matidatta, the chief scribe Skanḍapāla, and the record-keepers Naranandin, Gopadatta and Bhatanandin.\textsuperscript{155}

\textsuperscript{151} Ibid., p.52.  
\textsuperscript{152} Ibid., p.56.  
\textsuperscript{153} Ibid., p.60.  
\textsuperscript{154} Ibid., pp.63-64.  
\textsuperscript{155} Ibid., p.75.
The Khālimpur Copper-plate Inscription of Dharmapāla, which granted land in four villages within Pundravardhana bhukti, informed a large number of royal dignitaries and officials and others about the donation of the land. The list included (i) rāja (all kings); (ii) rājanak (tributary chiefs); (iii) rājputra (princes); (iv) rājmātya (ministers); (v) senapati (commander-in-chief); (vi) visayapati (district officers); (vii) bhogapati sāsthādhikṛtya (sub-divisional officers); (viii) cauradharanika (revenue officers); dāndasakti (judicial officer); (ix) dāṇḍapāśika (police officers); (x) dūta (officers-in-charge of recruitment of messengers); (xi) gamāgamika (home couriers); (xii) gomahisajavikādhyagya (superintendents of elephants, horses, cows, buffaloes, goats and sheep, fleet, etc.); (xiii) sādhanika (treasury officers); (xiv) tārika (officers-in-charge of rafts); (xv) sāulkika (excise officers); (xvi) gaulmika (forest officers); (xvii) tadāyuktaka (supervisors); (xviii) vinīyuktakādi (special officers and others depending on royal favour); (xix) visayavavavaharit (the officers of visayas / divisions) such as (a) jyeṣṭhakāyastha (registrar), (b) mahāmahattāra (president), (c) mahattāra (vice-president), (d) dasagrāmi (head of ten villages), etc.\textsuperscript{156} Each category in the list ended with the expression “ādi” (“and the like”) which indicates beyond doubt that there were also others with different titles and designations. This elaborate list of the personages and officials involved in the administration and management of the province, districts and other smaller administrative divisions within them focused on the existence of a gradation or hierarchy among the officials. The social stratification, which is considered a precondition for the state and polity formation processes to emerge and develop, could have been an accomplished fact in the Pundra region by the turn of the thirteenth century.

The epigraphic records made it clear that the rulers of the states generated income by collecting taxes and tributes. The records of the Gupta period mentioned of the payment and exemption from payment of taxes and the price and reduction of price of land.\textsuperscript{157} The Pāla, Candra and Sena inscriptions, in particular, mentioned the different types of taxes. Besides kara (periodical tax) and upaskara (appurtenances tax), bhāgabhogakara (grain-share or payment in kind), hiranya (cash payment), pīṇḍaka (collective tax for a village),

\textsuperscript{156} Ibid., pp.82-83.
\textsuperscript{157} See, for example, the five Damodarpur Copper-plate grants and the Dhānāidaha Copper-plate grant discussed in this chapter.
**danda**śādyā (fine), śulka (toll), gaulma (police taxes) like cauradharana (tax levied on thieves), daśāparādha or daśāpochāra (tax levied after committing ten crimes), uparikāra (rent of temporary tenants), are frequently mentioned. The same set of inscriptions also mentioned the exemption from taxation of the land granted to the Brāhmaṇas and religious institutions, entitlement to immunity from all burdens and ten crimes for the donees and transfer of the rights to collect taxes from the kings to the donees.\(^\text{158}\) Such grant no doubt introduced the elements of the feudal mode of production in the Puṇḍra region.

Nonetheless, it is evident from the sources that no recognizable state or kingdom had emerged from indigenous roots from within the territory, which could independently rule over the entire Puṇḍra region for a considerable length of time. On the other hand, what has been discussed above may suffice to conclude that for the greater part of its history, Puṇḍravardhana was ruled from outside by the imperial powers such as the Mauryas and the Guptas. The fact that Puṇḍravardhana was a bhukti or province is clear indication that the region was a part of larger political formations with the centre of the supreme authority located outside the region. It was this central authority that appointed the provincial governor of its choice. According to local traditions, the earliest known ruler in the Puṇḍra region was, of course, Bālī, who was probably a local chieftain whose kingdom covered an area much larger than Puṇḍravardhana. In all probability Bālī was a Kirāta or tribal chief, since the Purānic and epic sources called him an ‘asura’, a contemptuous term reserved in Brahmanical literature for anyone who was outside the varna-based society. The same sources spoke of Bālī’s contact with the Brāhmaṇa sage, Dirghatamas, who is said to have significantly influenced Bālī on various matters. The sources also credited Bālī with establishing the vama system in his kingdom. However, the legends quoted in the Mahābhārata and repeated in various Purāṇas and also in Kālidāsa’s Raghuvamsa do not go beyond the story of Dirghatamas and providing a brief genealogy of Bālī. Whereas the concept of genealogy itself carries a strong message of

\(^{158}\) U.N. Ghoshal, *Contributions to the History of the Hindu Revenue System*, Calcutta, 1929; reprint 1972, Saraswat Library, Calcutta, pp.324-336. (e.g., Khalimpur Copper-plate grant of Dharmapāla, Beleva Copper-plate grant of Vigrāhapāla, Kamāuli Copper-plate grant of Vaiṣyadeva, Rāmpāla Copper-plate grant of Śrīcandra, Barackpur Copper-plate grant cf Vijayasena, Tarpaṇḍigha Copper-plate grant of Laksmanasena).
rudimentary state formation, there is no information on other aspects of state formation, like the organization and surveillance apparatus, or the nature of sustenance of the state or the method of surplus generation and appropriation in the legendary period. It may however be presumed that Bāli was the ruler of a principality, which, like all early states, had gradually evolved under his predecessors whose names figured in the genealogy. But the Puṇḍra kingdom is said to have come into existence under Bāli’s son, Puṇḍra, since, according to the legend, Bāli had divided his original principality into five and given each of his five sons a portion of the territory. One of those five sons was Puṇḍra who is said to have founded the Puṇḍra kingdom.

Subsequent sources referred to Puṇḍraka Vāsudeva, a powerful king in the region, who is said to have combined the powers of both political and religious leadership in his person. As the sources informed, Puṇḍraka Vāsudeva had a powerful army and fought several battles, including those against some of the important characters of the Mahābhārata, such as Jarāsandha, Kārṇa, Bhīma and Kṛṣṇa. Nevertheless, the Mahābhārata mentioned Puṇḍraka Vāsudeva as a vassal king, first under Jarāsandha, then under Kārṇa and finally under the Pāṇḍava king Yudhiṣṭhira, although at times he might have asserted himself as an independent ruler. The information taken together may be regarded as proof of the establishment of some form of monarchy; but there is virtually no data available on the decline or fall of the kingdom, which had once come under the rule of Puṇḍraka Vāsudeva.

Thus, in the early periods of its history the Puṇḍra region was ascribed to the rule of legendary chiefs, as may be inferred from the names and genealogies mentioned in the Mahābhārata and some of the Purāṇas. The state and polity formations in the region seem to have coincided with the rise of local chieftaincies. Bāli, one of the most important among them is said to have divided his territory among his five sons and the five new domains were named after them (viz., Aṅga, Vaṅga, Kaliṅga, Puṇḍra and Sumha). The subjects of the chief Puṇḍra (i.e., inhabitants of the Puṇḍra domain) possibly came to be known as the ‘Puṇḍras’. Local traditions attribute the foundation of the fortified city of Bāṇagaḍa (identified with the place that corresponds to modern Bāṇagarh) to the asura rāja Bāna. Another legendary king
was Paundraka Vásudeva, an important character in the *Mahābhārata*. However, during the historical period Puṇḍravardhana was an outlying administrative division and then became a province within the territorial domain of powerful dynasties (beginning from the Maurya through the Gupta period to the period of the Pālas, Candras and Senas).

It was from the fourth century BC that Puṇḍravardhana had been placed under the administrative jurisdiction of a governor or an administrator stationed at Puṇḍranagara within the Mauryan Empire. By the fourth-fifth century, Puṇḍravardhana had assumed the status of a *bhukti* or province under the Guptas. It continued to maintain this status under the Pālas, Candras, Varmans and Senas. In between the rule of the Guptas and that of the Pālas, Puṇḍravardhana was for some time a part of the Gauḍa kingdom under Śaśāṅka. Śaśāṅka’s capital was at Karnasuvarṇa (within the larger Puṇḍra region). The domain of the later Pāla kings had shrunk to a part of Bengal and they ruled with their headquarters in northern Bengal, which area had by then come to be known as Varendra. But all other imperial powers ruled over Puṇḍravardhana from their distant political centres located outside the region, i.e., from Kanauj, Rājagṛha or Pātaliputra. The Candras, Varmans and the Senas mostly ruled from eastern Bengal. There were, of course, always a large number of local chiefs or chieftains within the Puṇḍra-Varendra region. They were tributary to or were feudatories of the imperial powers but asserted or reasserted themselves during the periods of political interregnum or when the central authorities were weak or their states were declining. A feudatory Kaivartta chief, for example, revolted against the Pāla emperor and established the short-lived Kaivartta kingdom. The imperial authorities, however, conveniently involved the feudatories and the local personages in local administration.

The involvement of the local elements in administration was facilitated by the process of Sanskritisation or Brahmanisation, according to which process local elements were admitted to the Śūdra *varṇa* and most of them conferred with a peasant status. The process could perhaps be traced back to as early as the time of the composition of the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* (dated about the eighth-seventh century BC).159 The spread of Buddhism was parallel to the

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process of Sanskritisation in northern Bengal. Buddhism was already established in Bengal at the time of Hiuen Tsang’s visit during the seventh century, but it seems to have assumed more importance during the period of the reign of the Pāla rulers who were actively involved in patronising Buddhism in the land. The Buddhist sahajiyā songs in Bengali, popularly known as ‘mahipāla gīt’, are said to have touched the peasants and artisans of the region during the reign of the Pāla king Mahipāla. His son Nayapāla is said to have patronised the panditas and the latter made significant contributions to the growth of local Buddhist literature. Some of those panditas are said to have travelled to Tibet and China. In course of time the local communities of the region may have been culturally integrated into the Brahmanical-Buddhist folds. Some of them were given Sanskritised names. The peasants and artisans, who were categorized as Śūdras. apparently included the local communities also. The place-name ‘Gorājya’ of the Dāmodarpur Copper-plate Inscription of Kumāragupta I (AD 448) most likely stood for a locality of cattle-keeping communities. Another place-name, ‘Kuddālakhātaka’ of the Jagiivanpur Copper-plate Inscription of Mahendrapāla was probably a settlement of the agriculturists and might have indicated the use of spade at a transitory phase between shifting cultivation and the use of cattle-driven plough. The Manhāli Copper-plate Inscription of Madanapāladeva noticed the presence of ‘candalas’, indicating the emergence of Brahmanical norms in respect of caste distinctions based on the ideas of ‘polluted’ and ‘impure’ social groups associated with occupations such as removing unclean objects including corpses and carcasses, leather working, etc. Like the agriculturists, the artisans and manual labourers were also included among the Śūdras. The Deopārā Inscription of Vijayasena spoke about the artisans and guilds of artisans. Boats provided important means of communication over water. The sources made frequent references to boatmen (mānjhi) and occupational groups like the Kavarttas (fishermen), who formed a large

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160 Thomas Watters, op cit, p 189
162 Dāmodarpur Copper-plate grant of Kumāragupta I, v 9, in R R Mukherji & S K. Maity (eds.), op cit, p 47
165 Deopārā Stone Inscription of Vijayasena, v 36 in R R Mukherji & S K. Maity (eds.), op cit, p 258
community in northern Bengal. The Khālimpur Copper-plate Inscription of Dharmapāla mentioned ‘tārika’, an official in charge of boats and of collecting dues from the boatsmen. The same inscription informed that the king had a large navy and could easily throw a boat-bridge across the Gangā. Similarly, the Rāmacaritam informs that during the final encounter against the Kaivartta chief, the allied army of Rāmapāla threw a bridge of boats across the Gangā, crossed the river, destroyed the Kaivartta stronghold, and took the Kaivartta chief, Bhīma, captive. From the evidence of the relevant sources it may be inferred that the Kaivarttas were among the powerful local communities who resisted the hegemonistic policies of the imperial authorities; while the Cedis, Nāgas and Kāmbojas had established their own territorial domains in northern Bengal at different points of time. The chiefs or ‘kings’ of those communities may have been reduced to tributary status by the ruling dynasties from the period of the Pālas. The Kaivartta chiefs Dibyoka, Rudoka, Bhīma or Hari seem to have been the ‘native’ inhabitants of the land, who had served the Pālas in the capacity of tributaries or feudatories. Bhīmapāla of Pādi was perhaps another such feudatory under Rāmapāla. Śūdraka, a high functionary in Gaya under Nayapāla, and his son, Viṣvaśīma, who was credited with erecting a temple at that site, also seem to have belonged to the ‘native’ stock of northern Bengal. As some of them were mentioned by their Sanskritised names and surnames, it is difficult to recognize the ethnic identity of the feudatories and officials from the evidence of the relevant sources. For instance, even the Kāmboja kings adopted the surname Pāla. There were also officials, elders, artisans, merchants and scribes named in various inscriptions with the same suffix (-pāla). The Faridpur Copper-plate of Dharmāditya (sixth century) mentioned “the common folk, headed by village-heads — Itita, Kulacandra, Garuḍa, Vṛhaccatta, Āluka, Anācāra, Bhāśāitya, Sulladeva, Ghoṣacandra, Animitra. Guṇacandra, Kālasukha, Kulasvāmin, Durilava,

169 Ibid., Canto II, v.8, p.126.
171 Supra, 112n.
172 For example, Dhānāīda Copper-plate grant, Dāmodarpur Copper-plate grant (AD 444), Dāmodarpur Copper-plate grant (AD 448), etc. in R.R. Mukherji & S.K. Maity (eds.), op.cit., pp.43, 46, 49.
Satyacandra, Arjuna, Bappa and Kundalipta.\textsuperscript{173} The village elders, urban officials and others named in various inscriptions recovered from sites across the region had similar names. Therefore, it is not unlikely that most of the commoners in the villages, including the village-heads were Sanskritised or Brahmanised ‘sons of the soil’. All told, cultural assimilation seems to have been the key to state and polity formations involving the local elements.

\textsuperscript{173} Faridpur Copper-plate grant of Dharmaditya in R.R. Mukherji & S.K. Maity (eds.), \textit{op.cit.}, p.77.