Chapter III
REGIONAL CONCEPT OF PUṆḌRAVARDHANA

The geographical extent of Puṇḍravardhana as a bhukti (province) having political jurisdiction over the territory and the people can be marked out from the evidence of the epigraphic records issued by members of the ruling families who held sway in the region from time to time. The Mauryas and the Guptas, whose main political base was the middle Gangetic valley, ruled over Bengal and other parts of eastern and northern India from their capital, Pāṭaliputra. In the post-Gupta period, the Pālas of Bengal ruled over parts of eastern and northern India at certain points of time and were involved in the tripartite struggle against the Rāṣṭrakūtās and the Gurjara-Pratihāras for the occupation of Kanauj. The Candras, Varmans and Senas basically ruled over smaller or larger parts of Bengal during the period of their hegemony. Of these four dynasties, the Varmans established their rule over eastern Bengal; and a portion of Puṇḍravardhana formed part of their domain for a brief period. But the Pālas, Candras and Senas not only ruled over Puṇḍravardhana along with the rest of Bengal but even the seat of their authority (or capital) was sometimes located within Puṇḍravardhana itself. Nonetheless, the territory of Puṇḍravardhana was endowed with the status of a bhukti or province under all these imperial powers, although the boundary of the province changed from time to time. The chronological sequence of the development of Puṇḍravardhana is given below on the basis of epigraphic evidence.

Changing Extent of Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti

The Mahāsthāṅgarh Fragmentary Stone Inscription of the third century BC1 provided the earliest reference to Puṇḍra as a political division during the Maurya period. In fact, the Mahāsthāṅgarh inscription was the earliest epigraphic source recorded in the early

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Mauryan Brāhmī character to have been recovered from Mahāsthān in the Bagura district (now in Bangladesh). It recorded that the sādvarika (local administrator or governor) of the prosperous city of Puṇḍanagala (i.e., Prakritized form of Puṇḍranagara of the Sanskrit records) was ordered by the imperial authority to grant paddy, sesamum and mustard seeds to the Samvamgīyas (i.e., followers of the Saḍvargika sect of Buddhism in Bengal) during any period of distress or emergency, to be replenished in due course with paddy and coins. The reference to Puṇḍanagala in this inscription confirms the identification of Puṇḍranagara with Mahāsthāngarh and indicates that the Puṇḍra region formed an administrative division within the Mauryan Empire. Two votive inscriptions at Sānchi (dated the second century BC) referred to Puṇāvadana (i.e., Puṇḍravardhana) while recording the gifts by two inhabitants from that place (i.e., Puṇāvadana) for the improvisation of the Sānchi stūpa. Some scholars suggested that ‘Puṇāvadana’ should actually be read as Puṇḍravardhana.

The expansion of the Magadhan Empire during the Gupta period (from the fourth century to the sixth century) witnessed certain modifications in the territorial organization of the areas subsumed under the Empire. The region corresponding to Bengal (consisting of Sumha, Rāda, Puṇḍra and Vaṅga or Tāmralipta, Rādha, Varendra, Vaṅga, Samaṭa, etc.) could not escape the changes brought about by the expanding influence of the imperial Guptas. The contents of the Mehrauli Pillar Inscription of Candragupta I (located in Delhi), the Allahabad Pillar Inscription of Samudragupta, and other epigraphic documents of the Gupta period have been interpreted by scholars to suggest that Vaṅga, Samaṭa, Tāmralipta, Puṇḍravardhana and Vardhamāna-bhukti were parts of the Gupta Empire. As R.K. Mookherji has shown, Bengal was conquered by Candragupta I. The Mehrauli Pillar Inscription recorded Candragupta’s victory over the coalition of the imperial Guptas.

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chiefs of Bengal. The Allahabad Pillar Inscription (fourth century) mentioned the rulers of Samatāta, Davāka, Kāmarūpa, Nepāla, Karttrpura, etc., as ‘frontier kings’ (prātyanta nrpati) of Samudragupta’s empire. It may therefore be inferred that Bengal proper (or Vaṅga, Tāmralipta, Pundravardhana, Vardhamāna, etc.) was already a part of the Gupta Empire during the reign of Samudragupta. Bengal comprised political units such as bhuktis (provinces), mandaḷas (divisions) and viṣayas (districts) of the Gupta Empire. Moreover, even the kingdoms of Kāmarūpa and Nepāla which lay beyond Pundravardhana were mentioned as ‘frontier kingdoms’ (prātyanta rājya) in the inscription. R.K. Mookherji suggested that Bengal continued to be an integral part of the Gupta Empire even under the successors of Samudragupta, particularly, Candragupta II and Kumāragupta I. Thus the region of Pundravardhana bounded by the Gaṅgā on the west and the river Karatoypī on the east was under the rule of the Guptas from the second quarter of the fifth century to about the middle of the sixth century. It included the areas corresponding to undivided Malda, Dinajpur, Rajshahi, Bagura and Rangpur districts and parts of Pabna and Murshidabad districts of modern times.

As stated already, Bengal continued to exist as an integral part of the Gupta Empire under the successors of Samudragupta up to the reign of Buddhagupta. By the period of Kumāragupta I, Bengal was administered by his governors ruling over its different provinces. This fact is borne out by the evidence of a vast range of epigraphic sources, the important among which were Skandagupta’s Bhitari Inscription, and Kumāragupta I’s Dāmodarapura Copper-plate Inscriptions (AD 443 to AD 448), Bāigrām Copper-plate Inscription (AD 447) and the Dānāidaha grant. The Jagadishpur Copper-plate Inscription (Gupta Era 128 = AD 447) of Kumāragupta I, issued from Purnakausikā in Śrṅgaverā-viṭṭhā, referred to Pundravardhana, but it did not mention the suffix ‘bhuktī’. However, in several other epigraphic records the northern region of Bengal figured as a regular province of the Gupta Empire under the name Pundravardhana-bhuktī. In fact, Pundravardhana-bhuktī figured in several inscriptions issued by Kumāragupta I. To cite

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7 For the text of Allahabad Pillar Inscription of Samudragupta see J.F. Fleet (ed.), *op.cit.*, pp.1-8.
8 R.K. Mookherji, *op.cit.*, p.82.
one instance, his Dhānāidaha Copper-plate grant (dated Gupta Era 113 = AD 432-33) recorded the grant of one kulyavāpa of cultivated land, measuring 8x9 reeds, in the Khādāpārā-viśaya in favour of a Brāhmaṇa. The plate was discovered in Dhānāidaha, a village in the Nātore sub-division of the Rajshahi district. Therefore, it may be concluded that the Khādāpārā-viśaya was located within the bhukti of Puṇḍravardhana.\(^\text{10}\) The plausibility of this conclusion is further confirmed by the Kalāikuri Copper-plate grant (Gupta Era 120 = AD 439) and the Sultānpur Copper-plate grant (Gupta Era 120 = AD 439), recovered from the villages Kalāikuri and Sultānpur respectively (both located in the Bagura district). The common date of the two inscriptions indicates that the plates belonged to the reign of Kumāragupta I. Apart from valuable information relating to the local administrative system during the Gupta period, the inscriptions recorded the grant of land in Śṛṅgaverā-vīṭhī. The editors of the inscriptions have identified Śṛṅgaverā with either modern Singrā police station in the Nātore sub-division of Rajshahi district or Singāhār, twenty miles to the south-west of Mahāsthān in the Bagura district. The identification of Śṛṅgaverā with Singāhār seems to be justified in that the Sultānpur plate further mentioned that a division called Gohālī-mandaḷa was in Śṛṅgaverā-vīṭhī. A village called Gohālī still exists at a distance of seven miles to the east of Singāhār in the Bagura district. This village was possibly the ancient headquarters of the Gohālī-mandaḷa. The Gohālī-mandaḷa and the Śṛṅgaverā-vīṭhī were, therefore, within the Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti.\(^\text{11}\)

The five copper-plate inscriptions discovered in Dāmodarpur village in the Dinajpur district are essentially religious sale deeds. They recorded the transactions between the government and the purchasers. The latter were granted land at reduced price calculated in dināras or gold coins of the Gupta rulers. Two of the plates belonged to the reign of Kumāragupta I. The first Dāmodarpur Copper-plate Inscription of Kumāragupta I (Gupta Era 125 = AD 444) mentioned the grant of one kulyavāpa of land in the region north-west of Doṅgā for three dināras (gold coins). The grant further recorded that the gift of


\(^\text{11}\) R.K. Mookherji, \textit{op.cit.}, pp.81-82. Surprisingly, these two important inscriptions are not included in the Corpus of Bengal Inscriptions compiled by R.R. Mukherji & S.K. Maity.
land was according to *nīvidharma* (to oblige the recipient to maintain the endowment in perpetuity), whereby the land could be enjoyed rent-free but could not be sold or transferred to anybody. The second plate of the same hoard (Gupta Era 129 = AD 448) recorded the grant of a plot of land measuring five *dronas* (eight *dronas* = one *kulyavāpa*), lying in the west of the village of ‘Airavata-Gorāyja’ to a Brāhmaṇa for two *dīnāras* at the established rate of three *dīnāras* for each *kulyavāpa* of land. This grant was made in accordance with the customary rule of *aprākṣayanīvī* (the same as *nīvidharma* as mentioned in the earlier inscription). Both the inscriptions located the gifted lands in the Koṭivārṣa-vaṣya, which vaṣya was within the Pundravardhana-bhukti. Therefore, it is clear that like Rajshahi, the modern Dinajpur district was also within the Pundravardhana-bhukti.

The Bāigrām Copper-plate Inscription (Gupta Era 128 = AD 448), discovered in 1930 in the village of Bāigrām in the modern district of Bagura, was issued from a district office at Pancanagarī, the headquarters of the Vāyigrāma vaṣya. The inscription recorded that three *kulyavāpas* and two *dronavāpas* of land located in Trivrāta and Srīgoхālī were sold to two Brāhmaṇas. This was after receiving six *dīnāras* and eight silver coins from them at the rate of two *dīnāras* for each *kulyavāpa* of land as per *nīvidharma*. The village of Bāigrām (or Vāyigrāma) is located in modern Bagura district; hence, it is confirmed that like Rajshahi and Dinajpur, modern Bagura district was also in the heartland of Pundravardhana.

Another important document on the geographical extent of Pundravardhana is the Pāhārpur Copper-plate inscription, which was recovered during the archaeological excavations from a place called Pāhārpur in the modern Rajshahi district. The epigraph (dated to the Gupta Era 159 = AD 479) was recorded during the reign of Buddhagupta. As stated in the document, a district officer issued the grant from Pundravardhana. It recorded that a Brāhmaṇa named Nāthaśarman and his wife Rāmī were granted one and a

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13 Ibid., pp.47-49.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid., pp. 45-49.
16 Ibid., pp.49-53.
half dronavāpa of land in Vātāgohāli; four dronavāpas at Prśhimapoṭṭaka; four
dronavāpas at Gosaṭapunja; and two dronavāpas and two ādhavāpas (four ādhavāpas =
one dronavāpa and eight dronavāpas = one kulyavāpa) in Nītvagohāli, in all measuring
one and a half kulyavāpas, after receiving three dīnāras at the rate of two dīnāras for
each kulyavāpa of land. This grant was made for charitable works for the Jaina monks
and according to the principle of perpetual endowment and the custom of nīvīḍharmā.
The document also informed that the four villages were situated in the area of Palaśāṭṭa in
the Nāgiraṭṭa-ṃaṇḍala in the Daksināṃśaka-vīthī. Since Pāḥarpur (in the Rajshahi
district) is situated in the eastern part of the traditional boundary of the province of
Punḍravardhana, it is concluded that the four villages mentioned in the document were
possibly located in the eastern region of the Punḍravardhana-bhūkti. Similarly, two of
the five Dāmodarpur plates are dated to the period AD 476-495, i.e., the regnal years of
Buddhagupta. The first inscription (dated Gupta Era 163 = AD 482) recorded the
purchase of one kulyavāpa of land on the receipt of two dīnāras by Nabhaka, the
headman of the village of Caṇḍagrāma, from one Nāgadeva for the purpose of settlement
of some Brāhmaṇas. Nabhaka obtained the sanction of the governor of the province of
Punḍravardhana. The inscription also located the land thus purchased in the south, west
and east in close proximity to the northern boundary of the village of Vāyigrama
(Bāigrām, near Hili in Bagura district). The date of the second inscription could not be
deciphered. However, considering the fact that the name of Buddhagupta is mentioned in
the text, it is assumed that the inscription belonged to the period of his reign (AD 476-
495). The document registered the purchase of one kulyavāpa of homestead land in the
forest region of Himavacchikhara in the village called Doṅgāgrāma by the guild
merchant, Ribhupāla, for three dīnāras. The purpose of buying the land was to erect
thereupon two temples and store-rooms for the deities Śiva and Viṣṇu. The inscription
located the said forest region of Himavacchikhara within the bhūkti of Punḍravardhana
and the viṣaya of Koṭi-varṣa. In both cases, the purchase was according to the prevailing
custom of nīvīḍharmā. It is also clear that Caṇḍagrama and Doṅgāgrāma were both

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17 Ibid., pp.53-58.
20 Ibid., pp.61-65.
within the perimeters of Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti. The Gunaigarh Copper-plate grant of Vainyagupta (Gupta Era 188 = AD 507) was found in Tipperah district, in the village of Gunaigarh situated about eighteen miles to the north-west of the town of Comilla and a mile and a half to the southwest of the police station of Devilvara in the Tipperah (now, Comilla) district.21 The fact that the Gupta rule extended to Comilla during the time of Vainyagupta in the beginning of the sixth century is further proof that Puṇḍravardhana was till then under the Guptas and that the geographical extent of this bhukti at that point of time covered parts of Samatāta as well.

In the last of the five copper-plate inscriptions discovered in Dāmodarpur, dated the Gupta Era 214 (= AD 543), the name of the issuing ruler is not clearly legible, although the name undoubtedly ended with the suffix ‘Gupta’. The document registered the grant of five kulyavāpas of fallow land upon the receipt of fifteen dināras (at the rate of three dināras for one kulyavāpa) according to the custom of nīvīdharma. The beneficiary was one Amritadeva of Ayodhyā and the grant was meant for the service of the god Viṣṇu. The contents of the inscription show that the land so granted was located in the five villages of Svācchandapātaka, Lavangasīka, Sāṭuvanāśramaka, Paraspātika and Purnavṛndīkahāri. This inscription also located Koṭivārśa-visaya in Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti, thus indicating that the five villages in which lands were granted were situated in the Koṭivārśa-visaya within the Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti.22

An important epigraphic source of the post-Gupta period is perhaps the Rāgholi Inscription of Jayavardhana, a ruler of the Saila dynasty. It recorded the victory of his paternal granduncle over the king of Puṇḍra and its conquest around AD 725. However, there is no other evidence of the Saila rule in north Bengal or any part of ancient Puṇḍravardhana that has yet been discovered.21 On the other hand, the extant sources are very clear about the rule of Śaśānka in Bengal, including the Puṇḍra region, during the

seventh-eighth centuries. Conventional history of course spoke of a period of political disintegration and disorder in the region after the death of Śāśāṅka. The eighth century saw the rise of petty chieftaincies and then the eventual rise of the powerful Pāla dynasty. Some writers therefore thought that Jayavardhana established his rule in a part of Puṇḍravardhana for a short period during that phase of political instability but that he could not extend his authority over the entire area.

When the Pālas became prominent rulers of Bengal, Puṇḍravardhana seems to have continued to be suffixed with the term bhukti. This was despite the fact that there were no overarching imperial systems emanating from any part of northern India. The Khālimpur Copper-plate Inscription of Dharmapāla (discovered at Khālimpur in Malda district) dated to AD 802 recorded the grant of land made by Dharmapāla to Śrī Nārāyaṇavarman for the worship and maintenance of the venerable Nanna-Nārāyaṇa. The gifted land included the four villages of (a) Crancasvabhra in the Mahantaprakāśa-visaya, which was attached to the Byaghratati-mandalas; (b) Madhāśalmali; (c) Pālitaka; and (d) Goppāli, all three in the Sthālikatā-visaya within the Āmvasaṇḍikā-mandala. The donated land taken together was bounded on the east by the western boundary of the Uḍragrāma-mandala. The mention of Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti in the document indicates that the Vyāghratati-mandala, Āmvasaṇḍikā-mandala and Uḍragrāma-mandala, along with the aforementioned visayas and the villages within those mandalas, were included within the Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti. The mandalas, visayas and grāmas named in the inscription have not yet been identified beyond doubt, but it has been tentatively concluded that they fell under the area corresponding to the modern Malda area of north Bengal.

The Nalanda Copper-plate Inscription of Devapāla (dated tenth century) also mentioned the grant of land by Devapāla in the village of Vyāghratati within the Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti. In this inscription, Vyāghratati was mentioned only as a village (grāma). Similarly, the Āmgači Copper-plate Inscription of Vigrāhapāla III (dated to AD 1055), recovered from a place called Āmgači in the Dinajpur district, recorded the grant of a plot of land in the

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25 Supra, 23n.
27 Amitabha Bhattacharyya, op.cit., p.75.
Kotivarsa-visaya within the Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti to a Brāhmaṇa by the king. The contents of the document implied that Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti included Kotivarsa-visaya within its territorial limits. The Bāṅgada Copper-plate Inscription of Mahipāla I (AD 988-1023), which was recovered from the famous remnants of Bāṅgarh in the Dinajpur district, recorded the gift of a plot of land in the village of Kuraṭapallīkā by Mahipāla I to a Brāhmaṇa named Bhaṭṭaputra Kṛṣṇadītya, a resident of the village of Cavaṭi. The grant was made for religious purpose, presumably for the worship of the Buddha. The land was donated according to the principles of non-transferable rent-free perpetual endowment. As inferred from the text of the document, the village of Kuraṭapallīkā was situated within Gokālika-mandala, Kotivarsa-visaya and Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti. Further, the royal proclamation was issued by king Vigrahapāla III from the victory camp at Vilāsapura, possibly situated in the northern division of Bengal. Again, the Manhāli Copper-plate grant (recovered from Manhāli in Dinajpur district) of Madanapāla (first half of twelfth century), announced the gift of a village named Kautogiri to a Brāhmaṇa named Śrī Bateśvara-Svāmīśarman, as remuneration for reciting ślokas from the Mahābhārata. The grant was made at the request of Citramatikā, the chief queen of the Pāla king Madanapāla. The grant further recorded that Madanapāla executed the royal mandate from the victory camp situated in the precincts of the city of Rāmāvati, while the village Kautogiri was situated in the Halāvarta-mandala and the Kotivarsa-visaya lying within the jurisdiction of the Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti.

The Bangladesh National Museum Stone Inscription of Pāhila (dated about the ninth century) has been recovered recently from Nimgacchi in Pabna district (now renamed as Serajganj district) of present-day Bangladesh. It recorded the gifting of a matha (cloister) in the Bhaṭṭasala-mandala to the Vaiṣṇava recluses by one Pāhila having noticed the steadfastness of dharma and the transitoriness of wealth, life and youth. The inscription informed that Pāhila was the local administrator of the Bhaṭṭasala-mandala under Devapāla of the Pāla dynasty, who ruled over Gauḍa-Magadha. It has been suggested that the administrative division called Bhaṭṭasala-mandala was included within the

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Pundravardhana-bhukti and that the mandala was situated in the modern Pabna (Serajganj) district. Another recently discovered inscription, the Jagjivanpur Copper-plate of Mahendrapāla (dated the eleventh century, found at Tulabhita in the Jagjivanpur Mouza of the Habibpur Police Station in the Malda district of West Bengal) recorded that the king granted an area of land called Nandandighikodranga in the Kuddālakhātaka-visaya in Pundravardhana-bhukti from his victory camp at Kuddālakhātaka. The donation was made at the request of the commander of forces, Vajradeva, for the purpose of building a monastery (vihāra). The grant was issued in perpetuity according to the bhūmicchidranyāya with the approval of the officials present. The grant stipulated that the neighbouring cultivators would supply necessary cash and ration and that all future kings would uphold the terms and conditions of the grant.

The rise of the Candras in the Harikela-Vanga region (i.e., southeast and east Bengal) witnessed a significant development in the history of Bengal during the tenth-eleventh centuries. Founded by one Purnacandra, the Candra dynasty grew in strength during the reign of its fourth ruler Śrīcandra who expanded the boundary of the kingdom when the Pālas were on the decline. Śrīcandra conquered Pundravardhana or at least a part of it, as is evident from some of the inscriptions. The Rāmpāla Copper-plate Inscription (ascribed to tenth century) recorded the gift of one pātaka of land in Nehakāṭhi in Nānya-mandala of Pundravardhana-bhukti by Śrīcandradeva, king of Harikela, and son of Trailokyaśrīcandra. The donee was one sāntivārika Pītāvāṣaguptaśarman. He received the grant for performing one crore sacrifices. The royal proclamation was issued from the victory camp at Vikramapura. The copper-plate was discovered at the village of Kampala in the Munshiganj subdivision of the Dacca district in east Bengal. As known from various sources, the heartland of the Harikela kingdom was southeast Bengal, precisely from Śrīhāṭṭa (Sylhet) to Čattograma (Chittagong); under the Candras this kingdom expanded to include parts of Vanga (East Bengal) and the Candradvīpa area. This

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34 R.C. Majumdar (ed.), History of Bengal, Vol.1, Dacca University, Dacca, 1943, pp.9-11.
particular inscription further showed that the area corresponding to northern Bengal also
came under the Candra suzerainty during the period of Śrīcandra. It can be inferred from
this Rāmpāla Copper-plate Inscription that Pūndravardhana-bhukti included within its
territorial limits Nānya-mandala within which was situated Nehākaṣṭhirāma. The
Candras probably initiated the expansion of their empire from the heartland of Harikela
(i.e., southeast Bengal or the Śrīhaṭṭa-Maināmatī-Caṭṭagrāma region) and gradually
spread to northern Bengal (the heartland of Pūndravardhana) through the Meghna valley.
The Paścimbhāg Copper-plate grant of Śrīcandra (dated to about the tenth century, which
was discovered in a village called Paścimbhāg in the Maulavibazar subdivision of the
Sylhet district in East Pakistan in 1958) recorded that the Śrīhaṭṭa area (geographically
northeast Bengal) was also included in the Pūndravardhana-bhukti during the reign of
Śrīcandra. The royal charter was executed from the victory camp at Vikramapura. It
recorded that mahārāja Śrīcandra made over land in the three viśayas (districts) of
Candrapura, Garala and Pagara situated in Śrīhaṭṭa-mandala within the jurisdiction of the
Pūndravardhana-bhukti. The grant was for charitable purposes. The gifted land extended
over all the three viśayas within the Śrīhaṭṭa-mandala. In Candrapura-viśaya alone, four
hundred pātakas of land were donated to six thousand Brāhmaṇas associated with the
eight maṭhas (monasteries). The land was granted according to the principle of
bhūmicchidra and was to be enjoyed in perpetuity free of rent and any kind of
interference or fear of confiscation. It is clear from the text of the Paścimbhāg
Inscription that Śrīhaṭṭa was a mandala within the Pūndravardhana-bhukti, and that
Śrīhaṭṭa-mandala included three districts, namely, Candrapura, Garala and Pagara. Thus,
the Pūndravardhana-bhukti at the time of Śrīcandra included the Śrīhaṭṭa region, which
geographically formed the extreme northeastern corner of Bengal (Īśvāṇ-Vanga or
northeast Bengal). In this context it may be noted that Bhāskaravarman, king of
Kāmarūpa, renewed the grant of land to a large number of Brāhmaṇas in the Candrapura-
viśaya by the Nidhanpur Copper-plate (dated the seventh century). This grant had
originally been issued by his great grandfather Bhūtivarman. It is interesting to note that

35 Supra, 33n.
the findspot of this inscription was the village Nidhanpur located in the Sylhet district. The boundaries of the Candrapuri-visaya of the Nidhanpur grant and those of the Candrapura-visaya of the Paścimbhāg Inscription, as described in the respective inscriptions, are almost identical. On the basis of the data provided by both the inscriptions, K.K. Gupta prepared a map of the donated villages in the Candrapura-visaya, which showed that this visaya included parts of the modern Sylhet district (now Sylhet Division consisting of four districts) in Bangladesh, the three Barak valley districts of Cachar, Hailakandi and Karimganj in Assam, and the Kailasahar-Dharmanagar area of modern Tripura. The evidence of this inscription therefore confirmed that Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti not only covered northern Bengal and parts of eastern, western and southern Bengal but also included a large portion of southeast Bengal up to the borders of Tripura. The extent of this bhukti must have been very large under Śrīcandra. His Dhullā Copper-plate grant (dated tenth century) further indicated that Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti included Yolā-mandala of Ikkadasi-visaya in which the donated villages of Pakkadimunda and Bahupatra were located. It also included the Bāllimunḍa-khandala of Khādiravilli-visaya in which the villages of Loniyājodā, Jivanavilli and Durbapatra were situated. The evidence points to the fact that Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti during the reign of the Candras covered not only northern Bengal but also extended as far as the Barak-Surma valley and the Tripura plains in the northeast and southeast regions of Bengal.

Most likely the Candras reorganized the bhukti to extend their jurisdiction over the whole of southeast Bengal. The Mainamati Copper-plate Inscription (eleventh century) of Laḍahacandra, the grandson of Śrīcandra and son of Kalyāncandra (recovered from Maināmati in Comilla district) recorded the grant of land situated in the village of Suravoraka in Peranātana-visaya within Samatāta-mandala that was under Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti. Amitabha Bhattacharyya identified the place Campavanī mentioned in the inscription with Campaknagar in the Comilla district and added that the Maināmati inscription effectively showed that Samatā, which was coterminous with the

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37 Ibid., pp.126-127.  
38 Amitabha Bhattacharyya, op cit., pp.75-76.  
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Tippera-Noakhali area, formed a mandala within Pundravardhana-bhukti at the time of Laçahacandra. In this connection it may be noted that the Meher Copper-plate of Dāmodaradeva (dated AD 1234 or Šaka Era 1156) also made reference to Mehāragrāma (located in the Candrapur subdivision of Comilla district) situated in Vāyisagrāma-khandala in the Paratīyi-visāya of Samaṭa-mandala, which was within Pundravardhana-bhukti. The Pundravardhana-bhukti therefore sometimes extended up to Samaṭa.

The Belāva Copper-plate Inscription (twelfth century) of Bhojavarman (discovered in village Belāva in the Narayanganj sub-division of the Dacca district) recorded the grant of one pātaka and 9½ dronas of land in the village Upayalika within Kausāmbi-Aṣṭagachchha-khandala situated in Ādhāpattana-mandala of Pundravardhana-bhukti. The grant mentioned the name of the donee as Rāmadevaśarman, a priest and an inhabitant of the village of Siddhala in the Uttara-Rādha. The grant was issued from the victory camp at Vikramapura. The contents of the document are indicate that Pundravardhana-bhukti included within its jurisdiction the village of Upayalika located within Kausāmbi-Aṣṭagachchha-khandala lying within the Ādhāpattana-mandala.

Pundravardhana maintained its identity as a bhukti under the Sena kings of Bengal also. The Senas had their political base at Lakhnāuti (in modern Malda area). The Mādhāinagar Copper-plate Inscription of Lakṣmaṇasena (dated to about the twelfth century) and the Deopāra Stone Inscription of Vijayasena (dated the twelfth century) claimed that the Sena rulers had subjugated Kamarūpa. It bears noting however that so far there is no evidence of the Sena kings having issued landgrants in Kamarūpa, although such instances were plentiful in the case of the region of Pundravardhana. The Barrackpur Inscription of Vijayasena (dated to about the twelfth century), who ascended the throne in AD 1095, referred to a grant of land in Ghāsasambhogabhāṭavida in Khāḍi-visāya within the Pundravardhana-bhukti, while his Deopāra Inscription informed that

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40 Amitabha Bhattacharyya, op.cit., p.77.
43 Ibid., pp.32-38, 244-258, 277-289.
Varendra was a large region within Pundravardhana. The twelfth century Mādhainagar Copper-plate Inscription of Lakṣṇaṁsaṇa, son of Vallālasena (which inscription was recovered from Mādhainagar in the Pabna district) registered the donation of a village named Dāpaniyā-pātaka, situated on Rāvana lake in Kāntāpura-vṝti of Varendra within the boundary of Pundravardhana-bhukti. The donated land measured one hundred bhūkhaḍīs and sixty-one khāḍikās and yielded an annual income of one hundred purāṇas and sixty-eight kapardakas. The donation was in favour of Govindadevasarman, officer-in-charge of the room of propitiatory rites for religious purposes. The contents of the inscription also indicated that the grant was made in perpetuity free from all dues or threats of interference or confiscation. The document further mentioned that the donation was made according to bhūmicchidranyāya. The grant was issued from the victory camp in the vicinity of Dhārryā-grāma. Thus, Dāpaniyā-pātaka in Kāntāpura-vṝti of Varendra was included within the jurisdiction of the Pundravardhana-bhukti. The twelfth century Sunderban Copper-plate Inscription of Lakṣṇaṁsaṇa (which was discovered in the village Bakultalā to the south of Kośinagar in the Diamond Harbour sub-division of the 24-Parganas district of West Bengal) recorded that he granted a plot of land along with a homestead in Mandalarāma, altogether measuring three bhūdronas, one khāḍikā, twenty-three unmānas and two and a half kākinis and yielding an annual income of fifty purāṇas. The donated land lay within the jurisdiction of Kāntallapura-caturaka, belonging to Khāḍī-mandala of the Pundravardhana-bhukti. The grant was made in favour of Krṣṇadharadevasarman, the priest-in-charge of the room where propitiatory rites were performed. It was to be enjoyed in perpetuity free from all dues and any kind of interference or confiscation in accordance with the principle of bhūmicchidra. It was issued from the victory camp at Vikramapura. As inferred from the contents of the document, Mandalarāma in Kāntallapura-caturaka, lying within Khāḍī-mandala was situated within the bhukti of Pundravardhana. Similarly, the twelfth century Tarpantīghi Copper-plate grant of Lakṣṇaṁsaṇa (recovered from the northern part of Tarpantīghi under Gangārāmpur Police Station in the Balurghat subdivision in Dinajpur

44 Ibid., pp.244-258; Amitabha Bhattacharyya, op.cit., p.76; B.C. Law, op.cit., p.247.
46 Ibid., pp.290-294.
47 Ibid.
district) recorded the donation of a plot of land situated within Velahisthi in Varendri belonging to the Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti. It measured one hundred and twenty ādhāvapās and five unmānas and yielded an annual income of one hundred and fifty kapardaka-purānas. It was gifted by way of remuneration to Iśvaradevaśarman, the priest who performed the ceremony of giving away a golden horse and chariot. The document further mentioned that the grant was made according to bhūmicchidranyaya and the donee was to be the beneficiary of the custom of perpetual endowment free of any rent and any kind of interference or danger of confiscation. The copper-plate was issued from the victory camp at Vikramapura. This shows that the bhukti of Puṇḍravardhana included within its jurisdiction the Velahisthi area in Varendri.48 The Bakultalā Copper-plate Inscription of Lakṣmanāsena designated Khādi as a mandala within the jurisdiction of Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti. Khādi is identified with the region presently known as Khāri located in the Diamond Harbour area of the 24-Parganas of West Bengal.49 Another inscription of Lakṣmanāsena, the Ānuliā Copper-plate grant, was recovered from the village Ānuliā near Ranaghat in the Nadia district (West Bengal). It recorded the transfer of a plot of land in the village of Mātharaniyā, measuring one pātaka, nine droras, one āḍhāvāpa, thirty-seven unmānas and one kākinika and yielding one hundred kapardaka-purānas as an annual income in favour of a scholar named Raghudevaśarman. The grant was made according to the principle of perpetual endowment, with provision for enjoying freedom from payment of any rent and immunity from interference or confiscation as per the principle of bhūmicchidra. The document further stated that the village Mātharaniyā was situated within the jurisdiction of Vyāghrataṭī which belonged to the Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti.50 It may be mentioned in this connection that according to the Khālimpur Copper-plate grant of Dharmapāla and the Nālandā Copper-plate Inscription of Devapāla, Vyāghrataṭī was a mandala within the bhukti of Puṇḍravardhana.51 It is interesting to note that while the Tarpanḍighi Copper-plate Inscription of Lakṣmanesṣa recorded the grant of a plot of land within the traditional boundary of Puṇḍravardhana (i.e., in the Dinajpur area of north Bengal), the Mādhainagar charter issued by the same

48 Ibid., pp.295-302.
49 Amitabha Bhattacharyya, op.cit., p.76.
51 Ibid., pp. 95-110, 312; Amitabha Bhattacharyya, op.cit., p.75.
ruler recorded the grant in the Pabna district, the Sunderban Copper-plate Inscription recorded a grant in the 24-Parganas and the fourth epigraph, Ānuliā, recorded another grant in the Nadia district. The latter three inscriptions effectively showed that during the Sena period the boundary of Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti included not only the northern districts of Bengal but had also been extended further eastwards (Pabna) and included parts of the modern 24-Parganas and Nadia districts (western and southern Bengal).

At least two of Laksmanasena's successors issued land grants in east Bengal within Puṇḍravardhana. The twelfth century Madanapāḍā Copper-plate charter of Viśvarūpasena (found in Madanapāḍā in Faridpur district in East Bengal) was executed from the victory camp at Vikramapura (modern Vikrampur in East Bengal, i.e., Bangladesh). This inscription recorded the grant of the village of Pinjokāṣṭi situated in Vikramapura within the jurisdiction of the Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti. The grant was made in favour of a Brāhmaṇa named Viśvarūpadevaśarman, who was a reciter of the moral texts. The village thus gifted was, according to the document, divided into two plots — one situated in the locality called Kandarpāśankara and yielding an annual income of five hundred purāṇas; the other situated in the area called Kandarpāśankarasa belonging to the locality Nāraṇḍāpa and yielding an annual income of one hundred and twenty-seven purāṇas. Thus both together fetched a total annual income of six hundred and twenty-seven purāṇas. As the inscription indicated, the grant was made in accordance with the principle of bhūmicchidra to be enjoyed by the donee in perpetuity free of all dues and any kind of interference or threat of confiscation. The twelfth century Calcutta Sāhitya-Parisat Copper-plate Inscription of Viśvarūpasena (preserved in the Sāhitya Parisat Museum, Calcutta, after it was recovered from the neighbourhood of Dacca) recorded the grant of land within the jurisdiction of Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti. The land measured sixty-seven and three-fourth udānas in two plots in Rāmāśiddhi village situated in the navigable region; twenty-five udānas in the village of Vinayatilaka; one hundred and sixty-five udānas in Ajikula in Navasamgraha-catutraka within Madhukṣiraka-āvṛtī; twenty-five udānas and ten udānas respectively in two plots in Deuldhāṣṭi in Lāhuṇḍā-
caturaka in Vikramapura; twelve and three-fourth udānas in Ghāgharakāṭṭi in Urā-caturaka within Candradvīpa; and twenty-four udānas in Pāṭilādivikā in Candradvīpa. The donee was a Brāhmaṇa named Āvapallika Paṇḍita Halāyudhasarman. He received a total area measuring three hundred and thirty-six and a half umnānas and yielding an annual income amounting to five hundred purāṇas. He was to enjoy in perpetuity freedom from payment of rent and any kind of interference or danger of confiscation as per the principle of bhūmicchidra. The grant was executed from the victory camp at Vikramapura. Thus, the villages of Rāmaśiddhi, Vinayatilaka, Ajikulā in Navasamgraha-caturaka within Madhukṣīraka-āvṛtti; Deuldhasti in Lāuhaṇḍa-caturaka in Vikramapura; Ghagharakatti in Urā-caturaka within Candradvīpa; and Pāṭilādivikā in Candradvīpa were all within the jurisdiction of the Pundravardhana-bhukti. The evidence of this inscription confirmed that the jurisdiction of the bhukti called Pundravardhana included for sometime at least the heartland of eastern Bengal like modern Dacca-Vikrampur-Faridpur area up to Candradvīpa. Further, the twelfth century Edilpur Copper-plate grant of Keśavasena, (executed from the victory camp at Phalyugrama and recovered from Edilpur in the Faridpur district) recorded the perpetual grant of the village of Tālāpadā, situated in Vikramapura, lying within the jurisdiction of Pundravardhana-bhukti. The donated land yielded an annual income of two hundred drāmmas. The grant was made in favour of a Brāhmaṇa named Iśvaradevasarman, the reciter of moral texts. The land was gifted as per the bhūmicchidranyāya. Thus, Pundravardhana-bhukti included within its jurisdiction Vikramapura to which belonged the village of Tālāpadā. 

The status of Vikramapura, which included a number of gifted villages as mentioned in the inscriptions of Lākṣaṇaśaṇa, Viśvaśapaksa and Keśavasena, is not known for certain. However, it is possible that Vikramapura was either a viṣaya or a mandala or some other revenue division, since the inscriptions located it within the province of Pundravardhana. The Sena kings issued these grants from their various victory camps in eastern, western and southern Bengal, although they were the kings of Gauḍa, with their capital at Lakhnāuti in north Bengal. Therefore, it is possible that from the north they expanded to other parts of Bengal through wars and conquests and some of those newly

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53 Ibid., pp.321-332.  
54 Ibid., pp.333-349.
acquired areas were made parts of Puṇḍravardhana-bhūkti. R.R. Mukherji and S.K. Maity identified Isvaradevasarman of the Edilpur Copper-plate Inscription and Viṣvarūpadēvaśarman of Madanapāḍā Copper-plate Inscription as brothers. It is therefore not unlikely that the Sena kings facilitated the settlement of some of the Gaudīya Brāhmaṇa [i.e., Brāhmaṇas from Guāḍa (north Bengal)] in the newly acquired regions through land grants.

The epigraphic and other sources depicted Prāgjyotiśa-Kāmarūpa and Puṇḍravardhana as immediate neighbours, but the political boundary between the two political formations — or the geographical extent of the two regions — changed at different points of time. Based on the evidence of the Doobi Copper-plate Inscription of Bhāskaravarman (dated to seventh century), some scholars suggested that parts of Puṇḍravardhana were then included within Kāmarūpa. In fact, the Doobi grant renewed a gift of land, originally made by Bhūtivaran, to some Brāhmaṇas. P.C. Choudhury claimed that the information contained in the sixth century Badgahga Rock Inscription of the time of Bhūtivarman was suggestive of the conquest of Puṇḍravardhana by Bhūtivarman around AD 550, the period which marked the end of the Gupta hold over Bengal. However, there is no direct mention of any conquest in the said inscription. Similarly, Choudhury’s interpretation of the Tezpur grant of Vanamāla (ninth century) that Puṇḍravardhana was included within Vanamāla’s kingdom is not corroborated by the text of the inscription. It is also doubtful that Vanamāla had ever conquered Puṇḍravardhana (in north Bengal) despite Choudhury’s location of Hensiva, the donated area in Dijjina-viṣaya to the west of Teestā or Kāratoyā in Puṇḍravardhana, which was made over to a Brāhmaṇa named Shrutildhara. This is because the Nowgong grant (on which Choudhury had based his interpretation) did not mention either Teestā or

55 Ibid., p.321.
59 M.M. Sharma (ed.), op.cit., p.49.
60 P.C. Choudhury, op.cit., p.43.
Karatoya. The twelfth century Subhankanarpāṭaka grant of Dharmapāla of Kāmarūpa also recorded the donation of land in Dijjina-visaya to a Brāhmaṇa who hailed from the village of Krosāṅja in Srāvasti-visaya. D.C. Sircar identified Srāvasti with the Hilimbalurghat area of north Bengal and concluded that the village of Krosāṅja and the visayas of Srāvasti and Dijjina mentioned in the document were situated within the jurisdiction of Punḍravardhana-bhukti. M.M. Sharma, however, felt that Dijjina probably corresponded to the Dijjina-visaya of the Nowgong grant of Vanamālavarmān III and was located it in the Daśśinakula or the south bank of the Brahmaputra.

D.C. Sircar examined in detail the possibility of a portion of Punḍravardhana having been included in Prāgjyotisa-Kāmarūpa for sometime. He refuted the possibility on the ground that many of the copper-plate grants of the Pālas of Bengal and Bihar, ranging from about eighth to the twelfth century speak of the bhukti or province of Punḍravardhana as an integral part of the empire. Besides, the Pāla records as well as the copper-plate grants of the age of the Imperial Gupta, issued in the fifth and sixth centuries, often locate Koṭivarṣa-visaya, i.e., modern Bāngarh near Balurghat in the West Dinajpur District, West Bengal. Devīkottā and Bāṇapurā, which still exist under their ancient names, are mentioned in some records as within Koṭivarṣa-visaya. Moreover, an inscription of about the third century BC (i.e., of the Maurya age) has conclusively proved that Punḍranagara, which was originally the headquarters of the Puṇḍra people and afterwards that of the territory named after them, has to be identified with modern Mahāsthān in the Bagura district of Bangladesh. Finally, Sircar opined that since the earliest Gupta inscriptions recording transactions in the Punḍravardhana-bhukti belong to the reign of Kumāragupta I (AD 413-455) and the latest of them bears a date in AD 543., it is impossible to accept the theory regarding the inclusion of the northern areas of Bengal or the eastern part of

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64 Ibid., p.247.
Bihar in the Prāgyotisa-Kāmarūpa during the reign of king Bhutivarman (dated AD 518-542). Be that as it may, it is not unlikely that at certain points of time during the early period, some areas of modern northern Bengal were included within Kāmarūpa, because, as already discussed, some literary sources suggested that the territorial boundaries of Kāmarūpa extended up to the river Karatoya.

The eleventh century Silimpur Stone-slab Inscription (found at Silimpur in the Bagura district of Bangladesh) issued by Jayapāla, the king of Kāmarūpa, recorded the grant of nine hundred gold coins and a gift of a landed property to a Brāhmaṇa named Prahāsa on the occasion of the tulāpurusadāna. The donee was credited with the construction of a temple, the installation of the deities Amaranātha and Trivikrama, the foundation of an alms-house, the creation of a garden and the excavation of a tank. According to the contents of the charter, the donated land was in the Bālagrāma village in Sravasti-viṣaya in Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti. The land yielded one thousand measures of paddy. However, the donee refused to accept the gift even though persistently pressed. As observed by D.C. Sircar, the name of Jayapāla was only casually mentioned in the inscription. It is not clear whether the inscription was issued by Jayapāla or the refusal of Prahāsa to accept the offer of the tulāpurusadāna is mentioned as an example of the greatness of the Brāhmaṇa named Prahāsa. After all, the inscription is a prāṣasti (eulogy) in honour of Prahāsa. As the facts indicate, the award of the tulāpurusadāna was not limited only to Brāhmaṇas within the kingdom of Kāmarūpa; it could be conferred on learned and righteous Brāhmaṇas from other regions as well. The Guwākuchi Copper-plate grant of Indrapāla (dated AD 1071) recorded the grant of land to a Brāhmaṇa named Vāsudeva, in

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68 Ibid., p.66.
Vaināmagrāma in the Sāvathi-visaya. The Sāvathi-visaya (identified as Srāvasti) has been located by some scholars in Puṇḍravardhana like Srāvasti of the Subhankarapāṭaka grant of Dharmapāla. As already discussed, the Rāmacaritam by Sandhyākaranandin, besides some other sources made it clear that during the last quarter of the eleventh century, the region of Puṇḍravardhana came to be known as Gauḍa and the city of Vārendrī within Puṇḍravardhana was deemed to be ‘the ornament’ of the region. The Rāmacaritam also mentioned Rāmapāla’s conquest of Kāmarūpa. This view finds corroboration in the Kamauli plates of Vaidyadeva.

On the other hand, the evidence of the Kamauli grant of Vaidyadeva (dated AD 1142) showed that the region of Puṇḍravardhana or Vārendrī included some parts of modern Lower Assam under the later Pālas. The document recorded the donation of land located in the Vāḍā-visaya which was within the Kāmarūpa-āndala to a Brāhmaṇa family that presumably came from Vārendrī. The text of this copper-plate grant of Vaidyadeva clearly pronounced that mahārājādhirāja paramēśvara paramabhaṭṭāraka illustrious Vaidyadeva was the great devotee of Śiva and the great devotee of Viṣṇu, that while in a perfect state of health he greeted, informed and commanded the cultivators and other citizens beginning with the cattā, the bhaṭṭa and the visayillaka about the grant of land belonging to the villages of Sāntibaḍā and Mandarā, possessed by Gangādhara Bhaṭṭa and situated in the visaya of Vāḍā, in the aṇḍala of Kāmarūpa, within the bhukti of Prājyotisa, and that the charter was issued from the illustrious victorious royal headquarters situated at Hamsākοṅci. This inscription also mentioned that Vaidyadeva was a minister under the Pāla king, Kumārapāla of Gauḍa and that this widely celebrated Śrī Vaidyadeva was appointed as a ruler by the Lord of Gauḍa, in place of Tingyadeva.

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The evidence of the charter suggested that Kāmarūpa was at that point of time a *mandala* and Prāgijyotīsa a *bhukti* within Gauḍa (earlier known as Puṇḍravardhana and then as Vārendrī). Tingyadeva had probably been a local governor or ruler in Kāmarūpa under the later Pālas of Bengal. Vaidyadeva may have replaced him due to the latter’s hostility to Kumārapāla of Gauḍa. Perhaps this had happened after the fall of the Pāla dynasty of Kāmarūpa. In this context, M.M. Sharma seems to be convinced that Rāmapāla of Bengal earned authority over Kāmarūpa, and more probably over the western part of it, through the military expedition of one of his allies, that Tingyadeva ruled over the eastern region of the Pāla kingdom as a feudal ruler during the reign of Rāmapāla’s son Kumārapāla, that Vaidyadeva came to the eastern region himself when Tingyadeva started a rebellion, that Prāgijyotīsa was a *bhukti* and Kāmarūpa was a *mandala* in his kingdom, and that his seat of government at Hamsākoṇci was decidedly situated within the area of the modern Kāmrūp district.78 Therefore, during the period of the Pāla kings of Bengal, Prāgijyotīsa was a *bhukti* within the Kāmarūpa *mandala* and Vaidyadeva was a feudatory ruler of the eastern region of the Pāla kingdom.

**Heartland of Puṇḍravardhana**

The available sources suggest that the geographical extent of Puṇḍravardhana underwent continuous change during the period starting from the third century BC to the twelfth century AD. Some scholars formulated opinions about the geographical extent of the region of Puṇḍravardhana on the basis of the information available to them through other scholars’ researches. In fact, the development of the geographical concept of Puṇḍravardhana makes an interesting study. As the researchers brought out more and more literary, epigraphic and other archaeological sources to light, opinions on the subject also underwent significant changes. Apparently, Alexander Cunningham had mistakenly identified Puṇḍravardhana with ‘Pubna’ (Pabna district). It appears from his own statement that he was wrongly guided by the idea that the kingdom of *Pun-na-fa-tan-na* (later on identified as Puṇḍravardhana), as recorded by the Chinese pilgrim Hiuen

Tsang, would have been called ‘Ponbardhan’ or ‘Pobadhan’ from which the name Pabna came. According to Hiuen Tsang, the circuit of *Pun-na-fa-tan-na* measured about four thousand *li* or six hundred sixty-seven miles. Alexander Cunningham was further prompted by the information that Pabna was situated just a hundred miles from ‘Kankjol’ (Kajangala) on the opposite bank of the Gangā, notwithstanding the fact that its location was almost southeasterly rather than towards the east. He found *Pun-na-fa-tan-na*, Puṇḍravravardhana and Pābnā sounding very similar to one another. Nevertheless, Cunningham’s effort inspired a number of scholars to direct their attention towards the proper estimation of the location of Puṇḍravravardhana. Therefore, it is obvious, as later on pointed out by scholars like B.C. Law and Amitabha Bhattacharyya, that Cunningham was initially mistaken in identifying the location of Puṇḍravravardhana, but that later on he had revised his opinion in subsequent writings and located the ancient city of Puṇḍravravardhana in the present ruins of Mahāsthān or Mahāsthāṅgarh which lay seven miles north of the modern town of Bagura. Writing at about the same time of Cunningham, Sir M. Monier-Williams identified ‘Puṇḍra’ as a country which included parts of Bengal and south Bihar.

B.C. Law not only identified the city of Puṇḍravravardhana with Mahāsthān in the Bagura district but also discussed the geographical extent of Puṇḍravravardhana-ḥukti, as gleaned from the information contained in several literary, epigraphic and other archaeological sources. He concluded that the territorial limits of the ḥukti changed at different points of time, and from time to time its boundary extended, besides northern Bengal, to include parts of western, southern and eastern Bengal during the period of study. According to Law, Puṇḍravravardhana-ḥukti in its heydays included the districts of Dinajpur, Bagura, Rajshahi, Malda, Rangpur, Sunderbans and 24-Parganas and parts of the Dacca division; but for much of the ancient period it was confined to northern Bengal only corresponding

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to Dinajpur, Bagura, Rajshahi, Malda and Rangpur districts.\(^3\) Law did not mention anything about the Śrīhāṭṭa-Samaṭṭa region having formed a part of Puṇḍravardhana. This was perhaps because the copper-plate grants pertaining to the Śrīhāṭṭa-Samaṭṭa region were not known during his time.

R.C. Majumdar, who dealt in detail with the geographical extent of Puṇḍravardhana, sourced a vast range of literary and epigraphic material in particular, those dated to the ancient and the early medieval periods. According to him, Puṇḍravardhana mainly corresponded to the region of northern Bengal. However, he suggested that at various points of time it included eastern, southeastern and southern Bengal, thus stretching its boundary up to the sea-coast of the Bay of Bengal. The evidence of ancient and medieval literature and inscriptions cited by Majumdar proved that Puṇḍravardhana included major portions of the present districts of Bagura, Rajshahi, Rangpur and Dinajpur in Bangladesh, besides the north Bengal region of the present state of West Bengal India.\(^4\) Majumdar’s opinion is more or less corroborated by the findings of M.R. Singh. Basing his research on the study of the Purānas, Singh stated that Puṇḍravardhana in the Purānic period included Varendra or Vārendri, which covered the region roughly corresponding to northern Bengal.\(^5\)

D.C. Sircar studied the geographical extent of Puṇḍravardhana in the specific context of the geographical regions of ancient and medieval India. On the basis of a vast range of literary, epigraphic and archaeological sources dated to the ancient and medieval periods and strictly conforming to the available data, Sircar concluded that the city of Puṇḍra (Puṇḍranagara / Puṇḍravardhana-nagara) should be identified with Mahāsthāṅgarh in the modern district of Bagura, while the geographical extent of the province (Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti) included a large area covering parts of northern, eastern and western Bengal.\(^6\) Sircar argued his identification on the grounds that,

\(^{3}\) B.C. Law, op. cit., p.247.
\(^{4}\) R.C. Majumdar, op.cit., pp.13, 29.
\(^{5}\) M.R. Singh, op.cit., p.225.
\(^{6}\) D.C. Sircar, op cit., p.27.
(a) according to Divyavadāna, the city of Puṇḍravardhana lay beyond Kajangala, the eastern border of the land which was the early sphere of Buddhism (i.e. Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh);

(b) the Mahāsthān inscription of the third century B.C. not only proves that Puṇḍravardhana was also called Puṇḍranagara, ‘the city of the Puṇḍras’ but also supports its identification with Mahāsthān;

(c) the Dāmodarpur plates of the Gupta age show that Koṭivarṣa (the area around modern Bāngarh in the West Dinajpur district, West Bengal) was a viṣaya or district of the bhukti or province of Puṇḍravardhana;

(d) Hiuen Tsang, the Chinese pilgrim of the seventh century, travelled from Kajangala (modern Rājmahal in Bihar) to Puṇḍravardhana and thence to the farther east to Kāmarūpa (Prājyotisa);

(e) the epigraphic records of the early medieval period applied the name Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti to north Bengal, its chief city being identified with modern Mahāsthān in the Bagura district (Bangladesh).

Among subsequent writers, Parmanand Gupta suggested that the region of northern Bengal (consisting of north Bengal in the present state of West Bengal and the northern districts of Bangladesh) remained a constant part of Puṇḍravardhana, while it sometimes also corresponded to the modern districts of Malda, Dinajpur, Rajshahi and portions of Bagura and Rangpur districts situated to the west of the Karatoya. He further concluded that Puṇḍravardhana was bounded by the main stream of the Ganga on the west and the Karatoya on the east. However, the most detailed study so far on the historical geography of ancient Bengal is by Amitabha Bhattacharyya. He observed that although the geographical extent of Puṇḍravardhana experienced a continuous change the region or the bhukti was always identical with the region of northern Bengal which, besides the present north Bengal districts in West Bengal, included Dinajpur, Bagura, Rajshahi and Rangpur districts in northern Bangladesh. Geographically, all these areas together constituted the northern geographical division of undivided Bengal. Therefore, the recent

87 Ibid., pp.159-160.
89 Amitabha Bhattacharyya, op.cit., pp.6-7.

78
writers also seem to be in agreement with B.C. Law, who had observed that Pundravardhana as a bhukti at times included the districts of Dinajpur, Bagura, Rajshahi, Malda, Rangpur, Sunderbans and 24-Parganas and parts of the Dacca division of his time, but the Dinajpur, Bagura, Rajshahi, Malda and Rangpur areas were always included within that bhukti. These districts have been further bifurcated in recent years into more districts both in India and Bangladesh.

B.N. Mukherjee is also of the opinion that the ancient Pundravardhana was situated around Pundanagala (Pundranagara), identified with Mahasthan in the Bagura district (now in Bangladesh), while as an administrative division, called bhukti, it included in the age of the Imperial Guptas substantial parts of the territories now included in the northern sections of Bangladesh and West Bengal. Several areas to the east of the Bhāgirathi were brought within the limits of the bhukti of Pundravardhana in the Pāla-Sena age. The extension of its jurisdiction to the east of the Brahmaputra is suggested by the Paśchīṁbhāg copper-plate inscription of Śrīcandra, which included Śrīhaṭṭa-mandala in Pundravardhana-bhukti. The mandala of Śrīhaṭṭa certainly included the modern Sylhet area to the east of the Brahmaputra (Lauhitya). The name Pundravardhana thus gradually became associated with a large territory outside its normal geographical limits in the Pāla-Sena age. In the same vein, Mandira Bhattacharyya also observed that ancient Pundravardhana roughly corresponded to the undivided districts of Malda, Bagura, Rajshahi, Rangpur and Dinajpur of undivided Bengal. On the east it was separated from the Kingdom of Prāgjyotisa by the river Karatoya and in the west from Kajangala and Karnaṇasuvanrṣa by the river Ganges, and this tract of land was slightly higher than the alluvial plains of the rest of Bengal. In about the ninth century, this area came to be known as Varendra or Vārendrī and formed an important administrative unit of the Pāla Kingdom.

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90 Supra, 83n.
91 B.N. Mukherjee, “Pundravardhana and the Sculptural Art of Kāmarūpa” in B.N. Mukherjee & P.K. Bhattacharyya (eds.), Early Historical Perspective of North Bengal, North Bengal University, Siliguri, 1987, p.98.
The survey of the available source-materials confirms that the scholars like B.C. Law, R.C. Majumdar, D.C. Sircar, Amitabha Bhattacharyya and others were more or less justified in their observation that Pundravardhana was generally identifiable with northern Bengal. These scholars, however, overlooked a few facts, perhaps mainly because some of the documents and inscriptions of Kāmarūpa and Śrīhaṭṭa had not been available to them. Consequently, some of the important facts regarding the changes in the geographical extent of Pundravardhana are not clearly known from their works, as brought out below:

(a) that Pundravardhana or north Bengal came to be better known as Varendra or Varendra between the tenth and twelfth centuries, and under the later Pālas and the Senas the same area was recognized as ‘Gauḍa’ (indeed, a revival of an earlier name), and under the later Senas it was called Lakṣmāṇavatī, which the Persian writers mentioned as Lakrāuti (Lakṣmāṇavatī) or Bārind (Varendra);

(b) that the later Pālas conquered and ruled over a part of Kāmarūpa (more precisely Lower Assam), as borne out by the evidence of the Kamauli grant of Vaidyadeva and the Rāmacaritam of Sandhyākaranandin;

(c) that the Pascimbhāg grant of Śrīcandra clearly mentioned that Śrīhaṭṭa was a mandala within the Pundravardhana-bhukti and there were three visayas within the Śrīhaṭṭa-mandala (viz., Garala, Pagara and Candrapura);

(d) that other copper-plates of Śrīcandra and his successors also recorded grants of land in different visayas within the Pundravardhana-bhukti, while the find-spots and the villages named in the inscriptions were spread over Dacca, Vikrampur, Tripura and other districts of eastern, northeastern and southeastern Bengal;

(e) that the territorial limits of Pundravardhana-bhukti from time to time extended to other regions of Bengal also, although for most of the time it might have been identifiable with northern Bengal only.

It may thus be concluded that the geographical extent of the Pundra region or Pundravardhana as a bhukti changed from time to time during the period under study since the Pundras were noticed in the literary sources as inhabitants of the area in later
Vedic times. The area was known as Pundra and Pundravardhana, and then as Varendra or Varendri till about the twelfth century. The area denoted as Pundravardhana was first limited to modern northern Bengal, then it expanded to cover the neighbouring areas, and finally, it again shrank to northern Bengal in the eleventh-twelfth centuries, when it more popularly came to be known as Varendra. Pundranagara (modern Mahasthangarh) continued to be its main political centre. However, Pundravardhana, as a bhukti or province, denoted a much larger area than what was originally known as Pundra or the land of the Pundras. Although for most of the times Pundravardhana was limited to northern Bengal, under the Candras and the Pālas, Pundravardhana-bhukti included parts of western, eastern and northeastern Bengal also, besides northern Bengal. Nonetheless, for much of its history the Pundra region coincided with modern northern Bengal, the part of which is now included in the state of West Bengal in India and another part is in Bangladesh. Like the geographical extent, the ethnic composition of the area had also undergone changes. Although the Pundras were first referred to as the inhabitants of a part of the region and the word ‘Pundra’ sometimes denoted land and sometimes people, at a point of time in history the Pundras and the Kiratas were seen as people occupying areas adjacent to one another, while at an earlier point of time the entire area was referred to as Kirata (both as a land and the people who inhabited that land). Social elements from the western direction spread into the area at a later stage and introduced the Brahmanical culture principally manifested in the idea of the varnāśrama-dharma.

93 See Map 2: Heartland of Pundravardhana.