Chapter V

SETTLEMENT PATTERNS

The settlement patterns in early times were generally influenced by the physical features of the geographical space. Physical features, particularly the natural drainage, and the climatic conditions and fertility of the soil — all of these were important for the purpose of economic activities, mode of production and subsistence of the people. The geologists identified the region of Bengal as a 'delta', whereas the scholars dealing with the history of Bengal were inclined to highlight variations in the topography of the entire area for the purpose of explaining the historical processes. For example, Barrie M. Morrison divided the whole of Bengal into five distinct major geographical regions, viz., the deltaic plain, the Tippera surface, the Sylhet basin, the Madhupur jungle, and Varendra uplands (made of Pleistocene alluvium). Deltaic Bengal is bounded by the Tippera hills on the east, the Shillong plateau and Nepal Terai on the north and the highlands of the Rajamahal and Chota Nagpur on the west. Whereas the deltaic plain, the Tippera surface and the Sylhet basin consist of recent alluvial deposits, the Madhupur jungle and the Varendra uplands, which are contiguous to one another, comprise large tracts of ancient Pleistocene alluvium and are formed of oxidized ferruginous soils. The twin geological region (Madhupur-Varendra) has remarkable drainage pattern and abundant vegetation cover. The Varendra area, which measures three thousand six hundred square miles, stretches from the northern reach of the flood plains of the Ganga to the alluvial fan of the Nepal foothills. The Brahmaputra marks its eastern boundary and separates it from Madhupur, whereas its western edge merges into the lands lying across the Garo-Rajmahal gap.

2 Ibid., p.9.
3 Ibid., p.8. This Bengal Delta consisted “80,000 square miles” (or 1,48,000 square kilometers).
4 Supra, 2n.
5 Ibid.
Varendra area, identified elsewhere as the heartland of Pundravardhana, which may well be called the Puṇḍra-Varendra region, was the more ancient part of Bengal. By analyzing the distribution of population in the 1941 Census of undivided Bengal, Morrison observed that the Madhupur jungle and Varendra were more thinly populated than other parts of Bengal.

Historically, Puṇḍra-Varendra was an important region of early Bengal. Many politically important urban centres of ancient and early medieval Bengal, such as Puṇḍranagara (Mahāsthānagar), Bāṅgarh, Pāhārpur, and Gauḍa-Pāṇḍua were located within the region. The Mahāsthān Inscription of the Mauryan period, said to be the oldest epigraphic record found in Bengal, referred to Puṇḍranagara. But this urban centre, along with Gauḍapura and Gauḍa had attained significance as early as the sixth-third centuries BC, as known from the literary sources, such as the Aṣṭadhyāyī of Pāṇini, the Arthasastra of Kautilya, and the Harāha inscription of the Maukhari king, Iśānavarman. By the medieval period, Gauḍa (or Gauḍa-Pāṇḍua) came to be known as Laksmanāvati (Lakhnāuti). Varendrī (Varendra) found mention in the Tālcher Grant of Gayādatuṅgadeva (dated the last quarter of the tenth century), the Kavipraśasti of the Rāmacaritam, and the Sīlimpur, Tarpanādighi and Mādhāinagar inscriptions as a flourishing urban centre within Puṇḍravardhana. It may be presumed that the growth of these important urban centres had been possible because of the support derived from the resource-rich rural hinterlands. The Himalayan streams passing through this region fed the major rivers of Bengal, including the Karatoya (which river still flows by the ruins of the ancient city at Mahāsthānagarh, although the volume of water has undoubtedly decreased). However, all the major rivers have changed their courses during the last three hundred years thereby causing major problems in tracing the ancient settlements in the region based on the evidence of the available sources.

^ Supra, Chapter III.
^ Supra, 2n. Also see Map 3: Political Divisions of Ancient Bengal.
^ B.M. Morrison, op.cit., pp.6-7.
^ Barun De et al., Introducing West Bengal, Government of West Bengal, Calcutta, 1994, p.3; Irfan Habib, People's History of India - Part 1: Prehistory, Aligarh Historians' Society & Tulika Books, New Delhi,
The paucity of reliable data makes it almost impossible to reconstruct the settlement patterns in the region pertaining to the prehistoric period. Admittedly, southwestern Bengal revealed all the major stages of prehistoric tool traditions; but in the northern division of Bengal the evidence is limited mainly to scattered finds of neoliths. Scholars had therefore presumed that much of the landmass in the region in pre-historic times had been covered with thick forest and that the hunting-gathering and pastoral economy of the tribal people had dominated the scene. They suggested that things had changed to some extent in the chalcolithic phase.\(^{12}\) As the archaeological evidence shows, chalcolithic sites are located over a fairly wide geographic area all over Bengal. Dating from the middle of the second millennium BC to about 500 BC, the chalcolithic settlements are said to have marked the beginnings of settled village life in Bengal with agriculture as the mainstay of the economy. At least two such major sites — viz., Mahāsthāngarh (Bagura district, Bangladesh) and Bāngarh (West Dinajpur district, West Bengal, India) — are in northern Bengal which corresponds to the erstwhile Puṇḍra region. Perhaps these sites emerged in the early historical period out of chalcolithic settlements in the region.\(^{13}\) On the basis of excavated archaeological evidence, Dilip K. Chakrabarti observed that there is clear evidence that the undivided districts of Dinajpur, Rajshahi and Bagura witnessed the beginnings of human occupation in the third century BC, if not earlier. In that portion of Dinajpur which is now in Bangladesh, no early historic occupation level or evidence has yet been unearthed; but across the border in the West Dinajpur district of West Bengal, the excavation in Bāngarh or the site of ancient Koṭivarsa, which was a visaya in the bhukti of Puṇḍravardhana according to the Gupta inscriptions, has clearly yielded Mauryan occupation level. In the Rajshahi district of Bangladesh, the evidence of punch-marked coins discovered in Fetgrām and Bāigācchā and the surface finds of the NBP (Northern Black Pottery) at Halud Vihār near Pāhārpur in the same region are indeed considerable and the significance of this evidence cannot be disputed. Similarly, Pāthārghātā in the Bagura district of Bangladesh is also a major early

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\(^{12}\) Ibid.

\(^{13}\) Irfān Habib, op.cit., p.10; J. Coggin Brown, op.cit.
historic site both because of the surface occurrence of the NBP and the find of a female torso which is unmistakably of Kushana origin. The excavations at Mahāsthānagarh, undoubtedly one of the major pre-historic sites in the subcontinent, unearthed the occurrence of the Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW), terracotta plaques of the ‘Suṅga style’, a bronze mirror of the ‘Gandhara style’ and a good number of punch-marked coins, besides other objects. It bears noting that Mahāsthānagarh is also situated in the Bagura district of Bangladesh.

North Bengal arose as an important region in that period because of the emergence, growth and development of urban centres in the region. Mahāsthānagarh, earlier called Puṇḍranagara or Puṇḍravardhana-pura, was the seat of political authority of Puṇḍravardhana, while the site of the fortified town in Bāṅgarh was attributed by local traditions to the demon king Bāṇa, whose wife Kālārāni’s name was associated with a tank called Kālādīghighi at a place situated near Gaṅgārāmpur. This urbanization process perhaps had been accelerated only through proper management of land and water resources which augmented the agricultural productivity. The earliest epigraph of Bengal, i.e., Mahāsthān Fragmentary Stone Plaque Inscription, which mentioned Puṇḍranagara, was discovered in Mahāsthānagarh. The excavated objects in Mahāsthān, like NBPW, terracotta plaques of the ‘Suṅga style’, punch-marked coins, a bronze mirror of the Gandhara style, and other objects, undoubtedly proclaim the pride of Mahasthan as an early urban settlement in Bengal. However, the meagre chalcolithic data or a single fragmentary stone inscription can hardly be regarded as sufficient evidence to trace the settlement pattern in the entire region. For this, we have to look for the epigraphic sources, particularly the land-grants, pertaining to a fairly long time-span.

14 D.K. Chakrabarti, Ancient Bangladesh – A Study of the Archaeological Sources, OUP, Delhi, 1992, p.62. Earlier, Bendapudi Subbarao had also said: “The NBP spread over various parts of the country from Taxila in the North-west to Gaur and Pandua in the east and Amaravati in the south.” See Bendapudi Subbarao, The Personality of India, M.S. University, Baroda, 1958, p.46.


Land Grants and Rural Settlements

The Gupta period witnessed a series of land grants made by the rulers and the officials. The grants were recorded in copper-plates and gave valuable information about the gifted land including its physiography, composition of the settlement, economic products and cultural profiles. Such details became particularly evident since the reign of the Gupta emperor Kumāragupta I (fifth century). However, as B.D Chattopadhyay perceptively observed, conclusive details of the locations of the land grants are generally not available in the early epigraphic records from northern Bengal, but the information provided by the inscriptions are important for valuable clues to the settlements. The veracity of this observation may be examined in the following discussion.

The Dhanaidaha Copper-plate Inscription of Kumāragupta I (dated Gupta Era 113 = AD 432-433) was the first among the epigraphic records of the Gupta period to throw interesting light on the social composition of the village in which the land was granted. The earliest epigraphic reference to the donation of land to a Brāhmaṇa in Bengal was in this copper-plate grant discovered in Dhanaidaha, a village four-five miles to the north of Ishurdi town in the Natore subdivision of the Rajshahi district. The inscription recorded the donation of one kulyavāpa of cultivated land measuring 8 x 9 reeds by an official (mahattāra) of Brāhmaṇa background, who had purchased the plot from the authority of the visaya. The grant was made in favour of a Chandogya Brāhmaṇa named Varahasvamin (of the Sāma Vedic school and a resident of Bhrāṭrkāṭaka). The grant was issued from Khadapara visaya. Among the prominent members of the village jury and the local governing body of the village mentioned in the grant were two Brāhmaṇas and sixteen mahattāras. These eighteen members and others were informed of the donation of

17 B D Chattopadhyaya, Aspects of Rural Settlement and Rural Society in Early Medieval Bengal, K P Bagchi & Co, Calcutta, 1999, p 21 For details of settlements see Table II Land Grants & Settlements in Pundravardhana (Pundra heartland / Northern Bengal)
19 Ibid, p 41, Barrie M Morrison, op cit, p 157, B D Chattopadhyaya, op cit, p 21
20 R R Mukherji & S K Maty (eds ), op cit, pp 42-43, p 11 in the text of the inscription For the donor’s name, ibid, pp 42-43, 11 4-6
21 Ibid, pp 43-44, 11 7, 9, Puspa Niyogi, op cit , p 20, Barrie M Morrison, op cit, p 157
land. The record provides evidence of a mixed population in the village as it mentioned at least three main categories of inhabitants in the village, i.e., (a) *pratīvesi-kutumba* or a community of cultivators;\(^{22}\) (b) two Brāhmaṇas named Śivaśarman and Nāgaśarman,\(^{23}\) and (c) sixteen *mahāttarās* or officials — Vikīrtti, Kṣemadatta, Gosṭhaka, Varggapāla, Pingala, Šunkaka, Kāla, (a name ending with) viṣṇu, Devaśarman, Viṣṇubhadra, Khāsaka, Ramaka, Gopala, (a name ending with) Śrībhadra, Somapāla, and Rāma.\(^{24}\) The text however did not mention the boundaries of the donated land or the name of any river or hill or any other physiographic landmark in the village. Nonetheless, it is clear from the text that there were cultivators and Brāhmaṇas, besides the officials (*mahāttarās*), some of whom were Brāhmaṇas. The epigraph also specifically mentioned the donation of ‘cultivable land’ (*kedḍa sthala*), thereby distinguishing it from the uncultivable or ‘waste’ land (*khila*) and the homestead land (*vāstu-bhūmi*).\(^{25}\) The fact that a village official had purchased the plot of land from the *viṣaya* authority seems to suggest that the land in the village was collectively or communally owned or held by the village authority, or perhaps by somebody on behalf of the village community, and could be purchased by an individual for donating it to the Brāhmaṇas or for similar or other purposes. That the settlement of the learned Brāhmaṇas belonging to different schools of the Vedas in the village was being encouraged can also be inferred from the text of the inscription. The instant case of donation of land to a Chandogya Brāhmaṇa may have meant the demand for the particular Brāhmaṇa specialists in the village for ritual and educational purposes. Further, the text of the inscription indicated the heterogeneous composition of the village population.

The next important inscription was the Sultānpur Copper-plate grant of Kumāragupta I (dated Gupta Era 120 = AD 440), recovered in 1937 from Sultānpur (which is presently a suburb of Naogaon town in Rajshahi district, as an heirloom of a family originally from Kalāikuri, four miles to the west of Santāhār junction) in the Bagura district. It was issued


from Pūrṇakauśikā. According to the inscription, ten influential persons purchased nine kulyavāpas of ‘waste’ and fertile land (khila kṣetra) and donated the same to three Brāhmaṇas (viz., Devabhaṭṭa, Amaraḍaṭṭa and Mahāsenadāṭṭa) for performing the pāncamahāyajna ceremony. The group of ten individuals who purchased the land from the local authorities for the purpose of making the bequest included the kulika (named Bhīma); the Kāyasthas (Prabhucandra, Rudrāṭa, Devadatta, Lakṣmana, Kantideva, Sambhudaṭṭa, Krṣṇadāsa); and the puṣtapāla (i.e., the record-keepers, Simhanandin and Yaśodāman). The recipients of the gift belonged to the Vājasaneya school of Vedic learning and were residents of Puṇḍravardhana. This epigraphic record informed that the land was ‘purchased’ by the group of individuals of the village ‘from the village authority’ and donated it to three Brāhmaṇas who were also ‘residents within Puṇḍravardhana’, although they may have been from a different village. The significant information is the fact of the privatization process, as the land could be sold, bought and donated. The seller was the village authority, perhaps in the capacity of the land-holder (or land-owner) on behalf of the entire village community. The buyers were a group of individuals who belonged to the village itself. Equally significant is the information regarding internal migration of Brāhmaṇas within Puṇḍravardhana, probably motivated by various interests. Perhaps there was no scholar in the village belonging to the Vājasaneya specialization. It is possible that some of the village residents wanted the presence of the specific Vedic specialization for educational and ritual purposes.

There were other instances of transfer by sale and purchase of the waste land for various purposes. Although the epigraphs made no direct reference to the seller, it would appear that land was purchased from the village authority or the visaya authority (visayapati) within whose jurisdiction the transferable ‘waste land’ was available. Two of the five copper-plates discovered at Dāmodarapur in Dinajpur district (northern Bengal) were issued during Kumāragupta I’s reign. According to the first Dāmodarapur Copper-plate grant (dated Gupta Era 124 = AD 444) issued from Koṭivārśa-visaya, a Brāhmaṇa named Kārpaṭika purchased one kulyavāpā of unbroken or un-alienated khila kṣetra (‘waste’ and

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26 Barrie M. Morrison, op.cit., p.85; Puspa Niyogi, op.cit., p.110.
27 Ibid.
28 Barrie M. Morrison, op.cit., p.86.
fertile land) in the north-western region of Dongā, a village in Koṭivarṣa-viśaya, for the performance of the agnihotra rites as per nivīḍharmā. This record did not mention anything about the seller of the land. Notably, though, it spoke of waste land (of course, on the bordering area) of an established village that could be transferred for a ritual purpose and the practice of direct purchase by an individual for a specific purpose. Such instances of the granting of land by the state or king of both waste land and homestead land for religious purposes are not wanting. Kumāragupta I’s Bāigrām (Vāigrāma) Copper-plate grant (dated Gupta Era 128 = AD 448, discovered at Bāigrām in Bagura district) issued from Pancanagara mentioned that land measuring three kulyavāpas and two sthala dronavāpas respectively of khila (waste land) and vāstu (homestead) land was granted to two brothers, Bhoyila and Bhāskara. The waste land granted to Bhoyila was in Trivrā. It was made over for the purpose of repairing the shrine and image — as well as maintaining worship at the shrine — of the deity Govindasvamin, which was in a dilapidated condition. The purpose of the grant was also for ensuring regular supply of perfumery, incense, lamp and flowers for the worship of the deity. One dronavāpa of homestead land was granted in Śrīgohāḷī for dwelling houses and gardens in favour of the two brothers. Trivrā and Śrīgohāḷī were either parts of, or connected with, Vāigrāma (possibly the ancient name of modern Bāigrām). Since the grant was also for repair of the dilapidated temple in the mid-fifth century, the temple had probably been in existence since an earlier date. The waste land was perhaps acquired to repair and maintain the dilapidated temple out of the income of that land by developing and cultivating the same. However, the fact of separate measurement and location for the homestead land confirms that land in the villages during that period had been divided into different categories, viz., waste land, homestead land, and cultivable land. The kulyavāpa measurement applied to waste land and cultivable land; the dronavāpa measurement was applicable only to the homestead land.

31 Barrie M. Morrison, op.cit., p.158.
32 Ibid., pp.85-90, for the units of measurement.
The epigraphic records also make it clear that the population in the area was growing on account of the settlement of the new-comers; the facilities for agriculture and marketing were also simultaneously developing. Thus Kumāragupta I’s second Dāmodarpur Copper-plate grant (dated Gupta Era 129 = AD 449), issued from Kotivarṣa-visaya, for example, mentioned that five dronas of land lying west of the village named ‘Airavarta-Gorāya’ was purchased and gifted to a petitioner (whose name is illegible in the record) according to the customary rule of apradāksayanīvi, for the performance of the pāncamahāyajna or the five daily sacrifices. D C Sircar opined that the phrase ‘hatta-pānakaih’ mentioned in the inscription may have implied that apart from the donated land, the grantee had the right to use the canals excavated for the purpose of watering the field. R.R. Mukherji and S K Maity translated the phrase as “along with the market places and tanks”. The evidence of this inscription points to the existence of markets, excavated canals and tanks for irrigation in the area.

The reign of Buddhagupta witnessed the issue of at least three land grants in Pundravardhana-bhukti, viz., the Paharpur Copper-plate grant (dated Gupta Era 159 = AD 479), the third Dāmodarpur Copper-plate grant (dated Gupta Era 163 = AD 482) and the fourth Dāmodarpur Copper-plate Inscription (not dated, but possibly after Gupta Era 163). The Paharpur Copper-plate grant (which was issued from Pundravardhana) mentioned that a Brahmana, Nathasarman, and his wife, Rāmī, purchased a few plots of khila (unused) and vāstu (homestead) land for the purpose of worship and construction of a resting place in a vihāra at Vata-Gohālī. The donated plots were scattered in four villages: one and a half dronavāpa of homestead land at Vata-Gohālī, four dronavāpas at Pṛśtimapottaka (in possession of Jambudeva) four dronavāpas at Gośāṭapuṇṭja and two dronavāpas along with two ādhavāpas at Nitva-Gohālī (which had been in the possession of Mulanāgiratta). All the four villages seem to have been located near Paharpur (the find spot of the copper-plate), although those places have yet to be identified. The land

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31 R R Mukherji and S K Maity (eds.), op cit, pp 48-49, Barrie M Morrison, op cit, p 158, Puspa Niyogi, op cit, p 20
32 Barrie M Morrison, op cit, pp 48, 110
33 Quoted in R R Mukherji and S K Maity (eds.), op cit, p 49
34 Ibid, p 49
thus granted was to be utilized for the supply of sandal wood, incense, flowers, lamps, etc., to the shrine, and for the construction of a resting-shed and making a garden. It was also meant for the worship of Arhats by the Jaina monks in the vihāra at Vaṭa-Gohāli, which was inhabited by the disciples and grand-disciples of the great Jaina monk Guhanandin of the Pañcaśūpanikāya sect, originally from Varanasi but settled at Vaṭa-Gohāli.38

Buddhagupta’s Pāhārpur Copper-plate Inscription was perhaps the first to have recorded the grant of land in Bengal during the Gupta rule in favour of a non-Brahmanical (i.e., Jaina) religious establishment. The later Gupta rulers also encouraged land grants to the religious establishments associated with the non-Brahmanical sects that were making inroads into Bengal. In fact, it is evident from the information contained in the inscription that the land granted to the Guhanandin establishment spread over four villages (viz., Vaṭa-Gohāli, Prṣṭimapottaka, Goṣṭapaṇja and Mūlanāgirāṭa) in northern Bengal. This may have been indicative of the popularity of Jainism in the area covered by those villages. The instant epigraphic record is proof of the donation of land by common citizens after purchasing it from individual proprietors.

Buddhagupta’s third Dāmodarpur Copper-plate grant (dated Gupta Era 163 = AD 482) was issued from Palāśavṛndaka. It recorded the purchase of one kulyavāpa of khila (waste) land acquired from one Nāgadeva, a resident of Caṇḍragrāma, by Nābhaka, the headman of the same village. The grant was for settling some distinguished Brāhmaṇas.39 The donated land was situated in the northern boundary of the village called Vaígrama.40 The gift of khila land to the Brāhmaṇas is perhaps indicative of the non-availability of vāstu (homestead) land and of facilitating initiative on the part of the donees to convert the khila (waste) land into cultivable and habitable land. A situation like this may have arisen on account of population growth in the locality as a result of internal migrations within the region and from elsewhere into the locality. Similarly, Buddhagupta’s third

copper-plate, viz., the fourth Dāmodarpur Copper-plate grant (dated Gupta Era 163 = AD 476-495) recorded the purchase of a large plot of vāstu land by the nāgarasresthin (city-mayor) Ribhupāla, in the neighbourhood of land that he had bequeathed earlier in the village Dongāgrāma in the forest region of Himavacchikara in favour of the gods Kokāmukhasvāmīn (Śiva) and Śvetavarāhasvāmīn (Viṣṇu). The donated land was to the tune of four kulyāvāpas and seven kulyāvāpas respectively. The grant was made for the purpose of erecting two temples and two store-houses for the worship of the same gods.\textsuperscript{41} The shrines of Kokāmukhasvāmīn and Śvetavarāhasvāmīn situated in the Himavacchikara (the snowy mountains located in modern Nepal) were great centres of pilgrimage. Hence the document seems to bear testimony to the movement of pilgrims from Pundra upto Nepal to worship the manifestation of the Brahmanical deities in those ancient shrines.

Vainyagupta’s Guṇāigarh Copper-plate (dated Gupta Era 188 = AD 507) recorded the grant of eleven pātakas of khila land as an agrahāra (tax-free holding) in the village of Kānteudaka. The grant was made in favour of the Vaivarttika congregation of monks in the aśrama vihāra dedicated to Ārya-Āvalokiteśvara. The recipient was ācārya Śāntideva, the Buddhist monk of the Mahāyāna school. The purpose of the grant was to ensure supply of gandha (perfume), puspa (flowers), dip (light), dhūp (incense), etc., on the occasion of worshipping the Buddha three times a day in the abode of the Buddhist monks of the Vaivarttika sect of the Mahāyāna school. The school is said to have been constructed by ācārya Śāntideva himself in the vihāra dedicated to Āvalokiteśvara (Buddha). The grant was also for the purpose of meeting the expenses of garments, food, beds, seats, medicines, etc., which were to be provided to the host of monks, and also for undertaking repair works on the monastery whenever required. The donated land included eleven pātakas of uncultivated land in five plots situated in the village of Kānteudaka.\textsuperscript{42} The Guṇāigarh Copper-plate inscription gave details of the boundaries of the donated plots and shed light on the settlement patterns in Pundravardhana during the period of Gupta rule. The inscription mentioned the creation of an agrahāra in the well-

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., pp.61-62.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., pp.65-70; Barrie M. Morrison, op.cit., pp.92, 158.
settled village of Kānteudaka in which the kṣetra land covered a wide cross-section of the society — from individual land-holders to groups of individuals — many of whom were mentioned by their caste affiliations, viz., Doṣī, Vaidya and Vilâla. It provided additional information on the royal monastery, the monastery of the Buddhist ācārya, and the temple of Pradyumneśvara.43

For the first time the Gunāigarh Copper-plate Inscription also recorded the instance of a land grant to a Buddhist monk in the Puṇḍravardhana-bhūtī. The measurement of the land was given as eleven pāṭakas. This measurement denoted the common trend among the later Gupta rulers to encourage the growth of non-Brahmanical sects in order to sustain their rule and enjoy popularity among the general population. It also indicated the popularity of Buddhism among the common people of the region, for whom trade may have offered additional or alternative source of income. The inscription mentioned a number of navigable rivulets, water channels and ports, thereby even hinting at the existence of river trade. In the portion referring to the boundaries of the low-lying lands belonging to the royal monastery, the inscription mentioned two ports at Cinḍāmanī and Nagarasū with one channel running between them, another channel opening to boats and connecting to the lake, and a navigable channel leading to Praḍāmāra. The document also mentioned the dry rivulet Hacāta which perhaps indicated the role of rivers in defining the geographical limits of an area particularly in the context of the political and geographical divisions. The tanks and rivers along the settlement areas point to the fact that surface water played an integral role in the growth of human habitats in their proximity.44 Thus the Gunāigarh Copper-plate Inscription of Vainyagupta gave important information on the settlement pattern in the villages, the growth of non-Brahmanical sects (in this case, Buddhism) and the role of rivers in determining the pattern of human settlements and the boundaries of the geographical divisions. Significantly, the important feature of settlement patterns near the rivers also emerged from this record.

Dāmodaragupta’s Dāmodarpur Copper-plate Inscription (dated Gupta Era 214 = AD 544, the fifth charter to be recovered from Dāmodarpur) recorded the purchase of five *kulyavāpas* of *khila* (waste) and *vāstu* (homestead) land by the *kulapattraṇa* (nobleman) Amṛtadeva from Ayodhyā for the purpose of donation to the shrine of Śvetavarāhasvāmin in the forest region of Himavacchikhara. According to the terms of the grant, the income from the donated land was to be used to defray the cost of perfume, flowers, light, incense, etc., in maintaining the daily worship of Viṣṇu in the shrine and the cost of repairing the shrine whenever necessary.\(^{45}\) Evidently, the donated land was in the same sub-Himalayan region wherein land had earlier been granted in favour of Viṣṇu’s shrine by the third Dāmodarpur Copper-plate Inscription of Buddhagupta. It proved the popularity of Viṣṇu worship and also the movement of people between the two regions during that period. Buddhagupta’s third Dāmodarpur Copper-plate grant recorded the grant of seven *kulyavāpas* of *vāstu* land, while Dāmodaragupta’s Dāmodarpur Copper-plate grant recorded that five *kulyavāpas* of *khila* and *vāstu* land were donated to the shrine of Viṣṇu. Perhaps the growth of population in the region and the spread of technology into this mountainous segment of the province made it imperative to reclaim waste land and convert the plots into cultivable land. The document also hinted at the policy (among the Gupta rulers) of facilitating the growth of self-contained settlements. Dāmodargupta’s Dāmodarpur charter is in fact the last known document so far to have registered the donation of land in Puṇḍravardhana-*bhukti* during the Gupta period.

The settlements grew and expanded further under the rule of the Pālas of Bengal. The Pālas made generous land grants to the Brāhmaṇas in the Puṇḍravardhana region. Some of the grants issued under their rule and in post-Pāla times induced the settlement of enlightened, high caste Brāhmaṇas in the region. For example, Dharmapāla’s Khālimpur Copper-plate Inscription (32\(^{nd}\) regnal year, dated AD 802) issued from Pātaliputra, recorded the donation of land in the four villages of Kraunca-śvabhragrama, Mādhasammalī, Palīṭāka and Gopipallī in Mahantāprakāśa-visaya of Puṇḍravardhana-*bhukti* in favour of the temple of Nanna-Nārāyaṇa. The donation was made by royal consent on the request of the *mahāsamantādhipati* Nārāyaṇavarman through the *yuvarājā*

(crown prince) Tribhuvanapāla. Besides the four villages, a ḍhatikā (market) and talapāṭaka (government land) were also gifted by the charter. The reference to a market (ḥatiṅkā) along with the donated land indicated the economic viability of that part of the Puṇḍrabardhana-bhukti. The grant also referred to 'talapāṭaka' or land under the control of the crown, which perhaps indicated scarcity of land around the beginning of Pāla rule. It appears therefore that some plots of land (probably kṣetra or cultivable land) had to be kept in reserve or under the control of the government. The Khālimpur copper-plate made frequent references to the river Gāngetic, to channels extending to the Gāngetic as well as the Koṇṭhiyā srota (channel), Kāṇḍa dvipikā (a small island), marshy land, ditches, āli (embankment) as the boundaries of the four villages. It also referred to date and palm trees. Furthermore it highlighted the fertility of the land within the donated villages on account of its proximity to various water bodies. It was perhaps for all these reasons that some areas of land were reserved by the government (as talapāṭaka) and that markets (ḥatiṅkā) grew in the area. This supposition perhaps assumes credibility when placed against the backdrop of the practice of donating the market along with the villages.

Vigrahapāla III's Āmgāchi Copper-plate grant (12th regnal year, dated to AD 1055) recorded the donation of two dronas, six kulyas, three kākinis and two unmanas of land in the village of Vishamapura together with a part of the village of Dandatrāhesvāra in Vrah (brāhmanī-grāma maṇḍala in Koṭivarsa-visaya lying within Puṇḍrabardhana-bhukti. The grant was in favour of a Sāmavedin Brāhmaṇa, Khoduladevasarman, belonging to the Kauthuma śākhā. The donee, as mentioned in the charter, was the son of Arkadeva and the grandson of Padmavanadeva of the Śāṇḍilya gotra and the Devala pravara. The family had migrated from Krodaiica via Matsya-vāsa. At the time the grant was issued the family was already settled in Chatrarāma within the Puṇḍrabardhana-bhukti. The gift was made on the occasion of a lunar eclipse. The Āmgāchi Copper-plate Inscription is indeed a unique inscription in that it not only registered a land grant within the

Pundravardhana-bhukti but also provided the genealogy of the donee from the line of his grandfather including the ancestral home. In fact, the record set the trend of tracing the donees’ genealogy in the grants ascribed to the period of the Pāla, Sena and the Candra dynasties. Another significant feature of the grants issued during the reign of these ruling families was the transfer of land by the rulers themselves rather than any official or individual involved in the governance of the areas in which the land was donated. Yet another significant development was the visible change noticed in the values of the units of measurement between the Gupta period and the Pāla times.

Mahīpāla I’s Bāngaḍa Copper-plate Inscription (9th regnal year, dated to AD 988-1023) was issued from Vilāsapura. It recorded the transfer of the major part of the Kurata-pallika village with the exception of the part known as Cuta-pallika in Koṭivarṣa-visaya within the Pundravardhana-bhukti. The grant was issued by the king in favour of one Yajurvedin Brāhmaṇa named Kṛṣṇadityaśarman, who was a student of the Vajasenayin school.49 The donee belonged to the Parāśara Sakti gotra and the Vasiṣṭha and Parāśara pravaras. The source referred to the donee as the son of Bhaṭṭaputra Madhusādana and the grandson of Bhaṭṭaputra Hṛṣikeśa, an immigrant from Hastipada (identified with a place in the Madhyadesa or United Province).50 The evidence confirmed the connection of this family with Bengal for a period of at least three generations before it took up residence in Vellāvagrāma at the time the grant was issued.51 This grant thus provided the genealogical table of the donee’s family.

Madanapāla’s Manhali Copper-plate grant (8th regnal year, dated to the first half of the 12th century) was issued from Rāmāvati. It recorded his grant of some part of the village of Kāśṭhāgarī in Halāvartta-mandala of Koṭivarṣa-visaya in Pundravardhana-bhukti in favour of the Brāhmaṇa, Vateśvaravāmi-Śarman of the Kautsa gotra and Śaṇḍilya and Asitadevala pravaras. The donee was mentioned as a specialist in the Kauthuma śākhā of the Sāmaveda. The donation was in the form of daksina (fee) to the donee for reciting the Mahābhārata to the chief queen (Paṭṭamahādevi), Citramāṭikā. The recipient, a resident

49 Ibid., pp.8, 21; Barrie M. Morrison, op.cit., p.165.
50 Ibid., pp.96, 113; Puspa Niyogi, op.cit., pp.44-45.
51 Ibid., TS.No.22.

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of Campāhiṇī, was the son of Saunakasvāmin, and the grandson of Prajāpatiśvāmin and
great-grandson of Vatsasvāmin. The Mahāli Copper-plate Inscription of Madanapāla is
thus the first known inscription to have recorded the donation of land within the
Pundravardhana-bhukti, which traced the genealogy of the donee for four generations.
Unlike the Bāngaḍa grant, however, it did not mention that the donee and his family had
migrated from some other part of Bengal or the neighbouring areas into the donated land.

Gopāla II’s Jājīlpāra Copper-plate grant (6th regnal year, dated AD 948) mentioned that
the king granted two pallis (sections) of two villages, viz., Kaśṭhagṛha and
Mahārajāpallika, which lay within the jurisdiction of the Ānandapura agrahāra along
with the prospective revenue from the dvārikādāna (the word possibly meaning a toll) in
the Kaddālakhaṭā-visaya within Pundravardhana-bhukti. The beneficiary of the grant,
Śrīdharasārman Brāhmaṇacārin, belonged to the Kaśyapa gotra and the Avasāra and
Naidhrva pravaras. The charter also mentioned that Śrīdharasārman followed the
Mādhyaṇḍina branch of the Vaiṣṇava school and was an expert in three versions of the
Sāmaveda. He was the son and grandson of the learned Bhaṭṭaputra Śrīgarbhā and
Bhaṭṭaputra Nāga respectively. The record informed that Śrīdharasārman was an
immigrant from Muktavāstū and a resident of Śihaḍrapa (identified with a village named
Sahagrāma in the Dinajpur district in north Bengal) within Pundravardhana. According to
local tradition, Sahagrāma “was formerly a big village inhabited by a large number of
learned Brahmins”. Gopāla II’s Jājīlpāra Copper-plate Inscription, like most of the
charters issued by other rulers of the Pāla dynasty, began with the invocation of the
Buddha. Puspa Niyogi observed that this section of the inscription pointed to the fact
that Brāhmaṇas continued to migrate to Bengal at the invitation of some of the Pāla kings
who professed Buddhism. Thus, both the Brahmanical religion and culture and the non-
Brahmanical sects of Buddhism and Jainism received continuous royal support. Probably

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53 Barrie M. Morrison, op. cit., pp. 96, 111, 163; Puspa Niyogi, op. cit., p. 27, TS No. 20.
55 Ibid., p. 27, TS No. 20.
56 Barrie M. Morrison, op. cit., p. 164.
57 Puspa Niyogi, op. cit., p. 44. TS No. 20.
the Pāla kings followed a policy of religious toleration for the purpose of maintaining peace in a composite society which included a multi-cultural population.

The instances of land-grants for the permanent settlement of the new-comers from other parts of Bengal and from places beyond Bengal are recorded in the inscriptions. Thus Mahīpāla I’s Belwā Copper-plate grant (5th regnal year, dated to AD 988-1036) recorded his donation of three localities measuring eight hundred fifty-one units, all situated in the Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti. The recipient of the grant was the Brāhmaṇa, Jivadhara-deva Śarman. The grant recorded the transfer of permanent rent-free holdings58 in the localities including (a) Osinna-Kaivartta vṛtti which bordered the territorial unit of Amalaksudduniga within the Phāṇitā-vīthī and measured two hundred ten units; (b) Nandiśvāminī measuring four hundred ninety units and situated in Sattāpāṇayicatra bordering Pañcakāṇḍaka in Puṇḍarikā-ṃandala; and (c) Gaṇeśvara in Pañcanagarī-viṣaya measuring one hundred fifty-one units. The donee was the son of Dhīresvaradeva-Śarman and the grandson of Viṣṇudeva-Śarman. He belonged to the Hastidāsa gotra and the Āṅgirasa, Ambariṣha and Yauvanāśva pravaras.59 The inscription was silent on the donee’s Vedic affiliation and the purpose of the grant. However, it appears from the large size of the permanent rent-free grant that the donation was meant for the settlement of the families that had accompanied the Brāhmaṇa donee.

Vigrahapāla III’s Belwa Copper-plate grant (discovered at Belwā, in the 11th regnal year, dated to the eleventh century) recorded the donation of a part of the village Lovanikāma measuring three kulyavāpas. seven and half dronas and eleven udamānas to a Brāhmaṇa named Jayānandadeva-Śarman. The donated land was attached to Puṇḍarikā-ṃandala, situated in Phāṇitā vīthī-viṣaya of Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti. The donee was the son of Śūpatideva, and the grandson of Hṛṣikeśadeva and great-grandson of Mitra Karadeva. The family was affiliated to the Pippalāda branch of the Atharvaveda and belonged to the Bhāradvāja gotra. The inscription also mentioned that the donee was a co-student of the

58 Supra, 53n.
59 Supra, 54n.
60 Supra, 53n.
Brāhmaṇa Ananta of the Bhāradvāja gotra. The text of the document referred to the donee as belonging to the Āṅgirasa and Bārhaspatya pravaras. The grant mentioned that the family had migrated from Vahāḍagrāma and resided in Vellāvagrāma (modern Belwā). The grant also traced the genealogy of the donee for three generations. It did not specifically mention the purpose of the donation. But the emphasis on the genealogy and educational attainment of the donee, including the place of origin and current residency, could be taken as an attempt on the donor’s part to induce temporary residents to establish permanent settlement in the land. As already mentioned, the family had originally migrated from Vahāḍagrāma and had been residing in the Vellāvagrāma (Belwā) of Puṇḍarikā-mandala under Phāṇitā viṭhi-visaya within Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti.

The Candra kings of East Bengal (Vanga-Harikela) ruled over north, east, northeast and southeast Bengal during the tenth-eleventh centuries. The Puṇḍra region became part of the Candra kingdom during the reign of Śrīcandra (dated to the tenth century). Śrīcandra extended the Candra rule over northern, northeastern and southeastern parts of the delta. He issued a number of land grants to Brāhmaṇas, temples and monasteries. The Rāmapāla Copper-plate grant (dated to the eleventh century), issued from Vikramapura, recorded that Śrīcandra donated one pāṭaka of land in the village of Nehakasti in Nānaya-mandala within Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti to the sāntivarika (i.e., priest-in-charge of propitiatory rites) Piṭavāṣaguptasarman, in the name of Buddha. According to the charter, the grant was made as daksīna (fee) for the performance of the kotihoma ceremony (a propitiatory rite performed for the well-being of all) in the heartland of Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti. The donee was the great-grandson of Makkadagupta, grandson of Varahagupta and son of Sumangalagupta belonging to the Śaṇḍiliya gotra and the pravara of three rsis. Thus, the document traced the genealogical tree of the recipient of the land grant for four generations. However, the inscription was silent on the donee’s scholarship and the area of the family’s previous settlement. The invocation to the Buddha perhaps indicated the Candra kings’ adherence to Buddhism. Śrīcandra’s Rāmapāla Copper-plate grant...

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62 Barrie M. Morrison, op. cit., p.112; Puspa Niyogi, op. cit., p.8.
63 Barrie M. Morrison, op. cit., p.8; Puspa Niyogi, op. cit., p.27, TS.No.23.
described the donated land as abounding in *tma* (grass), *puti* plants, *go-cara* (pastures), *āmra* (mango), jackfruit, *guvaka* betel-nut and *nārikela* (coconut) trees, and in *gart* (pits) and *osara* (water surfaces which supplied salt). There were also *khila* land (barren tracts) granted to the donee.⁶⁴

Śrīcandra’s Paścimbhāg Copper-plate grant (dated to the tenth century), which was issued from his victorious camp at Vikramapura, recorded the same kind of dispensation in northeast Bengal (Śrīhaṭṭa region). It recorded the grant of about one thousand square miles of land spreading over three *visayas* — Candrapura, Garala and Pogara in the Śrīhaṭṭa-ṃandala within Pundravardhana-bhukti. The beneficiaries in this instance were four Vaṅgāla *mathas*, four *deṣāntariya mathas* and six thousand Brāhmaṇas. They were to enjoy the grant according to the *bhūmicchidhranyāya*⁶⁵ As the Brāhmaṇas constituted the majority of the population in the area, the settlement that evolved in the gifted land came to be identified as the Brāhmaṇapura-Candrapura settlement.⁶⁶ The settlement accommodated not only the aforementioned Brāhmaṇas and several temple-*matha* complexes but also people from many other communities who were settled in the land gifted by the charter. The different communities were settled there for the purpose of ensuring the performance of various services to the temple-*mathas* and the Brāhmaṇas.⁶⁷

The total area of the settlement designed to cover areas comprising contiguous parts of three districts (*tri-visayas*) corresponded to an unutilized space (*khila* land).⁶⁸ It also included the boat-station (*Indrēśvar-naubandha*), the area of which was fifty-two *pātaka*s.⁶⁹ Brāhmaṇapura-Candrapura was hemmed in on four sides by natural boundaries consisting of hills, rivers and channels which created conditions of a convenient environment and facilities for the evolution of a viable settlement. The settlement was bounded by the *brhat-kottalisimā* (ālī or bank of earth thrown up to form a line of demarcation of a big fort which seems to have existed) on the east, the Mani *nadi* (river)

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⁶⁴ R.R. Mukherji and S.K. Maity (eds.), *op cit.*, pp.221-229; Barrie M. Morrison, *op cit.*, pp 96,102,163; Puspa Niyogi, *op cit.*, p 8, TS.No 28
⁶⁹ K. K. Gupta (ed.), *op cit.*, pp 133-141
on the south, the Jujju khātaka (channel), the Kāsthaparnī channel and the Vetraghatī nadi on the west, and the Kośiyāra nadi on the north. These rivers and channels had the potential for transforming the khīla land into prime, cultivable area and thus supplying food-stuff to meet the needs of the concentrated population. The settlement thus created was indeed enormous, covering three visayas. The six thousand Brāhmaṇa donees received six thousand plots of land of equal size. Various other communities attached to the temples received plots that were also demarcated. Such communities were enjoined upon by the donor to use the land for cultivation. B.D. Chattopadhyaya, however, observed that a cluster of rural settlements, rather than an average village settlement, was more likely to have developed in the area.

Srīcandra’s Dhūlla and the Madanpāda Copper-plate inscriptions recorded the grant of land to individual Brāhmaṇas in the Vanga (eastern Bengal) segment of the enlarged Puṇḍravardhana-bhūkty. The Dhūlla Copper-plate Inscription (issued from Vikramapura, dated to AD 937) recorded the grant of nineteen hālas and six dronas of land in five plots. The land was made over to the sāntivārika Vyasagangasārman of the Vārdhakauśika gotra. The donee belonged to the pravara of three ṛsis. The Brāhmaṇa received the land as daksīna for performing the adhhiitasānti rites and four homas. He belonged to the Kanva śākhā of Vedic learning. The inscription spoke of the donee as the great grandson of Jayagāha, the grandson of Nandagāha and the son of Vibhugāha. This charter therefore traced the genealogy of the donee for four generations. Similarly, Srīcandra’s Madanpāda Copper-plate grant (dated the 6th regnal year, dated to AD 929-975) recorded the donation of more than eight dronas of land to the Brāhmaṇa Śukradeva in Vaṅgasāgarasambhāndāriyaka within Yola-maṇḍala in Puṇḍravardhana-bhūkty. The donee was born in the family of the Somapīṭha Brāhmaṇas and belonged to three well-known pravaraṇas (though it did not spell out the pravara-names). He was the great grandson of Mahādeva, the grandson of Varāha and the son of Hara.

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70 Barrie M. Morrison, op.cit., pp.135-137; B.D. Chattopadhyaya, op.cit., p.33
71 Ibid., p.29.
72 Barrie M. Morrison, op.cit., pp.96, 162; Puspa Niyogi, op.cit., TS.No.29.
73 Ibid., pp.96, 162.
74 Ibid.
75 Ibid., p.102; Puspa Niyogi, op.cit., p.8, TS.No.31.
The practice of granting land for settling the Brāhmaṇas continued in the period of the successors of Śrīcandra. Some of these land grants were in southeast Bengal (Samaṭāṭa region). Kalyāņacandra’s Dacca Copper-plate grant (dated in the 24th regnal year, dated AD 975-1000) recorded the donation of 120 pātakas of land in Kuḍagrāma connected to Nomundikhal (or Nomundi) lying within Khāṭi-mandala in Pundravardhana-bhukti. The land was gifted to one pandita Dharādhara-deva-saśaman of the Sāvarṇi gotra, who belonged to the pravara of five rśis avo, the Chandogya śākhā of the Śāmaveda.76 This is the only document which referred to a grant of land by Kalyāņacandra in the Pundravardhana-bhukti. However, more grants were issued by his successors. Ladañacandra’s Charpatra Mura or Lāmbai-Mainmati grant (dated to AD 1000-1020) recorded the gift of eight pātakas and eight dronas of land to the Śrīlada-Mādhavabhaṭṭaraka temple at Śrīpāṭikera in the village of Surañoraka in Peranāṭana-viṣaya in the Samaṭāṭa-mandala within Pundravardhana-bhukti.77 Another grant by the same ruler (which was discovered in the same Charpatra Murā in Lāmbai-Mainmati hills) recorded the gift of another plot of land to the same shrine of Śrīlada-Mādhavabhaṭṭaraka in the Śrīpāṭikera-viṣaya in the Samaṭāṭa-mandala within Pundravardhana-bhukti.78 Govindacandra, a latter ruler of the Candra dynasty, issued a copper-plate grant (dated about AD 1020-1056, discovered in the same site of Charpatra Murā), recording the gift of Samsāharatalaka, a pātaka of land to the temple of Natesvarabhaṭṭaraka (Śiva) in Peranāṭana-viṣaya in the Samaṭāṭa-mandala within Pundravardhana-bhukti.79 These three grants made by the Candra kings indicated that the two rulers were trying to develop a settlement around the shrine in Charpatra Mura (the findspot of the inscriptions). This was done perhaps to settle families belonging to various social groups in the region for the purpose of providing necessary services connected with the worship of the deity and the maintenance of the temple.

76 R.R. Mukherji and S.K. Maity (eds.) op cit., pp.176-184; Barrie M. Morrison, op cit., pp.96, 164
77 Ibid., pp.96, 117,164
78 Ibid., pp.96,117,164-165.
79 Supra, 77n.
The decline of the rule of the Candras corresponded to the rise of the Varman kings who seized Vikramapura and ruled over deltaic Bengal for a short period. The Varman kings also issued land grants some of which were within the heartland of Puṇḍravardhana. Harivarman’s Śāmantasār grant (dated around AD 1090-1136) registered the gift of one hāla, six dronas and eighty other units of cultivable land (kṣetra) in the village of Varaparshvata located in Mayūravidjā-viśaya lying within the Pañcavāsa-maṇḍala of Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti. The donee was a Brāhmaṇa who served as a śāntivārika. He was the son of Padmanābha-Śarman and the grandson of Bhaṭṭaputra Vedaśarman. The donation was made as daksina for the service of the śāntivārika. The donee belonged to the Āśvalāyana śākhā of the Rg Veda and was a member of the Vatsa gotra. The inscription mentioned that he was attached to the five usual pravrātras but it did not clearly spell out the pravrātra-names. Bhojavarman’s Belāva Copper-plate grant (the 5th regnal year, dated to AD 1150) recorded the donation of one pāṭaka and nine and one-fourth dronas of land in the village Upyālika located in Kauśāmbi-Aṣṭacchha-khandala within the Ādhāpattana-maṇḍala situated within the jurisdiction of Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti. The grant was made to a Brāhmaṇa named Rāmadeva-Śarman, who was the śāntyagārādhikṛtāya or the officer-in-charge of the room where propitiatory rites were performed. The inscription stated that the donee was the great-grandson of Pramānadeva-Śarman, the grandson of Jāgnāthadeva-Śarman and the son of Viśvarupadeva-Śarman. The great-grandfather of the recipient had migrated from Madhyadesa and resided in Siddhāla-grāma in Uttara-Rādgha. Thus, the family of the donee had been settled in that locality for a long time. The donee was a student of the Kāṇva śākhā of the Yajur Veda branch of Vedic knowledge. He belonged to the Śāvarcagotra and the pravrātras of Bṛhgu. Cyavana, Ānapāṇa, Āurva and Jamadagni. He was also attached to the Vājasaneya carana of Vedic studies. The information contained in

80 Ibid., pp.97, 103, 166; Puspa Niyogi, op. cit., pp.9, 42, TS.No.34.
the Belāva Copper-plate grant of Bhōjavaranm points to the fact that apart from the sāntivārikas, the sāntyagārādhikrāyas were also held in high esteem by the rulers and so frequent donations of landed property were made to them. The transfer of property was also for the purpose of inducing Brāhmaṇas proficient in Vedic studies from outside Bengal to settle in different parts of the Varman kingdom. The rulers perhaps wanted to promote Vedic knowledge among the Brāhmaṇas of the area and to encourage the advancement of Brahmanical culture and to extend the knowledge of iron technology from the region of Madhyadeśa to Pundravardhana so as to augment higher agricultural productivity.\(^{85}\)

Two recently discovered copper-plate grants of the Pāla period are also important for understanding the pattern of rural settlement and the nature of social formation in the region. Mahendrapāla’s Jagjivanpur Copper-plate Inscription (dated to the ninth century, issued from the victory camp at Khuddālakhātaka) recorded the grant of a plot of land called Nanda-dīrghiko-uḍrāṅga in the Kuddālakhātaka-visaya which was situated in Pundravardhana-bhukti. The donation was made on the request of the commander of army, Vajradeva, for the purpose of building a vihāra (monastery) to provide space for the bhiksus to offer prayers and worship the Buddhist gods and goddesses. The grant was made according to bhūmicchidrānyaya. The eastern side of the vihāra was bounded by the river Tāṅgila, the western border by a dry river-bed which was thirty to forty meters wide and was filled only during the rainy season.\(^{86}\)

The other grant, i.e., Pāhila’s Bangladesh National Museum Stone Inscription (dated the ninth century), recorded Pāhila’s gift of a mātha (cloister) to the Vaiṣṇava recluses in the Bhaṭṭa-māṇḍala in Pundravardhana-bhukti. The donor made the grant having understood the transitoriness of wealth, life and youth, and the steadfastness of dharma. The inscription referred to the donor as the local administrator of the Bhaṭṭa-māṇḍala under

\(^{85}\) Barrie M. Morrison, op.cit., pp.104-106; R.C. Majumdar, op.cit., p.429.

Devapāla, who ruled over Gauḍa-Magadha. The epigraph did not give details related to the location of the matha, the area of the donated land, other social groups settled in the area, the income from the land or its geographical features which would have been relevant for facilitating the growth of a settlement around the institution. But it may be inferred that the matha complex provided scope for settling a number of other social groups to render service in connection with daily worship and maintaining the temple and the matha, as well as assisting the Brāhmaṇas who performed the worship of the gods and goddesses in the temple probably situated next to the matha.

The period of Sena rule in Bengal witnessed political unrest caused by frequent invasions of the Muslim elements in midland India (Madhyadeśa), causing insecurity to the lives and occupations of the Brāhmaṇas residing in the affected areas. Some of the distressed Brāhmaṇas are said to have left their original homes in the disturbed areas for safer places in search of comfortable livelihood. The later Pālas, the Varmans and also the Sena kings of Bengal welcomed the displaced Brāhmaṇa families from midland India by settling them in large tracts of land, which action served to strengthen the position of the resident Brāhmaṇa community in Bengal. The frequent donations made to the Brāhmaṇas in Bengal attracted Brāhmaṇas from other regions other than midland India as well. Vijayasena’s Barrackpur grant (dated to the twelfth century) recorded the gift of four pātakas of land yielding two hundred kapardaka purānas (unit of currency used in Samatata), which land was located in the village of Ghāsasambhoga-bhāṭavāda (Bhāṭpāḍa) within Khāḍi-viṣaya of Punḍravardhana-bhūkti. The donation was made to Udayakaradeva-Śarman as a fee for the performance of homa during the kanakatulāpuruṣa mahādāna ceremony performed by the Mahādevī Vilāsadevi on the occasion of a lunar eclipse. He belonged to the Vatsa gotra and the Bhārgava, Cyavana, Āpnavāna, Aūra and Jāmadagnya pravaras. He was attached to the six angas of Āsvalāyana sākhā of the Rg Veda. Udayakaradeva-Śarman was the great-grandson of

88 For events pertaining to the reign of the Senas, see Puṣpa Niyogi, op.cit.; Barrie M. Morrison, op.cit., p.16.
89 Barrie M. Morrison, ibid., pp.97, 103, 166; Puṣpa Niyogi, op.cit., pp.38-39, TS.No.36.
90 Ibid., pp.9-11, TS.No.36.
Ratnakaradeva-Śarman, grandson of Rahaskaradeva-Śarman and son of Bhāskaradeva-Śarman. The inscription informed that Ratnakaradeva-Śarman, the donee’s great-grandfather, was an immigrant from Madhyadesa and that the family had formerly resided at Kāntijōngā. Most likely the family of the donee had been living in the locality for a long time.

As many as six copper-plate grants in the Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti have been ascribed to the reign of Laksmanasena. The Tarpanāḍighi grant (dated to AD 1180) recorded the gift of land measuring 120 ādhaṇāpās and five unmānas lying within the jurisdiction of the village of Velāhiṣṭhī situated in Vārendrī within Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti. The land was granted according to the bhūmicchidranvāya. It was bounded on the east by an udraṅga (dyke) of one ādhaṇāpa of rent-free fertile land belonging to the deity of a Buddhist monastery; on the south by the Nicadahara tank; on the west by the Nandihari-pākuṇḍī; and on the north by the ditch called Mullāṇa. The tract included forests, khila (unused land), jala (water), go-kṣetra (pastures), tamāla (betel-nut) and coconut trees and yielded an annual income of 150 kaparddaka purānas. The grantee was the Brāhmaṇa Iśvaradeva-Śarman. He received the gift as fee (daksina) for his service as a ācārya (teacher) in the hemāsvaramahādāna ceremony. The document traced the genealogy of the donee for three generations. It mentioned Iśvaradeva-Śarman as the great-grandson of Hutāsanadeva-Śarman, grandson of Mārkandeyadeva-Śarman and son of Lakṣmīdhara-Śarman of the Bhāravāja gotra. He belonged to the pravaras of Bhāravāja, Āṅgirasa and Bārhaspataya and was a student of Kaṭhumā śākhā of the Sāmaveda. In fact, most of the land grants made by Laksmanasena were for the Brāhmaṇas of the Kaṭhumā śākhā of the Sāmaveda. Evidently, the family was residing in Bengal, since the charter said nothing about the family’s place of origin. Similarly,
Lakṣmaṇasena’s Sundarban grant (2nd regnal year, dated AD 1180) announced the gift of five contiguous plots of land measuring three bhū-dronas, one khādiṅka, twenty-three unmānas and two and half kākinīs, according to the standard of thirty-two cubits. The land was situated in Maṅḍala-grāma belonging to the Kāntallapura-caturaka in the Khāḍi-maṅḍala of Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti. The donee was the śāntyāgārika Kṛṣṇadharadeva-Śarman, priest-in-charge of the room where propitiatory rites were performed. The land included homestead land (vāstu-bhūmi). The grant was made according to the bhāmicchidranyāya and yielded an annual income of fifty purānas.

The inscription provided the genealogy of the donee for three generations. He was the great-grandson of Jagadharadeva-Śarman, grandson of Nārāyaṇadhaharadeva-Śarman and son of Narasimhadharadeva-Śarman of the Gārgya gotra. He belonged to the Āṅgirasa, Brāhaspati, Usānas, Garga and Bhāradvāja pravaras. He was a student of the Āśvalāyana śākhā of the Rg Veda. Interestingly, the record indicated that the plots which bordered the gifted land were held by the Brāhmaṇas. The plots on the east, west and north were in the possession of the śāntyāgārikas, whose names were Prabhāsa, Rāmadeva, Viṣṇupāni, Goḍālī and Keśava Goḍālī.

Lakṣmaṇasena’s Ānuliā grant (3rd regnal year, dated to AD 1181) also recorded the gift of a field measuring one pāṭaka, nine dronas, one ādhavāpa, thirty-seven unmānas and one kākinīkā according to the vrṣabha-śāṅkara-nala (unit of measurement). The field yielded an income of one hundred kapardakara-purāṇas per annum. The donated land was situated within the jurisdiction of the village Māṭhāraṇḍiyā in Vyaṅgratāṭi-maṅḍala (a part of Samaṭa lying in the delta of the Gaṅgā) of Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti. The gifted land had on its eastern boundary banyan trees, on the southern border the settlement of Jalapillā, on the western limit the village of Śāntigopi, and on the northern border the settlement of Māḷāmaṅcavāṭī. The land included forests, barren tracts (khila), water, betel-nut and coconut trees, grass, puti plants and pasture grounds (go-kṣetra). The recipient of the grant was Paṇḍita Raghudeva-Śarman of the Kāṇva branch of the Yajur

100 Ibid., p.39.
Veda. The grant recorded the genealogy of the donee for three generations. He was the great-grandson of Vipradāsa-deva-Śrīman, grandson of Śaṅkaradeva-Śrīman and son of Devadāsa-deva-Śrīman belonging to the Kauśika gotra and to the Visvamitra, Bandhula and Kauśika pravaras\textsuperscript{101}. The inscription referred to the donee as a pandita or scholar. It may therefore be inferred that the Sena rulers encouraged the settlement of scholarly Brāhmaṇas for the spread of education or knowledge within the territory. It appears that they were respected by the rulers and were held in high esteem in the contemporary society.

Lakṣmaṇasena’s Madhāinagar grant (25\textsuperscript{th} regnal year, dated to AD 1204) recorded the gift of the village Dāpaniyāpattaka located on the Rāvana lake near Kāntāpura-vrtī in Vārendrī within Puṇḍravardhana-bhūkti. The land was gifted according to the bhūmicchidranyāya to one Govindadeva-Śrīman, a sāṇiyāgārika or an official in charge of the room for performing propitiatory rites. The granted land measured one hundred bhūkhādis and ninety-one khādi kās and yielded an annual income of one hundred and sixty-eight kaparaddaka-purāṇas. The gift was made for the performance of the aindri mahāsānti ceremony on the occasion of the mūlābhiseka and for the maintenance of the Brāhmaṇas associated with the religious ceremonies performed in the propitiatory room and the deities worshipped there. The record provided information about the genealogical tree of the donee. He was the great-grandson of Dāmodara-deva-Śrīman, grandson of Rāmadeva-Śrīman and son of Kumārādeva-Śrīman of the Kauśika gotra. He was attached to the Pippalāda branch of the Atharva Veda\textsuperscript{102} The inscription made no mention of the donee’s pravaras or the family’s place of origin or earlier residence.

Lakṣmaṇasena’s Rājāvāḍī (Dhāryya-grāma) or Bhawāl grant (27\textsuperscript{th} regnal year, dated to AD 1206) recorded the donation of land divided into four plots situated in two villages — Mādisāhānsa and Vasu manḍana — south of the river Bānāhara in Bāṇḍana within the Puṇḍravardhana-bhūkti. The land was granted to one Brāhmaṇa Padmaṇābha to please


the god Nārāyaṇa and to secure the welfare of the two major queens. The gifted land measured six paṭakas, one drona and twenty-eight kākiniś and yielded four hundred purāṇas per annum. The recipient of the gift, Padmanātha, was a paṭhaka or reciter of holy texts. He was associated with Kauthuma sākhā of the Sāmaveda. The charter revealed that the donee was the great-grandson of Buddhadeva-Śarman, grandson of Jayadeva and son of Mahādeva of the Madgailya gotra; he belonged to the Aurva, Cyavana, Bhārgava, Jāmadagnya and Āpnāvāna pravaraś.103 The document however did not give any information on the homeland of the donee’s ancestors.

Keśavasena’s Edilpur grant (issued from Phaspha-grāma in the 3rd regnal year, dated to AD 1225-1228) recorded the transfer of one paṭaka of land in the village Tālapadapāṭaka to a Brāhmaṇa named Iśvaradeva-Śarman. The village was situated in Vikramapura within Pundrabhadhana-bhukti. The grant was made to the Brāhmaṇa for praying for the long life of the king on the occasion of his birth anniversary. The gifted land yielded two hundred drāmmas per annum. The charter traced the genealogy of the donee. He was the great-grandson of Parāśaradeva-Śarman, grandson of Garbheśvara-Śarman and son of Vanamālideva-Śarman. The donee was appointed nātpāṭhaka or reciter of moral texts. He belonged to the Vātsyya gotra and the pravaraś of Bhārgava, Cyavana, Āpnuvat, Aurva and Jāmadagnya.104 From the evidence of the document it is obvious that he was a learned Brāhmaṇa.

Viśvarūpasena’s Madhyapāḍā (or Dacca or Caicutta / Vāngīya Sāhitya Pariṣat) Copper-plate grant (dated to the twelfth century) recorded the grant of eleven plots of land altogether measuring 336½ unmanas situated in the Nāvya-mandala to the Brāhmaṇa Avapallika-Pāṇḍita Hālāyudhasārman on the occasion of the birth anniversary of the king, coinciding with the lunar eclipse. The donated land included eleven plots distributed over six villages, i.e., (a) two plots in the Rāmasiddhi-paṭaka measuring sixty-seven and three-fourth udānas and yielding hundred purāṇas annually of which nineteen and eleven-sixteenth was received from the Barajas; (b) one plot in the village of Vinaya-

103 Barrie M. Morrison, op. cit., pp.98, 105, 168.
tilaka measuring twenty-five udānas and yielding sixty purānas; (c) one plot of land measuring one hundred sixty-five udānas in Ajikulā-pāṭakas which lay in Navasamgraha-caturaka included in Madhuksiraka-āvytti and yielding one hundred forty annually; (d) three plots of land measuring twenty-five udānas, seven udānas and ten udānas respectively in Deśilahasti in Lāhuṇaṇa-caturaka in Vikramapura yielding one hundred purānas; (e) twelve and three-fourth udānas in Ghāghanakaṭṭi in Urā-caturaka within Candradvīpa; (f) and twenty-four udānas in Pāṭiladivikā in Candradvīpa yielding hundred purānas. The total area yielded an annual income amounting to five hundred purānas. The grant was made according to the principle of bhūmicchidra. The village Rāmasiddhi-pāṭaka, wherein sixty-seven and three-fourth udānas of land was granted, has been identified with a village in the Gauradā area of Bākerganj district. Accord-ingly to traditions, it was an enlightened village inhabited by the Śrotṛiyā Brāhmaṇas. The village of Vinayatilaka has not yet been definitely identified, although it is clear from the text that its eastern boundary extended up to the sea (Bay of Bengal) and the estuary of the river Meghnā. The region possibly enjoyed special navigational facilities, corresponding “to the tract of country lying along the lower course of the Padma.” The location of Ajikulā-pāṭaka in Navasamgraha-caturaka in Madhuksiraka-āvytti and its connection with the Nāvyā region has not been traced with certainty. The charter mentioned that all the plots of land distributed over the six villages were included within the jurisdiction of Pundrvardhana-bhukti. Evidently, the donee who received the grant was the great-grandson of Lakṣmīdhara-deva-Śarman, grandson of Devadharadeva-Śarman and son of Adhyayadeva-Śarman of the Vātsyya gotra and belonging to the pravaras of Āurvā, Cyavana, Bhārgava, Jāmadagnya and Āpnuvat. He was a scholar of the Kāṇva sākhā of the Yajur Veda. Barrie M. Morrison observed that some of the plots were acquired by purchase and the others were presented as gifts by a number of persons connected with the royal court.

105 Ibid., p.37.
106 Ibid.
Viśvarūpasena’s Madanapāda Copper-plate grant (14th regnal year, dated to AD 1206-1220) recorded the donation of two plots of land in the village Pinjokāśṭhī situated in Vikramapura within Pundravardhana-bhūkti. The land was granted to the Brāhmaṇa Viśvarūpadeva-Śarman who was a śrutī-pāṭhaka or the reciter of moral text for acquiring merit as described in the Śiva Purāṇa. The donated land comprised two plots situated in two different localities in the village of Pinjokāśṭhī. One was in the locality called Kandarpāsankaraśā and yielded an annual income of five hundred purāṇas. The other was located in the area called Nāraṇḍapa and yielded one hundred twenty-seven purāṇas annually. Thus the total income from the donated land was six hundred twenty-seven purāṇas per annum. The grant was made in accordance with the principle of bhūmicchidra. The donee was the great-grandson of Parāśaradeva-Śarman, grandson of Garbheśvaradeva-Śarman and son of Vanamālideva-Śarman of the Vātsya gotra. He belonged to the pravāras of Bhārgava, Cyvana, Apnuvat, Aurva and Jāmadagnya. Nothing is known about the measurement of the donated land or the scholarship of the donee. Barrie M. Morrison felt that the donated land was situated in the two villages of Pinjokāśṭhī and Nāraṇḍapa. But R.R. Mukherji and S.K. Maity thought that the latter was a locality within Pinjokāśṭhī.

A series of recently discovered copper-plate inscriptions in India and Bangladesh bear testimony to the rule of a Deva dynasty in parts of northern and southeastern Bengal pertaining to the thirteenth century. Perhaps it was at the time the rule of the Senas was on the decline and they were preoccupied with resisting the Muslim invasions. Dāmodaradeva’s Mehar Copper-plate grant (dated Śaka Era 1156, 4th regnal year = AD 1234) recorded the donation of a number of plots in Vāgīśāgrāma in Mehār-khanḍala (in Cāndpura sub-division, Tipperah district, now in Bangladesh) in Paratāyi-viśaya in Samatāta-mañḍala of Pundravardhana-bhūkti. The grant included sixteen homestead sites and other plots of land approximating four and eleven-sixteenth dronas (approximately one chāṛī) and yielding twenty-five purāṇas. The donation was made to twenty

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110 Barrie M. Morrison, op.cit., p.169.
Brähmanas who belonged to the Sāvarṇa, Bhāradvāja and Ātreya gotras. The gifts were received on behalf of all the donees by one Kāpadi of the Sāvarṇa gotra. The grantees were referred to as residents of different villages, viz., (a) Kānyamala, Pūrvarāma in Daksīna-Rādha (identified with a village of the same name, situated seven miles to the west of the Murshidabad town); (b) Siddhalagrāma (identified with a modern village under Laspur Police station in the Birbhum district); (c) Dīṇḍasā (related to modern Dimśā or Disā in Burdwan district); and (d) Keśarakoṇā (associated with a village bearing the same name in Bankura district). The geographical features of the donated land do not find any mention in the document. However, Puspa Niyogi observed that all these villages, with the exception of Kānyamala, were included among the fifty-six gamis of the Rādhīya Brähmanas in the genealogical accounts (Kulapāṇjhikā) of the Brähmanas of Bengal. Niyogi further observed that the Brähmanas of Siddhalagrāma enjoyed a high reputation for their scholarship and piety throughout Bengal and that there was demand for them in other parts of the sub-continent wherever the rulers were pursuing a policy to strengthen the cause of Brahmanism.

Similarly, Dāmodaradeva’s Šobhārāmpur Copper-plate grant (dated Śaka Era 1158, 6th regnal year, AD 1236) recorded the grant of three villages along with fifteen dromas of an adjoining vāstu land in Chāṭihara-khandala in Midilī-viṣaya within Samaṭa-maṇḍala of Pūndravardhana-bhukti. The beneficiaries of the grant were two Brähmanas: Kausika and Devārata. The inscription informed that the three gifted villages were Sundaraya, Āhasyaga and Vāṇḍura. The donees belonged to the Agniveṣya gotra. The epigraph did not mention anything about the total measurement of the land donated or the income derived from it. It also did not refer to the geographical features of the area and kept silent about the donees’ scholarship, pravaras and genealogy. Viradharadeva’s Charpatra Mura Copper-plate grant (15th regnal year, dated to the thirteenth century) recorded that seventeen bhūpātīs of land located in two different villages were granted by the donor. The legible portion of the grant made it clear that the donated land was partly situated in Vasāgrāma of Vāṭēgadbha-viṣaya in Samaṭa-maṇḍala of

113 Ibid., p.52.

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Pundravardhana-bhukti. But the corrosive nature of the plate accounted for complete absence of knowledge regarding the name of the donee and other details of the grant, such as the place from which it was issued, the names of the sites where land was located, etc.115

Urbanization

The epigraphic records and archaeological remains offer a fair view of the early urbanization processes in the Pundra region. The Mahasthān Fragmentary Stone Plaque Inscription116 of the third century BC, which happens to be the earliest epigraphic record pertaining to the region, mentioned ‘Pundranagala’ (‘Pundranagara’, i.e., the city of the Pundra), identified with Mahasthangarh, the site at which the fragmentary stone inscription was recovered. Pundranagara was the headquarters of the Puṇḍras and the Samvamgiyas. At that time, northern Bengal or Pundravardhana was presumably a province of the Maurya Empire. As mentioned earlier, the inscription recorded that the local governor was ordered to distribute funds from the imperial treasury during times of scarcity caused by flood, fire or pests. This information suggested that the Mauryan rulers exercised political control over the Bengal delta or, at least, the area later on known as Varendra, at which Pundranagara117 was located. Presumably, this ‘nagara’ or urban centre had continued to flourish from about the fifth century BC.118 That Mahasthangarh

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115 Ibid., pp.108, 118, 170.
116 Discovered at Mahasthān in Bagura (Bogra) district of Bengal (now in Bangladesh).
118 Pāṇini’s Astadhyāyī (fifth century BC), for example, mentioned Mahānagara and Navañagara among the important towns in eastern India, while Pāṇini’s other text, Kaśika, mentioned Puṇḍranagara as an important centre of trade in the Puṇḍra region. On the basis of information provided by the two texts, V.S. Agrawala identified Puṇḍranagara with modern Mahāsthānaghar, the place where the stone inscription of the Mauryan period was located. V.S. Agrawala, India As Known to Pāṇini, Varanasi, 1953; reprint 1963, Bharatiya Publishing House, Varanasi, pp.65-66, 74.
was the seat of authority of Pundravardhana in the early period is accepted by almost all the scholars who worked on the history and historical geography of early Bengal.\textsuperscript{119}

The archaeological excavations at Mahāsthānagārha led to the discovery of coins and other artifacts datable to the fourth and third centuries BC,\textsuperscript{120} further illustrating the reach of Mauryan influence to the Pundra region. Mahāsthānagārha, a large and protected historical site in the northern division (now divided between West Bengal of India and Bangladesh) of undivided Bengal, stands on the bank of the Karatoya (the principal river of northern Bengal). The site consists of a series of mounds, the main mound representing the central part of the fortified ancient city. The main mound is oblong in shape. It measures about five thousand by four thousand feet, and the periphery is about three and half miles (i.e., a little over five and a half kilometers, precisely 5.635 kms) or one hundred and eighty-five hectares. A mud fortification lying below the burnt brick wall of the Gupta period was an earlier structure datable to the Mauryan or post-Mauryan times. However, apart from finds of some coins, shards of Northern Black Pottery (NBP) and terracotta figurines, besides the mud rampart, no other structural remains for this occupational level or the earlier stages have been exposed by the extensive archaeological activities undertaken at the site. Nevertheless, the necessity of fortifying the settlement would not have arisen had it not been a principal centre of economic and political activity. All this indicates that the site was under continuous occupation since the Mauryan period. A burnt clay figurine of a female deity datable to the Sunga period has also been recovered. It is believed to be further proof of Mahāsthānagārha’s status as one of the earliest urban centres in Bengal or even eastern India.\textsuperscript{121}

The levels associated with the Gupta rule revealed an immense brick rampart at a height of about twenty feet above the surrounding land forming a great fortified square nearly a mile on each side. Finds of numerous mounds outside the fortified area are probably


\textsuperscript{121} \textit{ARASI} (hereafter, \textit{ARASI}), 1928-29; D.K. Chakrabarti, \textit{op cit.}, pp 216-217; Barrie M. Morrison, \textit{op. cit.}, pp.4-5.
remnants of brick-built shrines and temples. The excavation reports further indicated that this urban site was in complete occupation by the early Gupta period continuing from several centuries before their rule. The massive brick-temples were built in the later Gupta period at the Gobinda Bhātā site (one of the mounds surrounding the main settlement), but the construction of the structures located near the surface within and outside the city have been attributed to the early period of Pāla rule. The ruined portions of the non-religious establishments are said to have belonged to the late Gupta period. The development of Punḍranagara (Mahāsthāngarh) as a large and prosperous city in Punḍravardhana in post-Gupta times up to the tenth-eleventh century seems to be confirmed by the accounts of Hiuen Tsang and the Rāmacaritam of Sandhyākaranandin.

Apparently, Mauryan settlement in eastern India had its foundations on the preceding layer of a long duration of rural settlement. Based on information furnished in the Mahāsthān Inscription, H.C. Raychaudhuri referred to Punḍranagara as a storehouse filled with coins (viz., gandaka, kākanīka, etc.) and the seat of a mahāmatra. He also pointed out that Megasthenes (who had visited the court of Candragupta Maurya) mentioned Punḍravardhana along with Pātaliputra, Taxila, Ujjain, Kauśāmbi and other important urban centres, thereby suggesting that Punḍravardhana was an important commercial hub and an administrative centre as early as the second century BC. B.C. Law examined the evidence of epigraphic and other archaeological sources. He suggested that it showed the existence of Punḍravardhana as an important urbanized area throughout the ancient and early medieval period. He also observed that as the

122 ARASI, 1928-29 and 1929-30; Barrie M. Morrison, op.cit., p.4.
125 H.C. Raychaudhuri, op.cit., p.244.
126 B.C. Law, op.cit., pp.247-248. He particularly cited the Khālimpur grant of Dharmapāla, the Nālandā grant of Devapāla, the Bāngar Copper-plate of Mahipāla, the Angāchī grant of Vighrahaśīla II and the Manhāli plate of Madanapāla of the Pāla dynasty, and the Barrackpur grant of Vijayasena, the Anuśa, the Tarpaṇḍīghī, the Mādhānagāra and the Sunderban inscriptions of Laksmaṇasena, the Edilpur Plate of Kesavasena, the Madanapāla and the Sāhitya Panamgadha grants of Viśvarūpaśena of the Sena dynasty, besides the Mahāsthān Inscription, which made clear mention of the urban status of Punḍanagala or Punḍranagara or Punḍravardhana or Punḍravardhanapura.
headquarters of Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti, the urban agglomeration around Mahāsthān developed by stages during the Gupta, Candra, Pala and Sena periods. Finally, Law concluded that Mahāsthān or Puṇḍranagara enjoyed the status of a 'city-site' beginning from the Mauryan period and extending to the twelfth century, when the Sena kings shifted their capital first to Deopārā (in Rajshahi district) and then to Gauḍā (in Malda district). Puṇḍravardhana completely lost its significance towards the end of the thirteenth century, when it was occupied by the Muhammedans. In this connection, Law quoted relevant reports in the Annual Report of the Archaeological Survey of India, 1930-34 indicating that the site of Mahāsthān was in occupation from the second century BC to the twelfth century as a regional or provincial headquarter or political capital.

R.C. Majumdar attributed the urbanization process in the region to not only the growth of administrative or political centres but also to the economic development. Puṇḍravardhana's urbanization process drew on the popularity of its textiles in far and near lands, its enormous agricultural products, concentrated deposits of precious metals and minerals spread over different parts of the region, and the trade routes and merchandise that served to boost the flourishing economic activities and brisk commercial life. Paramanand Gupta also suggested that the city was well-developed and it was known even beyond the region, since two wealthy inhabitants of the city had made donations for the improvisation of the Śūnci Stūpa.

127 Ibid., pp.230, 246. See Law's analysis of the contents of the Dāmodarpur grants and the Pāhārpur inscription of the Guptas, the Rāmapāl and the Dhūlla copper-plates of Śrīcandra, the Khālimpur grant of Dharmapāla, and the Anulīā and the Tarpaṇḍīghī plates of Lakṣmaṇasena, which mentioned Puṇḍravardhana as a bhukti, i.e., province.

128 Ibid., p.248.
129 Ibid., p.234.
130 For detailed survey of the archaeological, epigraphic and literary sources, including the excavation reports, the Mahāsthān Inscription, and the literary sources like the A rnnāṣāstra, Dişayadāna, Mathārītāsatāsāgara and the Rājarātārngiṇi, see R.C. Majumdar, op. cit., pp.13, 15, 30, 40-41, 203-204, 211, 287, 321, 513.
131 Paramanand Gupta, Geography in Ancient Indian Inscriptions, B.R. Publishing House, New Delhi, 1973, pp.24-28, 98-99. He analyzed the data derived from epigraphic sources, including the Mahāsthān Inscription (third century BC), the Śūnce Stūpa Inscription (second century BC), and the Kalākuri-Sultānpur Plate of Kumāragupta (AD 438-439), to account for Puṇḍravardhana as a city and attest its status of a regional headquarters under various rulers.
The urban development in Pundravardhana is particularly evident from the archaeological evidence recovered from the sites of Bairagarh Bhita, Gobinda Bhita and Gokul Bhita in the Mahasthangarh complex among the ruins of several ancient temples around the city of Pundranagara, which have survived as mounds.\(^{132}\) B.D. Chattopadhyaya opined that the fortified settlement in Mahasthangarh was a definite representation of the nodal point of an extensive area of dense occupation.\(^{133}\) K.N. Diksit, who supervised the excavation on behalf of the ASI, commented that the extent of the ancient city with its suburbs was unequalled by any other ancient city in Bengal and could be ranked as parallel to the ruins of the ancient cities of the other Gangetic provinces, such as Basarh, Saheth-Maheth and Kosam.\(^{134}\) D.K. Chakrabarti observed the pre-Mauryan occupation unearthed at Bangarh neighbouring Mahasthan. He opined that the Mauryan or earlier Northern Black Pottery (NBP) level in the neighbouring areas of Bengal and Bihar rested on the premise of village occupation of considerable antiquity, as characterized by finds of both painted and unpainted black-and-red ware.\(^{135}\) Chakrabarti further observed, on the absence of supportive evidence for the existence of a pre-Mauryan phase at Mahasthangarh yielded by the archaeological activities at the site, that a prosperous city (Mahasthangarh) could not have come into existence on the bank of Karatoya without an antecedent cultural development, although the history of pre-NBP or pre-Mauryan village occupation in the northern sector of Bengal still remains to be discovered.\(^{136}\)

In the search for a probable answer to this problem, Barrie M. Morrison turned his attention to the rich chalcolithic base of the region, which may have provided the background for the emergence of large settlements representing important urban centres in the early historical period. The expansion and enlargement of the urban centre of Pundranagara was probably accelerated through proper management of agricultural resources. The plausibility of this notion derives support from the evidence of the aforementioned Mahasthan Inscription which recorded that the mahamatra stationed at

\(^{132}\) See R.C. Majumdar, *op cit*, pp.620-621.


Pundranagara was ordered to distribute grains of various types to the population during periods of shortage and emergency in times of natural calamities like floods and droughts. The information contained in the Mahāsthāṅgarh Inscription suggests that a functional relationship existed between the urban centres and the rural hinterlands, even though this particular point is not directly illustrated by the archaeological data from Mahāsthāṅgarh or other sites in the Pundravardhana region.

Although Mahāsthāṅgarh or Pundranagara was the political headquarters since the Mauryan period, the urbanization process in the Pundra region as a whole seems to have begun centering on the market places which were a prominent feature of the economy of Pundravardhana. The markets were popularly known as ‘hāṭ’ and ‘haiti’, where exchange of goods took place. Pundranagara along with Tamralipti (Tamluk) and Karnasuvarna were the important commercial centres in the region. It was in the markets there that raw materials as well as finished products were bought and sold by the merchants and the local people. Items such as paddy and other agricultural products, sugarcane, coconut, varieties of textile products, ornaments of high denomination metals, precious and semi-precious stones, etc., were the articles of exchange. Important routes over land and water used in the course of trade and for administrative purposes linked Pundravardhana with neighbouring areas and beyond, especially from the period of the Mauryas and more so that of the Guptas. This had important implications for the growing popularity of both Purānic religions and non-Brahmanical sects (especially Jainism in eastern India). Pundravardhana's association with shop-lined streets, its abundance of urban centres and

137 For references cited, supra, 115-122ns
Barrie M. Morrison, op.cit., pp.4-5.
139 R.C. Majumdar, op.cit., p.321.
142 R.C. Majumdar, op.cit., p.26; D.C. Sircar, op.cit., p.159.
the well-connected commercial links with Pātaliputra are attested by a number of literary sources.\textsuperscript{143}

The accounts of the Graeco-Roman and Chinese travellers recorded their observations on the trade and economic life in Pundravardhana from time to time which also provide glimpses of the urbanization processes in the region. In the seventh century Pundravardhana was four thousand \textit{li} in circuit; and its capital city, Pundranagara, was thirty \textit{li} in circuit.\textsuperscript{144} It seems to have confirmed the information contained in the Graeco-Roman sources.\textsuperscript{145} The \textit{Tāng-shū} of Hiuen Tsang described Pundravardhana as a land of affluent population, important sea-route from the Bay of Bengal that facilitated the development of trade and foreign markets, and also some land-routes regularly used by merchants and pilgrims. Tāmralipta was a famous port wherefrom the products of Pundravardhana, Vaṅga and other parts of India were exported.\textsuperscript{146} This port formed part of the territorial perimeters of Pundravardhana during the rule of the Pālas and the Senas and sometimes even earlier \textsuperscript{147} Another Chinese pilgrim, I-tsing, who visited Tāmralipta in AD 673, had described the land-route connecting the sea-port and the internal markets which were frequently used by the pilgrims and merchants of Pundravardhana and China during the sixth-seventh centuries.\textsuperscript{148} The itinerary of Kīa-tan (AD 785-805) also referred to land-routes connecting Pundravardhana and Magadhā, which were traversed by merchants and travellers.\textsuperscript{149} A new insight into the study of the urban history of the region has been contributed by Annapurna Chattopadhyaya, who, by her application of the ethno-historical approach observed that the names of important urban centres of present-day Bengal which formed part of Pundravardhana in ancient and early medieval

\textsuperscript{143} Kathāsaritasāgara, p.67; Rājatarangini, p.178; Haraprasad Sāstria (tr. and ed.), \textit{op.cit.}, Canto III. vv.21-26, pp.68-70; See also D.C. Sircar, \textit{op.cit.}, p.163; R.C. Majumdar, \textit{op.cit.}, pp.77, 344.
\textsuperscript{145} J.W. McCrindle, \textit{Ancient India as Described by Ptolemy}, Bibliotheca Indica. Calcutta, 1885, pp.93-97; \textit{idem.}, \textit{Ancient India as Described by Megasthenes and Arrian}, London, 1887; reprint 1926, Bibliotheca Indica, Calcutta, pp.340-347.
\textsuperscript{146} Thomas Watters, \textit{op.cit.}, pp.184, 189-190; Samuel Beal & Shahan Mwui Li, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 137.
\textsuperscript{147} Amitabha Bhattacharyya, \textit{op.cit.}, pp.106-107; R.C. Majumdar, \textit{op.cit.}, pp.356-364.
\textsuperscript{148} Amitabha Bhattacharyya, \textit{op.cit.}, p.106 Bhattacharyya mentioned that the information recorded by I-tsing is corroborated by other Buddhist texts.
\textsuperscript{149} R.C. Majumdar, \textit{op.cit.}, p.346.
times were derived from the presence of metals and minerals in the area. For instance, Tamralipta was named after ‘tāmra’ or copper; Śuvarnagrāma, Karnasuvarna and Suvarnakundya owed their names to ‘suvarṇa’ or gold; and Bajrabhūmi derived its name from ‘bajra’ or diamond. Such instances suggest that many urban centres in Pundravardhana emerged around the metal-based crafts and the commerce associated with the products of those crafts. This seems to have accelerated the urbanization process in the metal- and mineral-rich region.

**Features of Settlements**

Certain basic features of the settlement pattern in the Pundra region during the early periods will stand out if the evidence of the epigraphic (particularly the landgrants) and literary sources is carefully studied. An abiding feature of the settlements was the predominance of agriculture and the rural character of human life. The land grants were generally made in the rural areas, and in most cases the names of the villages ended with the suffix grāma, pāṭāna, vṛūhi, etc. The landscape of the gifted lands, the neighbourhood of the forests and the presence of luxuriant varieties of plants, the waste land, agricultural fields, etc as described in the texts of the grants bear eloquent testimony to the fact that nature conditioned the settlements and significantly influenced the ways of life of the settlers. The cultivators, artisans, and Brāhmaṇas lived in the villages. It appears that the villages enjoyed local autonomy through the village authority. More often than not the Brāhmaṇa residents of the village seem to have been involved in fiscal, administrative and judicial functions. Kumāragupta I’s Dhānāidaha Copper-plate and Dāmodarpur Copper-plate, Pāhāpur Copper-plate, Buddhagupta’s Dāmodarpur Copper-plate, Dharmapāla’s Khālimpur Copper-plate, Mahipāla I’s Banagadā
Copper-plate, Bhojavarman’s Belava Copper-plate, Lakṣmaṇasena’s Tarpanḍīghi Copper-plate inscriptions and several other grants during the period fourth to thirteenth century recorded the presence of different sections of inhabitants, village officials, and the local authority.

Such settlements were in close proximity to the urban centres, whose names were usually suffixed with the terms pura, nagara, etc., indicating their status as either political headquarters or commercial townships. On the other hand, the urban-rural continuum was an important feature of the social and economic life of the people of Puṇḍravardhana. The majority of the people lived in the villages which supplied the requirements of the urban dwellers for subsistence. The urban centres were the seats of authorities who exercised supervision over the villages and collected taxes and tributes from the villages or the commercial centres to which the products of labour of the cultivators and artisans were marketed. The evidence of the inscriptions provided interesting data on social, cultural and economic linkages between the urban centres and the countryside. Rāmacaritam of Sandhyākaranandin provided a panoramic view of the metropolitan city of Puṇḍravardhana and its neighbourhood.

The relevant sources provide sufficient information on the existence, development and management of urban centres in the heartland of Puṇḍravardhana. As mentioned earlier, Puṇḍravardhana boasted of a big market with shop-lined streets, where varieties of commodities were exchanged. The riverine character of the region facilitated easy transport and communication, as most of the villages and towns were located on the banks of important rivers. Most of the epigraphic and literary sources have referred to

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156 Ibid., pp.197-201
157 Ibid., pp.235-237
158 Ibid., pp.295-299.
159 For details see Ibid., (Mahāsthān Inscription), pp.39-41; (Dāmodarpur Copper-plate Inscription I), pp.45-47; (Dāmodarpur Copper-plate Inscription II), pp 47-49; (Manahālī Copper-plate Inscription), pp.209-215.
160 Haraprasad Śāstri (tr and ed ), op cit , Canto VI, vv.7-9, pp.81-82
161 For details see R R Mukherji and S K Maity (eds ), op cit , Mahāsthān Fragmentary Stone Plaque Inscription (third century BC), pp 39-40; Dāmodarpur Copper-plate Inscription I (fifth century) pp 43-44, Bāigrām Copper-plate Inscription (fifth century), pp 49-51, Anāgāti Copper-plate Inscription (ninth century), pp.192-194.
162 Kathāsarasvatīsāgara, p 111. R C Majumdar, op cit . p 344
navigable rivers for trading purposes. As the evidence of various inscriptions indicated, the state or political authorities appointed a number of officials to local institutions. The institutions were also managed by local personages or bodies whose members were elected by the people. Such institutions and officials mentioned in the inscriptions included the grāmasthakuladhikāragascha (local governing body of the village), bhuktavuprik (provincial viceroy), pustapāla (record keeper), nagaraśresthi (chief merchant), satārthavaha (chief caravan trader), prathama-kulika (chief artisan), prathama-kāyastha (chief scribe), mahattaradastakulādhika (royal officials), grāmika-kutumbinaksa (village-heads), sthayapāla (watchman), dūta (messenger), and ranaka (feudatory). It appears therefore that the rural hinterlands maintained close relationship with the socio-economic and political institutions associated with urban / administrative centres, and that the village elements had to take cognizance of important happenings pertaining to administrative and commercial matters. Puḍranagara (modern Mahāstāngarh), which was the oldest and foremost among the political headquarters of Puḍravardhana, was the most important urban centre in the region. It was situated on the bank of the Karatoya, the most important river of ancient northern Bengal.

The region was accessible by navigable rivers for trading purposes and thus could boast of port towns, as mentioned in the Graeco-Roman and Chinese accounts. Corroborative evidence is also provided by epigraphic records, such as the Gunaigarh grant of Vainyagupta, the Khālimpur grant of Dharmapāla, the Ānuliā grant of Laksmanasena, and the Paścimbhāg grant of Śrīcandra, all of which indicated the abundance of rivers in the region. In fact, the epigraphic records testify that the rural

163 Thomas Walters, op cit., pp 189-190, R K Mosserji, op cit., p 167
164 R.R. Mukherji and S K Matty (eds.), op cit., p 42 (Dhānādāha Copper-plate Inscription of Kumāragupta I)
165 Ibid., p 60 (Dāmodarapur Copper-plate Inscription of Buddhagupta)
166 Ibid., p 303 (Ānulī Copper-plate Inscription of Laksmanasena), pp 221-222 (Rāmapāla Copper-plate Inscription of Śrīcandra)
167 ARASI, 1928-29; Pāṇini’s Astādhyāyī, i, iv 2 142, vi 2 89, Mahāstān Fragmentary Stone Plaque Inscription (third century BC), pp 39-40, Barrie M Morrison, op cit., p 4
168 Ibid.
169 R.R Mukherji and S K Matty (eds.),  op cit., p 67
170 Ibid., p 99.
171 Ibid., p 307
172 K.K Gupta (ed.), op cit., pp.156-159
settlements were generally located in close proximity to natural sources of surface water or extensions of such sources. The Khalimpur record of the Pāla king Dharmapāla (ninth century) mentioned in great details the boundaries of the donated land in four villages (grāma). Thus the donated land in Krauśaśvabhra-grāma was bounded on the west by a small river (Gaṅginikā), on the north by a small temple (devakulikā) and on the north-east by an embankment (ālī); in Mārdhāśālmāli-grāma the land was bounded on the north by Gaṅginikā and on the east and south water courses (ardhasrotikāyā) extending to Gaṅginikā; in Pālītika-grāma, the land was bounded on the south by a Kanā-dvīpikā (small island), on the east by the Konthiyā-srotah (channel) and on the north by the jolakah (marshy land), on the west by a khātika (ditch) called Vesānikā, and by a gomārga (cattle-path) as its northern boundary. Since the villages were gifted along with the ‘market places’, it may be presumed that the markets were accessible through the river and were important for river-borne trade. The Paścimbhāg grant (dated the tenth century) of Śrīcandra recorded the transfer of a large tract of land in three viśayās of Gorāla, Pagāra and Candrapura in the Śrīhaṭṭa-mandala within Puṇḍravardhana-bhakti. This was for settling a community of six thousand Brāhmaṇas and several other social groups and for construction of several matha complexes. The grant recorded that fifty-two pātakas of land were reserved for a boat-station (naubandha) in a place called Indesvara and the rest of the formerly unutilized tract was to form the new settlement called Candrapura-Brahmapura bounded on the east by a big fort (brhatkottālsimā), on the south by the Mani nadi (river), on the west by the Jujju khātaka (channel), Kāsthaparnī khātaka and Vetrāghatī nadi, and on the north by the Kosiyārā nadi (river). The Guṇāigarh grant of Vanyagupta (sixth century) mentions two ports at Cūḍāmanī and Nagaraśri and existence of a navigable channel between those two ports leading to the port of Prāḍāmāra. It also mentions that the navigable channel was open to boats. On the basis of epigraphic records pertaining to the region, B.M. Morrison commented that in the Madhupur jungle and the Varendra where the flooding was much

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less severe the homesteads were frequently grouped in villages centered on crossroads or a river crossing.\(^76\)

The settled villages comprised three major classes of land, \(\textit{viz}., \text{vāstu} \) (homestead), \(\textit{ksetra} \) (cultivable or agricultural land), and \(\textit{khila} \) (waste or fallow land). The sources indicate that there were different land tenures. Land was held by individuals as well as by the state / king. Forests and unused land were either communally owned or were under royal / state proprietorship. Land in the urban areas seems to have come under the king’s / state’s direct administration. Land had also become transformed into a commodity. It could be bought and sold by individuals and groups of individuals. Private landholders were required to pay taxes to the king, according to the class or type of the landholding or its quality and productive capacity. The copper-plate grants show that in certain cases lands were purchased by individuals and gifted to the Brāhmaṇas and temples. Of course, grants could be made only with permission of the local authorities and had to be regularized by the political authority by issuing records of the transfer usually on copper-plates. Usually the kings granted lands from areas which were considered to be under royal / state ownership. In most cases the beneficiaries were the Brāhmaṇas, temples and other donees including officials. The grants were conveyed through royal edicts for the purpose of bringing them to the knowledge of the public.

The donees thereupon gained certain privileges and immunities in the donated land at the expense of the peasant cultivators and other common inhabitants. The cultivating groups were henceforth required to give to the donee whatever shares of the produce had earlier been demanded by and paid to the king.\(^77\) The principle of \(bhūmichhidra\) accorded the Brāhmaṇa donee the status of primary colonizers of the plots of donated land. However, the operative clauses of the land grant clearly laid down the injunction that the donee could not part with, alienate or sell off the granted land under any circumstance. This provision created a permanent condition of attachment of the beneficiaries to the donated land and in due course of time this finally resulted in the donee having complete

\(^{76}\) Barrie M. Morrison, \textit{op.cit}, p.10.

\(^{77}\) Supra, Chapter IV (see landgrants).
ownership of the land. This was on account of his right to enjoy permanent usufructuary rights in the land as long as he adhered to the stipulated functions / duties enumerated in the charter. Subject to fulfilling the terms of the stipulation, the donee and his family were to enjoy in perpetuity the yields of the gifted land without any interference from the royal authorities. According to R.S. Sharma, two significant features of such grants, which became more frequent from the fifth century, were (i) the transfer of all sources of revenue, and (ii) the surrender of police and administrative functions.

The rights enjoined upon the donees included the yields of the revenue from all sources including “pasturage, hides and charcoal, mines for the production of salt, forced labour, and all hidden treasures and deposits of the villages.” The conferring of such rights upon the donee also meant the beginnings of delegating royal authority to the religious beneficiary. Significantly, in this regard, the donor not only abandoned his own claim to the revenues accruing from the granted land, but he also surrendered his right to govern the inhabitants settled in the donated land. The land grants of the Gupta period furnished evidence of the obligation on the part of the residents, including the cultivators and artisans, to transfer their customary taxes (in kind; hitherto paid to the king, viz., kara, bhāga and bhōga) to the donee. The grants also enjoined upon the residents of the donated land to obey the donee’s orders. Royal commands were issued wherein the ‘umbrella-bearers’ (chatravāsa) were asked not to interfere in the activities of the village or cause any kind of disturbance to the Brāhmaṇa donee. The donated land was outside the purview of royal interference, as it could not be entered by the royal troops, government officials and the police. As the post-Gupta sources indicated, the beneficiaries were granted the freedom to try cases and punish all kinds of offences committed within the jurisdiction of the villages donated to them. Evidently, the villages that were granted to the Brāhmaṇas and religious institutions included dwellings that belonged to peasants (khetaka) comprising the agricultural cultivating groups of Kaivarttas, cowherds, craftsmen, metal-workers, washermen, boatmen, shopkeepers,

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180 *ibid.*, pp.2-3.
181 *ibid*, p.3.
traders, etc. The Paścimbhāg Copper-plate grant of Śrīcandra provides one of the most elaborate lists of professional castes/groups who were transferred along with the land donated by the inscription.¹⁸² Such social elements were expected to provide necessary services to the beneficiaries. R.S. Sharma remarked, on the basis of the records he examined, that the beneficiaries were exempted from giving to the king any taxes and supplying any labour service which they could obviously collect from the villages held by them.¹⁸³

The social groups residing in the donated land had to provide all those services to the donees, which were hitherto rendered to the king. The donees were empowered with the right to impose “forced labour” upon the peasants (khetaka / kṣetra) and artisans (karmakaras / kulikas). Therefore labour service (viṣṭi) in various forms had to be rendered. It seems men were engaged in weighing and measuring agricultural produce, and in supervising the works of bringing in the sheaves of ripened crops, etc. Cultivation was carried out by ordinary men and women. It appears however that there was some division of labour. For instance, peasant women were engaged in filling up the granaries, grinding the grains, cleaning, decorating, spinning, weaving, and performing all sorts of household chores.¹⁸⁴

The right to impose “forced labour” more often than not became a legacy for the descendants of the donee. The residents of the donated plots of land were enjoined to pay taxes in kind (i.e., in terms of the produce accruing from the donated land). Different terms were used to indicate the taxes accruing from land and its produce, viz., bhāga, bhōga, etc. However, the actual amount denoted by these terms has not been determined with certainty. In course of time the status of the donees was relegated to the “functions of the collection of taxes, levy of forced labour, regulation of mines, agriculture, etc., together with those of the maintenance of law and order and defence which were hitherto

¹⁸² Ibid.
performed by the state officials. Thus, the Rāmapāla Copper-plate grant of Śrīcandra mentioned that the donee will enjoy the land permanently, circumscribed within its own boundaries, along with grass, pastures, mango and jackfruit trees, betel-nut and cocoanut trees, inclusive of the taxes levied for prevention of ten crimes and theft, immunity from all kinds of forced labour, not to be entered by the caṭtas and the bhattas, free from all dues, with all income, and gold enjoyed by the king. Similarly, the Tarpandīghi Copper-plate grant of Laksmanasena pronounced that a Brahmana was granted land measuring one hundred and twenty ādhavāpas and five unmānas, excluding such useless land as the road leading to a temple and cart-track, and yielding an annual income of one hundred and fifty kapardakapurānas, along with forests and branches, pits and barren tracts, sthala (land) and jala (water), betel-nut and cocoanut trees, with revenue yielded from fines imposed on perpetrators of the crimes, exempt from all oppression, not to be entered by caṭtas and bhattas, free from all dues, along with grass, puti plant and pastures. The Ānulīā Copper-plate of Laksmanaṣena also recorded the grant of a plot of land, to a scholar, measuring one pātaka, nine dronas, one ādhavāpa, thirty-seven unmānas and one kāniṇikā and yielding an annual income of one hundred kapardakapurānas along with forests and branches, pits and barren tracts, land and water, betel-nut and cocoanut trees, with revenue yielded from fines imposed on perpetrators of ten crimes, exempt from all oppression, along with grass and puti plant and pasture grounds, not to be entered by caṭtas and bhattas, free from all sorts of dues.

The rights and privileges made over to the donees were accompanied by a set of immunities that turned the benefices into practically independent pockets. The donees were completely immuned from the coercive administrative powers of the royal authorities. Kauṭilya recommended that land had to be granted in the new settlements according to the rules of the brahmadeya, wherein the donees were made completely free of paying taxes and from receiving all kinds of punishments. Evidently, the donees were also immuned from all kinds of interference by the royal officials and other

185 Ibid., p.4.
187 Ibid., p.300.
188 Ibid., pp.310-311.
189 Kauṭilyam Arthāśāstra, II, 1; R.S Sharma, ibid., p 3.
important members of the society, such as *caṭṭas, bhātias*, etc. The rights and immunities provided by the donors to the Brāhmaṇa donees to be enjoyed as the first colonizers of the granted land in course of time came to be enjoyed by the successors of the donee as the permanent privilege / right of the family. Henceforth the donated plots of land came to be held permanently. Some land grants recorded the sale, purchase and donation of land, the types of land and the practice of taxation. Such grants are indicative of land having become transformed into a commodity. Other grants however remained silent on the matter.

The epigraphic data sometimes gives impression of some amount of spatial distinction and social segmentation within the settlements. The Dhanaidaha grant mentioned two categories of inhabitants of the village, namely, the *brāhmaṇas* and the *mahattaras*, and eighteen individuals from the two categories represented the prominent families in the village. The expression *prātiveśi-kutumba* incorporated in the record seems to give the impression of the existence of a community of cultivators and the mixed composition of the population. The Kalākuri-Sultanpur Copper-plate grant (fifth century) recorded the donation of nine *kulyavāpas* of land, of which one was enclosed by an ancient moat (*parikhā*), with the Vata *nādi* (river) on the north and the borders of Gulmāghandhikā in its west; two *dronavāpas* were in Gulmāghandhikā in its east, to the west of its first pathway, and the remaining seven *kulyavāpas* and six *dronavāpas* were in Tāpasapōṭṭaka and Dayitapottaka in the *prāveśya* of Hastiśīrṣa and in Citravāṅtara in the *prāveśya* of Vibhīṇaka. B.D. Chattopadhyaya observed that the term *prāveśya* has been taken to

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192 *ibid.*, pp.41-44.


suggest that several villages were joined together for the purpose of fiscal assessment. He also observed that the villages mentioned in the Gupta records of northern Bengal were dispersed either in terms of their internal settlement structure or in terms of how they related to one another, both spatially and socially. The land perpetually gifted by the Gūnāigārgh inscription consisted of five segments and the boundaries of each segment have been marked out in minute detail e.g., rivers or ponds or other natural landmarks, or fields belonging to a monastery or an individual or a group of individuals, or to a caste (e.g., vaidya or physicians) or a specialized occupational group (e.g., dosī or community of cloth merchants; vardhaki or carpenter). This record also provided evidence of direct access to surface water through rivers and channels on the borders and ponds (puṣkarīṇī) within the settlements. However, as rightly observed by B.D. Chattopadhyaya, even with these details it is not possible to know the total configuration of the villages and one can only deduce that the cultivated fields bordered one another to cover a stretch generally uninterrupted by habitations and thus a spatial distinction existed between vāstu and kṣetra.

Finally, the society was characterized by the presence of numerous groups categorized according to their socio-economic and religious affiliations. As the known facts indicate, the different social categories included the land owners who were more often than not Brāhmanas (priests) and peasant cultivators; while in some cases, land could also be held by government officials and local elites, even artisans (goldsmiths, blacksmiths, potters) and manufacturers (textile weavers, spinners, dyers), as well as merchants and traders engaged in long- and short-distance commercial enterprises. Almost all the epigraphic evidence used so far attests to the fact of social differentiations and social stratification. The epigraphic records provide significant information on the structure of the rural community in terms of the degree of stratification which existed at the rural level and the linkage between rural settlements and rural community organizations as well as between the organs of the state. The Dhanāidaha Copper-plate grant of Kumāragupta I (fifth

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195 B.D. Chattopadhyaya, op cit., p.22.
196 Ibid., pp.22-23.
198 B.D. Chattopadhyaya, op cit., p.23
century) recorded that an āyuktaka (official) approached the kutumbins, the Brāhmaṇas, the mahattaras and the grāmaštakulādhikarana for the purchase of one kulyavāpa of land for the purpose of granting it to a Vaidic Brāhmaṇa. The mention of grāmāśtakulādhikarana is perhaps indicative of the hierarchical organization of the adhikaranas. It also suggests that the grāmāśtakulādhikarana may not have been an all comprehensive village body. This is because some of the social groups in the village — viz., the kutumbins, the Brāhmaṇas and the mahattaras — were mentioned separately from the adhikarana. The relative importance of the Brāhmaṇas and the mahattaras in the rural community is borne out by the fact that such individuals were mentioned by name in the Dhanāidaha Copper-plate grant. Notably, however, the grant specified that in case of land alienation, the consent of all categories of village residents was necessary. The Bāigrām Copper-plate grant of Kumāragupta I also confirmed the point of consent of the residents of the village in which the grant was made. But it did not mention grāmāśtakulādhikarana. Nor did it even have any reference to the viṣayādhikaraṇa in connection with the Pañcanagarī-viṣaya within which Koṭivarṣa was located, although it mentioned the Brāhmaṇa, mahattara, kutumbin, grāmika, etc., as together comprising an important section of the population. Similarly, the Dāmodarpur Copper-plate grant of the time of Buddhagupta introduced aṣṭakulādhikarana and mentioned that when one Nabhāka of Candagrama wanted to purchase a plot of land, he had to inform the mahattaras, the aṣṭakulādhikarana, the grāmika and the kutumbins about it. The Kalāikuri-Sultanpur grant, on the other hand, referred to the adhikarana of Śrṅgaṇeṣvara-vīthī. The grant recorded the communication addressed to the grāma-kutumbas headed by the Brāhmaṇas of the locality for the purpose of the land grant. As B.D. Chattopadhyaya concluded, on the basis of this evidence, the aṣṭakulādhikarana was interchangeable with grāmāśtakulādhikarana. In his opinion, grāmāśtakulādhikarana was originally a village organ composed of representatives of several families bound together by close blood relations, while the viṣayādhikaraṇa comprised, besides its official head, the kumārāmōtya, representatives from four non-agricultural occupational types.

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200 Ibid., pp.49-52.
201 Ibid., pp.58-60.
202 B.D. Chattopadhyaya, op.cit., p.38.
groups: *prathama-kulika* (the chief artisan), *prathama-kāyastha* (the chief scribe), *śārthavāha* (the merchant) and *nagara-śreṣṭhi* (the guild president of the town). Thus, the epigraphic records in effect highlighted the structure of the rural community based on functional and socio-economic interests that underlay the fact of the existing social stratification.

The impact of the establishment of new settlements and the urbanization process on the environment was equally significant. The proliferation of human settlements facilitated by the gifts and donations of large tracts of land through the land grants made by various hands (viz., the imperial and regional authorities, royal personages and officials) significantly affected the Pundrā region. The regular and varied range of human activities involving land, as discussed in the context of the settlement patterns, brought about visible change in the landscape of the area. Such human activities involved the following:

— the clearing of marshy lands and swamps;
— the reclamation of dense forests to make the area suitable for cultivation and human settlements;
— the construction of canals, tanks and channels to convert *khila* land into *kṣetra* land;
— the extension of settlements engendering the growth in the number of houses (shelters), ponds, tanks and wells attached to individual houses, construction of pathways and roads (for humans and cattles) and cart-tracks (for bullock carts), ports and boat-stations to connect settlements, agricultural fields, pasture grounds and market places;
— the erection of palaces and other structures and roads for the movement of the members of the royal families and personages in chariots, on horses and in palanquins.

All the above-mentioned activities had a direct bearing on the environment of Pundravardhana. As discussed earlier, there was a considerable degree of inter-dependence between the urban areas and the countryside. In fact, the urban-rural continuum was the basis of the growth of the society and economy in Pundravardhana.

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