Preface

The history of Puṇḍravardhana (i.e., the northern geographical division of Bengal) remains a major gap area in the modern writings on early Indian history. Although there were frequent references to Puṇḍravardhana in almost all the important works on ancient Bengal or ancient India that were published since the nineteenth century, the personality of Puṇḍravardhana was not the focus of those studies as on either Bengal or India as a whole. This, despite indications that in the early period of its history, Puṇḍravardhana had been geographically and historically important: As the known facts indicated, the region had been noticed in Indian writings since as early as the seventh century BC, as the land inhabited by the Puṇḍras. Its well-known settlement, Puṇḍranagara (identified with modern Mahāsthānagāra), had been the seat of the governor of the Mauryas in the east; it was also the findspot of the earliest inscription (dated the third century BC) ascribed to eastern India. By the period of the Guptas, the Puṇḍra region had assumed the status of a province. From the studies carried out so far it appears that the region’s importance was due to its strategic location: Being bounded by the sub-montane Himalayan range and northeastern India, and being traversed by all the major eastern rivers of the subcontinent, this resource-rich region had attracted streams of migrants from different directions to settle down and culturally mingle and merge with the region’s population, and thus provided the link with other regions for exchange of people, ideas, and goods. Graeco-Roman and Chinese writers had described Puṇḍravardhana as a flourishing area; this was corroborated by the evidence of archaeological excavations carried out therein, where the sites of an early civilization in the eastern part of the subcontinent abounded. However, it goes without saying that in the modern period, Puṇḍra as a race or the land of an ethno-cultural identity was already extinct; and the ancient land of Puṇḍra is now divided between India and Bangladesh. At any rate, students of History are still no wiser about the historical geography and social formations with reference to Puṇḍravardhana. For this reason, the theme demanded looking into. This thesis is the product of the inquiry into the theme.

The importance of Puṇḍravardhana in the early history of the eastern part of India had first drawn my attention as a postgraduate student of ancient Indian history at the North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong. After obtaining the Master’s degree I sought admission to the doctoral programme at the Department of History in the University. The Department appreciated my research interest and admitted me to the Ph.D. programme. It took me over eight years to complete the work in the present form. I had to wade through a wide range of documents: both Brahmanical and non-Brahmanical sources including foreign accounts, as well as epigraphic records and reports of other archaeological finds, besides many secondary works of historians/history writers dealing with various aspects of the history of Bengal and of ancient India, as would be evident from the Bibliography. It is hoped that the interpretation and organization of the evidence, despite whatever limitations, would contribute to further knowledge in the regional history of ancient and early medieval India.

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