Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

In the early periods of Indian history, the region now known as Bengal covered a large territorial area — which not only consisted of the state of West Bengal and some adjoining districts falling within Assam and Bihar, all within the Indian Union, but also included parts of the present-day Bangladesh — and comprised a number of sub-regions. Pundravardhana was one of those sub-regions. It probably derived its name, as in most other parts of India, from the name of the people inhabiting the region, i.e., the Pundras. In ancient Brahmanical literature, such as the epics\(^1\) and the Purāṇas,\(^2\) the Pundras were portrayed as among the tribal peoples. However, in the Buddhist\(^3\) and the Jaina\(^4\) sources as well as the Greek\(^5\) and Chinese accounts,\(^6\) Pundra was mentioned in the sense of a synonym for the convergence of the tribal and territorial identities. The inscriptions of the Maurya\(^7\) and the Gupta\(^8\) rulers mentioned Pundravardhana (or Paundravardhana) as a territory (in most cases as a bhukti, loosely translated as a province) and Pundranagara as a city or an urban centre. In the inscriptions and other records of the later Pāla\(^9\) and the Sena\(^10\) rulers, Pundravardhana was often mentioned as Varendra (and, sometimes, as Vārendri); the latter name also occurred in the historical literature of Bengal ascribed to

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\(^1\) Rāmāyaṇa IV, xi, 23-25; Mahābhārata I, c.iv, 53-55; I, c.xiii, 29; II, c.xxvii, 21; II, c.xxx, 16-25.
\(^2\) Brahmanda Purāṇa III, 74-103; Agni Purāṇa 272; Brahma Purāṇa 27-49; Bhaviśya Purāṇa XLVI. 49; Bhāgavata Purāṇa X, 59.
\(^3\) Divyāvadāna I. 21-22; XXIII. 427.
\(^8\) Ibid., pp.41-73 (see, for instance, the Dānāidaka Copper-plate, Dāmodarpur Copper-plate, Bāigrām Copper-plate, Pāhārāpur Copper-plate and the Guṇāghār Copper-plate inscriptions).
\(^9\) Ibid., pp.95-220 (see, for instance, the Khālimpur Copper-plate, Āmghā Copper-plate, Manahali Copper-plate and the Bāngad Copper-plate inscriptions).
\(^10\) Ibid., pp.244-320 (see, for instance, the Deopārā Copper-plate, the Tarpaṇḍīghī Copper-plate, Ānuliā Copper-plate and the Madanapāḍā Copper-plate inscriptions).
the period between the ninth and twelfth centuries. Under the later Sena rulers the land was called Lakṣmaṇāvati. The Persian accounts of the twelfth-thirteenth century referred to the same territory or a part of it as either Bārind (understandably, a corruption of Varendra) or Lakhnāuti (the shortened form of Lakṣmaṇāvati, named after king Lakṣmaṇasena).

Problem and Scope

Although the scholars are almost unanimous in identifying Puṇḍravardhana with the northern part of modern Bengal (or northern Bengal), so far they have not paid enough attention to the study of the geographical extent of this territory or its boundaries pertaining to different periods of its history. Among the literary sources, the first direct mention of Puṇḍra occurred in the Aitareya Brāhmaṇa, but the reference was to a people called Puṇḍra. As a matter of fact, Puṇḍra as a territory was first mentioned in the Mahāsthāṅgarh Inscription dated to about the third century BC. This inscription spoke of Puṇḍanagala (i.e., the Prakritised version of Puṇḍranagara) as the seat of administration within the region. The Greek and the Chinese accounts as well as the

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14 Aitareya Brāhmaṇa, VII. 13-18.
16 Ibid.
17 Supra, 5n.
18 Supra, 6n.
Buddhist and Jaina literary works referred to Puṇḍra or Paunḍra in the sense of both people and a territory. The Divyavadāna (a Buddhist text of about the second century) for the first time mentioned Puṇḍravardhana as a large territory in the east. However, the emergence of Puṇḍravardhana as a distinct cultural and political region or a regional concept in Eastern India has generally been traced back to about the Gupta period only. For example, the five copper-plate inscriptions discovered at Dāmodarpur in northern Bengal referred to Puṇḍravardhana as a bhukti, in the sense of a large territorial unit likened to a province, suggesting that it formed part of the Gupta Empire. Thereafter, the inscriptions of the post-Gupta period, like those of the Pālas, the Senas, the Varmans and the Candras provided significant information on the geographical extent of Puṇḍravardhana. They also gave glimpses of aspects of the political structure and administrative organization, the process of culture change, the economic organization and transformation, particularly in terms of agriculture, commodity production and trade, as well as the urbanization process, the growth of the regional identity, its transformation and decline. It bears noting, however, that the potential of the above-mentioned sources for reconstructing the history of Puṇḍravardhana has not yet been fully recognized or exploited by the earlier writers.

As the studies undertaken by various scholars have indicated, the geographical extent of the Puṇḍra region during the ancient and early medieval period seems to have been continuously changing and thus the matter of its historical reconstruction remains a problem. The problem is compounded by the fact that sometimes the political or administrative boundary of Puṇḍravardhana was confined to the area corresponding to the northern geographical division of Bengal, whereas, at other times, it extended to parts

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21 E.B. Cowell & R.A. Neil (tr.), Divyavadāna, Cambridge, 1886; reprint 1959, Mithila Institute, Darbhanga. For insights into the implication of the evidence of this Buddhist source, see also B.N. Choudhury, Buddhist Centres in Ancient India, Sanskrit College, Calcutta, 1969, pp.9-11.
23 Supra, 9th.
24 Ibid., pp.244-348.
of eastern and southern Bengal as well. According to some scholars, the area corresponding to southern and south-western Bengal was generally mentioned as the Rādhā region, while northern Bengal was referred to as Varendra. Therefore, the identification of northern Bengal as the core area of Pundravardhana may not be incorrect, but the context of its shifting boundaries remains to be defined as accurately as possible on the basis of the sources of information.

The evidence available to us by now makes it abundantly clear that at certain points of time Pundravardhana extended further towards the east and the northeast to include parts of Vanga, Samaṭa and Kāmarūpa. For instance, the tenth century Paścīmbhāg Copper-plate Inscription (named after its discovery at a village called Paścīmbhāg in Sylhet district), which was issued by Śrīcandra of Vanga-Harikela, mentioned Śrīhaṭṭa as a mandala within Pundravardhana-bhukti. It further stated that Śrīhaṭṭa-mandala included at least three visayas, viz., Candrapura, Garala and Pagara. According to this inscription, the ruler Śrīcandra donated large tracts of land within the mandala in favour of religious beneficiaries. The evidence of the same inscription has been widely used by the mainstream scholars of ancient Indian history in various contexts during the last four decades. But so far no attempt has been made to reconstruct the historical geography of Pundravardhana-bhukti on the basis of this important piece of evidence. Under the rule of the Candras and the Senas the territorial jurisdiction of Pundravardhana-bhukti extended further towards the east to cover parts of the area known as Samaṭa. This contention derives support from the evidence of the landgrants which were made in the Samaṭa-mandala within Pundravardhana-bhukti. Similarly, the references to Pundravardhana as a bhukti and also as a visaya in some of the inscriptions of Kāmarūpa deserve consideration in the same context. The copper-plate inscriptions mainly contained records of landgrants which were issued by some important rulers / personages in the visayas and mandalas of Pundravardhana-bhukti. Hence, according to the previous writers, the facts

28 Supra, 26n.
suggested that the rise and fall of various ruling dynasties in eastern India (particularly in Bengal) had a direct bearing on the geographical extent of Pundravardhana as a political division or a regional concept. As such, the reconstruction of the geographical extent of Pundravardhana remains a historiographic problem waiting to be resolved.

The known facts also indicated that the physical features of Pundravardhana played a significant role in the formative periods of its society and culture. The region of Pundravardhana encompassed hills and plains and also important rivers, viz., the Kuśiyārā, the Gaṅgā, the Tīstā, the Padmā, the Meghnā, the Brahmaputra, the Karatoyā, the Punarbhavā and the Atrāi. Its geographical location, therefore, seems to have provided the opportunity for the peoples to carry out agricultural activities as well as maritime, river-borne and overland trade, and thus attracted different groups of people into the region. The literary sources mentioned the co-existence of several communities like the Vaṅgas, Puṇḍras and the Kirātas in the region. In fact, the Chinese accounts attested to the existence of religious shrines and cited instances of royal patronage to religious institutions and leaders. Such patronage was mainly in the form of land grants and construction of temples and monasteries.

The grants of extensive tracts of land in favour of religious beneficiaries no doubt had crucial socio-economic implications, considering that only the powerful rulers and the affluent sections of the society made such grants. The land grants were instrumental in bringing in a large number of Brāhmaṇa donees into Pundravardhana for permanent settlement. The donees, in turn, facilitated the spread of varnāśramadharma or the Brahmanical code of conduct, enjoining upon the residents of the donated areas to follow the prescribed rules of behaviour. The data provided by the copper-plates can also be used to find out about the settlement patterns and the spread of settled cultivation in the region. The early Indian literary sources and some of the Chinese accounts are helpful.

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32 Supra, 6n.
34 Kautālyam Arthashastra 2.11.17-18.
for studying the indigenous crafts and industries, the short and long distance trading activities that certain sections of the population were engaged in, and the development of urban centres within the region. In this regard, mention may be made of urban centres like Mahāsthāngaḥ (in the Bagura district in Bangladesh) and Bāṅgarh (on the east bank of the river Punarbhavā in the present-day West Dinajpur district in West Bengal). A fresh look into the economic products of the region, the nature of trade, and the rise and development of urban centres would no doubt facilitate better understanding of the social processes and the superstructures that evolved over the centuries. Admittedly, some of the earlier scholars had initiated discussions on these points in various contexts, but the fact remains that there is still plenty of scope to look afresh at the evidence of the sources for an integrated study of the political, social and economic processes in the Puṇḍra region during the ancient and early medieval period.

As stated already, scholars have been more or less unanimous in identifying Puṇḍravardhana with the northern division of modern Bengal. However, their inquiries into its history have not proceeded on exactly the same lines. There are works dealing with aspects of the political structure and administrative organization of the region; there is even some amount of discussion on the economic organization and its gradual transformation, particularly in terms of agriculture, commodity production and trade as well as the urbanization processes. But such scholarly presentations were in the nature of descriptive accounts and were with reference to the rule of different dynasties, thereby implying that change was brought about on account of the efforts of the rulers. Other works that were produced only in the last three decades of the twentieth century displayed the initial attempts made by some scholars to provide explanatory accounts of the developments that had taken place in Bengal during the pre-Sultanate period. They pioneered inquiry into aspects of historical geography and social formations in Bengal as a whole. But by and large their studies took no cognizance of the situation in Puṇḍravardhana at different periods of its history. Their perceived assumptions on the general history of Bengal resulted in making sweeping generalizations for the whole of Bengal that more often than not remained unsubstantiated. This, despite the fact that the

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35 Supra, 6n.
36 Infra, Chapters III, VI, VII.
37 Supra, 13n.
Punja region had thrown up a wealth of source material that could be exploited to realize its full potential. It is for these reasons that the present research work has been undertaken. The purpose of this study has been to fill in the gap areas as outlined in the objective of this work. Towards this end the conceptual frameworks of (a) historical geography and (b) social formations have been used. These are briefly dilated as follows:

(a) Historical geography is the study of the geographic patterns of a region through time to understand how the people interacted with their environment and created the cultural landscape. The landscape and the cultures within it can be better understood if the physical, cultural, economic and political influences are taken into account. Historical geography involves combining the study of super-structural and related systems with that of the life and conditions prevailing in the region as can be gleaned from the evidence of the extant sources. Historical geography is not much concerned with the description and analysis of the territory per se.

(b) The concept of 'social formations' is representative of the structuralist conception of social life. In this sense it is the factor of social relations that is said to determine what happens within societies. As Louis Althusser put it, any social formation is a complex of concrete economic, political and ideological relations that are interlinked and given their particular character as capitalist, feudal or whatever by the fact of the socio-economic foundations of life. Following Althusser, Indian scholars such as Irfan Habib and R.S. Sharma have identified key elements such as the form of labour process (determined by the extent of bondage and production for market), the manner of extraction of surplus (e.g., land tax, rent), the system of distribution of the surplus and mode of production to study social formations.

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Survey of Literature

A survey of the available studies in the history of eastern India, particularly Bengal and Assam, demonstrates the fact that there is as yet no published work which specifically and exclusively covers the early history of the Pundravardhana region. There are, of course, some scholars who have included in their study of ancient Indian history certain aspects of developments in the region. A few have also pioneered studies in the regional history of Bengal or Assam pertaining to the early periods. However, most of the secondary works published so far are basically limited to the study of dynastic and political history and are in the nature of compilation of information without the appropriate interpretation or theoretical formulations. Moreover, it can hardly be ignored that most of the writers dealing with various facets of the history of Pundravardhana were influenced by the imperialist, nationalist and regionalist points of view.

As is well known, Indian history and culture found its earliest reference in the works of the British administrator-historians who belonged to the Imperialist School and whose main interest was to justify British colonial rule in India. They made the initial attempts to explain Indian culture; but the purpose of their attempts was to extend support to the establishment and consolidation of British rule in the subcontinent. They projected Indian history in a manner that would be conducive to achieve the colonial goals. Alexander Cunningham's *Ancient Geography of India*,\(^40\) which was one of the earliest works to marginally reflect on the Pundravardhana region as well map out the geographical location of the various regions of ancient India, bore a clear imprint of the imperialist approach. F.J. Monahan's *The Early History of Bengal*\(^41\) was another work that belonged to the same colonial-imperialist tradition. The followers of the imperialist school did not really address themselves to the issue of identifying the geographical dimensions of the ‘frontier’ and ‘peripheral’ regions such as Pundravardhana. This was because the focus of the histories written by those who subscribed to the historiographic tradition of the imperialist school was on northern India, and, specifically, the Gangetic basin. Moreover,

\(^{40}\) Alexander Cunningham, *op.cit.*
these writers projected a static picture of ancient India, where the people are said to have devoted themselves only to religious and philosophical pursuits and to have been hardly aware of the political and economic developments that had been taking place around them. The British writers completely ignored the dynamics of society and culture and the matter of uneven developments in a large territorial area with immense diversities that was India. It must be said to the credit of those writers that they were meticulous in collecting and collating information from all available sources. But all said and done, they tended to be dogmatic insofar as upholding the stereotyped assumptions were concerned.

Alongside the colonial-imperialist writings, a school of ‘Oriental’ scholarship had also emerged in the nineteenth century among the Western scholars. Those subscribing to the scholarship of the Oriental School tended to glorify the attainments of early India in religion and philosophy without critically examining the sources they encountered. The Westerners who engaged themselves in studies on India were more commonly known as Indologists. They concerned themselves with learning the languages of the land and exploring a vast range of primary sources of ancient Indian history; some of them edited the texts of the sources and even translated them into the European languages. The best known among the Indologists were Sir M. Monier-Williams, who produced the monumental work, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, and Thomas Watters, who brought out a vivid account of a Chinese pilgrim’s experiences in his book entitled, *On Yuan-Chwang’s Travels in India (AD 629-645)*. These sources are undoubtedly very helpful for identifying places and verifying information gleaned from other sources recorded in the subcontinent (including those of the Pundra region), ascribed to early times. Of course, the works were not completely free from Western biases.

Antithetical to the assumptions of the Indologists and scholars influenced by the imperialist school during the colonial period were scholars / writers of Indian origin who belonged to the Nationalist School. The latter’s literary efforts displayed the tendency on

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43 Thomas Watters, *op. cit.*
the part of the nationalist writers to find positive traits in — as against the limitations of — Indian traditions that had been focused upon by the writers of the imperialist tradition. In fact, the writers of the Nationalist School were inspired by the nationalist upsurge in the country from the nineteenth century onwards and the attempts on the part of the nationalist leaders to bring about the termination of British rule in India. The nationalist writers glorified India’s past and sought to unite — and infuse patriotism among — the Indians to serve the national purpose by harping on the ‘glorious heritage’ of the Indian institutions and traditions, whose origins were ascribed to ancient times. Among those whose writings had an impact on subsequent historical studies in India including Bengal, were H.C. Raychaudhuri and R.K. Mookherji. While writing on India as a whole, they contributed significantly to the history of Bengal but with a distinct nationalist bias. The trend continued even after India achieved independence, as may be inferred from the writings of B.G. Gokhale and M.R. Singh who produced their works several years after India became free from foreign rule. The nationalist writers exaggerated the information at their disposal and tried to show that the ‘country-wide’ empires like those of the Mauryas and the Guptas had flourished in India even before Britain herself had attained the semblance of civilized life. However, like their imperialist predecessors, the nationalist writers laid emphasis only on the history of the Indo-Gangetic basin or northern India, which ostensibly was the originator of most of the major dynasties of ancient India. In the process, they tended to ignore the histories of other areas in the sub-continent outside the Gangetic basin. Hence, in their works, the region of Pundravardhana figured only in the context of the integrative role of the major empires of northern India, whose rulers supposedly extended their hegemony over ‘distant’ and ‘peripheral areas’. The works of the nationalist writers also suffered from limitations of approach, having been dominated by the Orientalist scholarship of the nineteenth century and the nationalistic scholarship of the twentieth century.

44 H.C. Raychaudhuri, op.cit.
A by-product of the Nationalist School was the school of regional history. It emerged in response to the need to prove the existence of a 'pan-Indian' culture and civilization all over the subcontinent beginning from ancient times. This led to a stocktaking of the 'common' heritage of the Indian people throughout the subcontinent to attribute justification for the nationalist upsurge and the resultant establishment of the Indian nation-state. The mid-twentieth century therefore saw a spurt of writings on regional histories. Such writings, like those of the nationalist writers, aimed at inspiring the people of India to unite against foreign rule in the country and to contribute to national integration, and at promoting a 'national culture' after independence.

Eventually, however, the notions of regional chauvinism rather than those of nationalism dominated writings on regional histories, both before and after India became independent. This is revealed in the works of Rakhaldas Bandopadhyaya, K.L. Barua, R.C. Majumdar, P.C. Choudhury, and A.K. Sur among others. It was in their works that the region of Puñḍravardhana found mention to an appreciable degree. R.C. Majumdar gave the most detailed account of Puñḍravardhana. His works dwelt on various aspects of the history of the Puñḍra region, on the social and political developments, economic activities, historical geography, and religions and religious institutions. Majumdar revised and enlarged his works from time to time in consonance with the availability of new evidence derived from epigraphic records and excavation reports that came to light subsequently. Although his references to the Puñḍra region remained inadequate even after the revisions, it should be acknowledged that his writings brought to light some conventional source materials for the study of the Puñḍra region in terms of not only literary sources but also epigraphic and other archaeological data. The spade work he did inspired his younger contemporaries to focus on the study of the

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50 R.C. Majumdar (ed.), History of Bengal, Vol.1, Dacca University, Dacca. 1943.
53 R.C. Majumdar, The Early History of Bengal, Dacca University, Dacca. 1924; idem., History of Ancient Bengal, loc.cit.
Nevertheless, in spite of all their attempts, the regionalist writers failed to integrate the region's political and socio-economic history into the mainstream Indian history. Each of the themes covered by them remained in a separate compartment, while the historical perspective was confined to the study of the dynastic history only.

Thereafter there were some attempts by Indian empiricists to project a clearer picture of Indian history by using a wider range of sources — literary, epigraphic and other archaeological material. B.C. Law pioneered this trend in his *Historical Geography of Ancient India*, which threw significant light on the historical geography of Pundravardhana in the context of dynastic changes. He made meticulous use of available sources to locate the origin and development of place-names including aspects of religion, philosophy and political thought. But in the final analysis, Law’s work was in the nature of a dictionary of place-names, and the expression ‘historical geography’ in the title was a misnomer. Law made no attempt to examine the implications of the various forms of socio-economic and political structures. Another empiricist, D.C. Sircar (an epigraphist by training) made a substantial contribution to historical research by his novel use of epigraphic evidence to corroborate literary data. Like a true empiricist, Sircar repeatedly crosschecked the earlier works dealing with the region of Pundravardhana. Nonetheless, he, too, made no attempt to explain the implications of the socio-economic and political structures.

Evidently, the imperialist, nationalist, regionalist and the empiricist authors of historical writings had their main focus on the dynastic and political history of India and the different regions within the country, including Pundravardhana. The writers did not try to explain the role played by geographical factors in the evolution of the superstructures or the socio-economic input of the area in social and polity formation processes. It becomes apparent from the various works produced from the nineteenth century onwards that the writers had paid some attention to inquiring into the hitherto neglected area of historical

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55 B.C. Law, *op.cit.*

geography and this gradually became the focus of their studies. This is evident from such works by B.C. Law, H.C. Raychaudhuri, Puspa Niyogi and Paramanand Gupta who devoted parts of their respective research works to Puṇḍravardhana. One seminal work on the historical geography of Bengal was, of course, Amitabha Bhattacharyya’s *Historical Geography of Ancient and Early Medieval Bengal*. It was indeed the first work to have provided the most detailed treatment of the historical geography of Bengal, including Puṇḍravardhana, on the basis of the entire range of sources beginning with the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*. Notably, however, Amitabha Bhattacharyya’s work still did not adopt the interdisciplinary approach or the socio-economic and cultural perspectives which are important for the study of historical geography.

It was only in recent years that some historians took the cue from non-Indian scholars working on the history of pre-modern societies drawing on advances in research methods and theoretical assumptions to try and apply them to the Indian situation. Barrie M. Morrison in his book, *Political Centers and Cultural Regions in Early Bengal*, made meticulous use of over eighty copper-plate inscriptions of Bengal (all ascribed to the period ranging from circa third century BC to the mid-twelfth century AD), besides other corroborative sources. He grouped the Bengal inscriptions into four on the basis of typology, and identified four distinct divisions in early Bengal (of which Varendra or northern Bengal was one), and used the comparative method for the purpose of interpreting and analyzing the evidence. As a matter of fact, his treatment of northern Bengal (Puṇḍra region) is so far the most detailed and analytical, even though the work had the specific purpose of studying only the political centres and cultural regions in early Bengal. However, it was B.D. Chattopadhyaya in his work, *Aspects of Rural Settlements and Rural Society in Early Medieval Bengal*, who succeeded in uncovering significant aspects of the historical geography of ancient Bengal. His work complemented and offered certain correctives to the works of both Amitabha Bhattacharyya and Barrie

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57 *Supra*, 55n.
58 H.C. Raychaudhuri, *op.cit.*
59 Puspa Niyogi, *op.cit.*
60 Paramanand Gupta, *op.cit.*
61 Amitabha Bhattacharyya, *op.cit*
62 Barrie M. Morrison, *op.cit*
63 B.D. Chattopadhyaya, *op.cit.*
M. Morrison. Another noteworthy work is Dilip K. Chakrabarti’s *Ancient Bangladesh – A Study of the Archaeological Sources.* As the title suggests, the work is concerned with the study of the archaeological sources including the epigraphic records pertaining to the early history of Bangladesh. It provides valuable insight into the early history of southeast Bengal.

The foregoing survey of literature indicates that the scholars have covered only some limited aspects of the political, economic and cultural history of Puṇḍravardhana as parts of their works on larger or specific themes. To our knowledge, only two doctoral dissertations have been so far completed on aspects of the history of Puṇḍravardhana, viz., “Puṇḍravardhana in Historical Perspective” by Mandira Bhattacharyya and “Puṇḍravardhana / Varendra: A Socio-Economic and Cultural Profile of a sub-region of Early Bengal (Circa third century BC-mid twelfth Century AD)” by Ranjusri Ghosh. Neither of the two is published yet. As the titles of both the works indicate, these are studies on select aspects of the history of Puṇḍravardhana. Therefore, none of the published or secondary works discussed in this section dealt with Puṇḍravardhana as a distinct area of historical research with the focus on the geographical extent and the historical processes in the Puṇḍra region. In the works dealing with aspects of Indian history or the history of Bengal the Puṇḍra region has been covered very scantily. There is not a single published work so far to name on the history of Puṇḍravardhana (that is, northern Bengal) or any aspect of it per se. This is despite the fact that Puṇḍra had been listed as one of the important regions in ancient India at least from the time of Pāṇini (sixth-fifth century BC), as known from his major work, *Aṣṭadhyāyī,* and even during the period covering the Maurya and the Gupta times, Puṇḍra was a well-known janapada in eastern India along with Maṇḍūka, Kalinga, Sumha, Anga, Vanga, Saṃkṣetra, Kāmarūpa, etc. The movements of peoples, of goods and ideas from the Indo-Gangetic plains to the Himalayan region extending to northeast India and vice versa were through the Puṇḍra region. The problem under investigation therefore calls for a systematic study of the extant source-materials. The foregoing survey of literature indicates that there is enough

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64 D.K. Chakrabarti, *op. cit.*  
scope to accomplish the task on the basis of the sources that are now available in print, both primary and secondary. Moreover, the works providing new perspectives of early Indian history, which are now available, hold out promise to a research scholar to explore greater possibilities of reaching a better understanding of the themes and the area under study.

As regards the approach, it deserves noting that from the second half of the twentieth century, historical writings on ancient India underwent a sea change due to the adoption of inter-disciplinary and analytical methods. Among the trailblazers may be named scholars like R.S. Sharma, Romila Thapar, B.D. Chattopadhyaya, Kunal Chakrabarti and Kumkum Roy. The spade work was done by D.D. Kosambi in the mid-twentieth century. In fact, the critical and analytical study of ancient Indian history initiated by D.D. Kosambi and subsequently carried out by R.S. Sharma and Romila Thapar has been a source of inspiration for a host of other scholars working on regional histories. B.D. Chattopadhyaya, for instance, in his study of the making of early medieval India, argued for the need to re-examine the nature of change “from ancient to early medieval”, “constructing in clear contours an image of what tends to be called ancient”, and “providing a construct of early medieval”. Towards this end he “picked on the

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68 R.S. Sharma, Śūdras in Ancient India, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1958; idem, Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1959; idem, Indian Feudalism C. AD 300-1200, New Delhi, 1965; reprint 1980, Macmillan India Ltd., New Delhi; idem, Material Culture and Social Formations in Ancient India, loc. cit.


72 Kumkum Roy, The Emergence of Monarchy in North India – Eighth to Fourth Centuries B.C., OUP, Delhi, 1995.


74 B.D. Chattopadhyaya, The Making of Early Medieval India, loc. cit., p.3.
process of local state formation, despite the presence of large territorial states in the early historical period, as exemplifying the process of transition”.

In the same vein, Kumkum Roy emphasised how uncritical the nationalist, orientalist and utilitarian historians of the colonial phase had been in their use of the early Indian texts. In her dissertation on the emergence of monarchy in north India (eighth to fourth centuries BC) as reflected in the Brahmanical traditions, she analyzed the textual sources and highlighted the importance of understanding the ritual traditions, along with the texts, in examining the varṇa hierarchy, kinship structure and household organization, since the origin myths and ritual practices legitimated the positions of status of the functionaries in the socio-political order. Finally, she proceeded to focus on changes within the kinship structure and household organizations as a step towards explaining the emergence of monarchy, viewing the emergence of monarchy not as an inspiration from above but as the result of a complex process of social change. Kunal Chakrabarti, another historian of significance working on the role of the Bengal Purāṇas in the making of a regional religious tradition, systematically dealt with religious processes that had taken place in Bengal before and after the advent of Brahmanism; he evaluated the outcome of these processes as experienced in the field of a regional tradition in Bengal. He meticulously used the entire range of relevant literary sources (particularly the Purāṇas) only after proving their historicity through internal and external criticism in a section dealing with the historiography of literatures related to religious processes in India and the use of religious texts for their writings. He also delved into the problem of the indiscriminate use of archaeological sources by some of the earlier writers and suggested more practical ways of using the archaeological material as a major source of information in his scheme of work. Admittedly, these recent mainstream writings did not reflect much on the ‘frontier’ or ‘peripheral’ regions like Pundravardhana beyond occasional references. This was because their focus of study was much larger in scope. Nonetheless, the approaches they adopted have the potential for enhancing our understanding of historical phenomena.

75 Ibid., p.19.
76 Kumkum Roy, op.cit., pp.1-29.
of all the regions within the subcontinent and may be worth emulating for the purpose of this study.

**Objective**

The objective of this study is as follows:
- to trace the development of Puṇḍravardhana as a regional concept;
- to work out the settlement patterns in the Puṇḍravardhana region during the period *circa* fourth century BC to about twelfth century AD;
- to focus on the society, religion and economy in the region and the historical change in a broad sense by inquiring into the origin and development of the *varṇa* ideal; implications of land grants; technology and social change; religious dimensions in terms of sectarian developments, etc.;
- to inquire into the state and polity formation processes in different parts of the region;
- to highlight the impact of geographical and ethnic factors on the evolution of superstructures in different parts of the region.

**Sources and Method**

Our study is based on the following:

(a) **Primary sources** comprising literary texts, epigraphs and archaeological material,\(^{77}\) as follows:

(i) Literary sources dating from the later Vedic period up to the post-Gupta period — Brahmanical and non-Brahmanical, Indian and foreign — almost all of which have been critically edited and translated by well-known scholars in their respective fields;

(ii) Inscriptions attributed to rulers of different dynasties — Maurya, Gupta, Pāla, Sena, Varman and Candra — particularly the copper-plates, a large number of which have by now been uncovered in the greater Puṇḍra area; and

\(^{77}\) Details are provided in Select Bibliography at the end of the thesis.
(iii) Data gathered from archaeology comprising excavated artifacts, hoards of silver and copper coins, sherds of pottery, and structural remains both private and public, scattered across different parts of the region.

(b) Secondary sources comprising relevant publications on both general and regional histories of early India that have been produced during the last two centuries.78

The study is an attempt to proceed on the lines of approach followed by the recent mainstream Indian historians [such as D.D. Kosambi, R.S. Sharma and Romila Thapar] and the regional historians who have worked on Bengal [like Barrie M. Morrison, Dilip K. Chakrabarti and B.D. Chattopadhyaya]. An attempt is made in this research work to combine the study of superstructural and related systems with that of the life and conditions prevailing in the region drawing on the extant evidence. The study will also make use of the inter-disciplinary research methods of Social Sciences and other fields of scholarship, which now form part and parcel of contemporary historical research in India.

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78 For the list of publications, see *infra*, Bibliography.