Chapter II

LAND AND PEOPLE

As has been discussed earlier, \(^1\) 'Punḍra' (or 'Pauṇḍra') in early times denoted both the land and the people. The available literary works and inscriptions, particularly till about the time of the Guptas, referred to the land of the Punḍra (i.e., a territory inhabited by the Puṇḍras) or a race of people known as Puṇḍras. 'Punḍravardhana' was, of course, a territory, the geographical extent of which kept changing from time to time. In any case, Puṇḍra / Paunḍra denoted a territory under the occupation of the Puṇḍra people in the Bengal Delta. From his readings of the writings of the Graeco-Roman geographers and historians on the people of the Bengal Delta, Barrie M. Morrison seems to have been convinced of the following: that the people in question were known as the Gaṅgāridāi; that they had a powerful socio-political organization, since they were said to have had four thousand war elephants and had apparently mobilized their military strength to oppose Alexander if he should venture across the river Beas; and that such military strength could have only indicated that a formidable power had been organized in the Delta.\(^2\) It is certain, however, that none of the classical writers — whether geographers or historians — named by Morrison in his work had made direct reference to the word 'Punḍra'. At best the classical writers had spoken of the people of the Delta (i.e., of Bengal) in general. As Morrison himself commented, the people of the Bengal Delta were generally known to the Graeco-Romans as Gaṅgāridāi (possibly after the river Gaṅgā, i.e., the Anglicised 'Ganges'). Logically, therefore, it follows that the Puṇḍras had either been included within Gaṅgāridhāi or gone unnoticed by the Greeks and other classical writers. Be that as it may, to know about the Puṇḍras as a people and to be able to identify the land that they inhabited, it is necessary to go through the contents of the early Indian literary sources and the foreign accounts, i.e., the Brahmanical sources (particularly the Rāmāyana and Mahābhārata, the Purāṇas), the Buddhist and the Jaina

\(^1\) Supra, Chapter I, Introduction.
sources, the Greek and the Chinese accounts, and other contemporary literary works, as follows:

**Early Notices on Puṇḍra**

**In the Brahmanical Sources**

As mentioned earlier, among the mainstream ancient Indian literary works, the earliest reference to Puṇḍra in the sense of people was in the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* (dated to about the seventh century BC). It spoke of the Puṇḍras as one of the races in the eastern part of the subcontinent. This is what R.C. Majumdar probably meant when he said that the earliest reference to Puṇḍra was in the later Vedic literature, where the Puṇḍras were described as a group of people. Sir M. Monier-Williams had already clarified that the reference in the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* to Puṇḍra was as a people and he had assumed that their country corresponded to what is now the region of Bengal and Bihar. However, R.C. Majumdar was convinced on the basis of the literary and epigraphic evidence that the Puṇḍras as mentioned in the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* lived in the northern part of Bengal. He also quoted the same text as referring to the Puṇḍras as 'dasyus' (which he translated as 'demons' or 'non-Aryans'). However, the recent view held by the contemporary scholars point to the fact that the term 'dasyu' denoted groups of people who did not subscribe to Vedic culture. Rakhaldas Bandopadhyaya’s reading of the ‘Puṇḍrajāti’ mentioned in the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* was in the sense of the people who lived in the area which later on came to be identified with northern Bengal. B.C. Law also found that both the terms Puṇḍra and Puṇḍra figured in the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*; but he observed

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8 Romila Thapar, *From Lineage to State – Social Formations in the Mid-First Millenium BC in the Ganga Valley*, OUP, Bombay, 1984, p.44.
that whereas Pundra was a race of people, Pauṇḍra was the land of the Pundras. In Law’s view the land may be identified with the northern part of modern Bengal. Amitabha Bhattacharyya concurred with this view. He concluded that the antiquity of the name Pundra could be traced back to the date of the Aitareya Brāhmaṇa, where the Pundras were mentioned along with the Andhras, Śabaras, Pulindas and Mutibas. However, A.K. Chatterjee believed that the Pundras were in all probability lowly rated in the Brahmanical society, since the Aitareya Brāhmaṇa referred to them as ‘outcastes’ (antyaja), or those who were outside the ambit of the varṇa system, along with the Andhras, Pulindas and others. R.C. Majumdar also observed that the Aitareya Brāhmaṇa referred to the Pundra and the Vaṅgavagadhā (or Vaṅgamagadhā) in contemptuous terms, indicating perhaps that the area they lived in (that is, what now corresponds to modern Bengal) was outside the sphere of Brahmanical culture even in the later Vedic period. Nonetheless, some scholars thought that the reference to the Pundras in this text meant that Pundras and Vaṅgavagadhās were known to the Brahmanical scholars even before the end of the Vedic period. The Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (dated third-second century BC) also mentioned the Pundras along with the Kāsīs, Košalas, Videhas, Magadhas, Aṅgas and other eastern tribes while referring to the cultural differences between the people of the upper and the lower regions of the Gaṅgā Valley. The Brāhmaṇas, therefore, seem to have been the first set of literary sources of Indian history, which noticed the presence of the Pundras in the eastern region of the subcontinent.

F.E. Pargiter quoted a legend that was incorporated in the Mahābhārata and some of the Purāṇas, which connected the progenitor of the Pundras with a Vedic rṣi. The story ran

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11 Amitabha Bhattacharyya, Historical Geography of Ancient and Early Medieval Bengal, Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar, Calcutta, 1977, p.41.
12 Supra, 5n.
14 Supra, 8n.
as follows: Dirghatamas, the son of the Vedic rṣi Ucatya and his wife Mamtā, was a blind man. He lived in his cousin’s hermitage, but he indulged in gross immorality and sought access to the wife of his younger brother. Consequently, he was expelled from the hermitage and set adrift in the Gaṅgā. He was carried down the stream to an eastern kingdom and was received by Bali, the king of that territory. Dirghatamas married a Śūdra nurse of Bali’s wife and begot Kaksivanta and other sons. At Bali’s desire Dirghatamas also begot of Bali’s queen Sudesnā five sons (viz., Aṅga, Vaṅga, Kaliṅga, Pundra and Suhma), who were called both ‘ballya Kṣatriya’ and ‘ballya Brāhmana’. Afterwards, he regained his sight and assumed the name Gautama. Dirghatamas was also a Vedic rṣi and one of the authors of the Rg Veda I.17 If this story is to be believed, it follows that the Pundras were already in existence at the time of the Rg Veda, although their presence was directly recorded for the first time only in the Brāhmaṇas.

R.C. Majumdar also observed that the reference in the Aitareya Brāhmaṇa to the Pundras as ‘dasyus’ was possibly to a group of people who were outside the pale of ‘Aryan culture’.18 It is important to note that another Brahmanical text, the Aitareya Āranyaka, also referred to the Vaṅgavagadhāḥ (people of Vaṅga) in contemptuous terms.19 The mention of ‘Vaṅgavagadhāḥcerapadah’ in this text is taken by the scholars to mean the presence of two important ethnic groups in early times, namely, the Vaṅgas and the Magadhas, in the expression ‘Vaṅgamagadhāḥ’.20 However, the Śankhyaśāstra Śrauta Śūtra, a text of almost of the same period as the Aitareya Āranyaka, referred to the Pundras as a race of people in the same region occupied by the Vaṅgas and the Magadhāḥ.21 Patañjali’s Mahābhāṣya (dated second century BC) referred only to the Vaṅgas (but not to the Pundras) as the inhabitants of Vaṅga or Bengal,22 although the Pundras and the Vaṅgas, as stated above, were mentioned in some of the later Vedic texts.

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17 F.E. Pargiter, Ancient Indian Historical Tradition, Oxford University Press, London, 1922, p.163. Y.K. Misra (op.cit., p.53) confirms that Bali has been repeatedly mentioned in the Mahābhārata and the Purāṇas, for example, Mahābhārata, 1, 74, XIII, 29, 88; Agni Purāṇa 272, Bhāgavata Purāṇa IX, 23, Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa iii, 74-103, Brahma Purāṇa 27-49.
18 Supra, 8n.
19 Ibid.
20 Amitabha Bhattacharyya, op.cit., p.56.
21 Supra, 5n.
22 Supra, 20n.
(like the Brāhmaṇas and the Āranyakas) as inhabitants of the same region. It is possible that Patañjali did not differentiate the Puṇḍras from the Vaṅgas and called all inhabitants of Vaṅga, the Vaṅgas.

It appears from these early literary notices that the area inhabited by the Puṇḍra people came to be identified as Puṇḍravardhana, the land of the Puṇḍras. Pāṇini, for example, mentioned Puṇḍra as one of the janapadas in the east. While commenting on the information about the important towns in Pāṇini’s work, V.S. Agrawala observed that the two most notable towns in eastern India then were Mahānagāra and Navaṇagāra. He felt that Mahānagāra was to be identified with Mahāsthānagāra, the capital city of the Puṇḍra region or north Bengal, and Navaṇagāra with Navaṇḍīpa, the capital city of Vaṅga or southwest Bengal. Agrawala further observed that Navaṇḍīpa possibly developed as a new town when the southern route from Rājagṛha to the sea outgrew in importance the earlier route along the north bank of the Gangā (from Mithila and Aṅga to Puṇḍra). Gauḍapura (possibly modern Gauḍa in Malda district), an important town on the route from Mahāsthān and a trading centre for gūḍa (molasses) manufactured in the Puṇḍra country, lay between Mahānagāra and Navaṇagāra.\(^{23}\) In a later section of the text, Pāṇini also mentioned Sumhaṇagāra and Puṇḍranagāra in the east, which Agrawala preferred to identify as alternative names of the capitals of Sumha and Puṇḍra principalities respectively.\(^{24}\) Pāṇini used the word ‘bhakti’ to denote loyalty of the citizens (janapadin) to the state (janapada), whether a kingdom or a republic, and as examples of such janapadas he mentioned Aṅgaka, Vaṅgaka, Sumhaka, Puṇḍraka, Madraka and Vṛjika.\(^{25}\) The respective areas thus might have been identified as the land or principality of the inhabiting races or communities, viz., Aṅga, Vaṅga, Sumha, Puṇḍra, Madra and Vṛji.

Two post-Vedic texts, viz., the Baudhāyana Dharmasūtra\(^{26}\) and the Śankhyāyana Śrauta Śūtra (both ascribed to fifth century BC)\(^{27}\) listed the Vaṅgas and the Puṇḍras among the

\(^{24}\) Ibid., p.75.
\(^{25}\) Ibid., p.432.
\(^{26}\) Supra, 20n.
\(^{27}\) Supra, 5n.
people living in the regions beyond the pale of Brahmanical traditions. The authors of
these texts are believed to have looked down upon the settlements that were beyond the
sphere of Brahmanical civilization and clearly stated that Vaṅga and Punḍra were outside
the realm of ‘Vedic culture’. The Baudhāyana Dharmāṣṭra placed the Punḍras in the
region beyond the lands of the Ārāṭas, Kāraskaras, Śauviras, Vaṅgas, Kaliṅgas and
Prāmiras and prescribed performance of purification rites for anyone who had visited
those places. The fact that the text clearly mentioned the Punḍras and the Vangas
perhaps indicated that before the end of the fifth century BC, the ‘Indo-Aryans’ were
acquainted with the territories of the Punḍras and the Vaṅgas. On the authority of the
Baudhāyana Dharmāṣṭra, D.C. Sircar observed that the Paundras of north Bengal and
the Vaṅgas of south and southeast Bengal were regarded as of a lower status among the
peoples of eastern India and any Brāhmaṇa who visited their land was required to
undergo purification by the performance of rituals like the punastoma or sarvapṛṣṭha.

This prejudice of the Brahmanical writers against the region perhaps continued for a long
time. The Māṇava Dharmāṣṭra (dated first-second century) categorized the
‘Punḍrajāti’ as one of the indigenous tribes of Bengal that also included the Vaṅgas,
Sumhas, Śabaras, Pulindas and Kirātas and spoke of them as Kṣatriyas. But it branded
the Punḍras as degraded Kṣatriyas and grouped them with the Drāvidians, Scythians,
Chinese and other ‘outlandish’ peoples. The text then consigned the Paundrakas and
Kirātas in particular to the rank of Śudras because they had purportedly forsaken
Brahmanical rites and customs and had stopped maintaining contact with the Brāhmaṇas.
Finally, the text referred to the Paundrakas as ‘patita Kṣatriya’ or ‘fallen Kṣatriya’.
The Manusmṛti (dated second century) also categorised the Paundrakas and Kirātas as Śudras
on the ground that they were neither righteous nor respectful to the Brāhmaṇas. The

28 R.C. Majumdar, History of Ancient Bengal, loc.cit., p.11.
30 Supra, 15n.
32 Supra, 10n.
33 R.C. Majumdar, History of Ancient Bengal, loc.cit., p.29.
34 Ibid., pp.413-414.
35 Ibid.
Chisitosagi or Chirotosagi, probably a branch of the Šakas (Scythians), were mentioned by Manu together with the Puṇḍrakas, Odras (or Udras), Drāvidas, Kāmbojas, Yavanas, Pāradas, Pahlavas, Cīnas, Kirātas, Daradas and Khašas. Manu also included the Paṇḍra (north Bengal), Odra (Orissa), Drāvida (Tamilnadu), Kāmboja (Iranian settlers of Kāndāhar region and elsewhere), Yavana (Greek), Śaka (Scythian), Pārada (Parthian), Pahlava (Persian or Sassanian), Cīna (Chinese), Kirāta (Nepalese and dwellers of north-eastern hills), Darada (Kishenganga Valley of Kashmir) and Khaša (Kashmir or Himalayan region) in the list of ‘degraded Kṣatriyas’. Drawing on the authority of Manusmrti, which bracketed the Puṇḍras and the Kirātas together as belonging to the category of ‘degraded Kṣatriyas’ for not consulting the Brāhmaṇas, some scholars inferred that the Brāhmaṇas of north Bengal and Assam were strictly not members of the Brahmanical caste hierarchy and they might have been assimilated in the Brahmanical society from the ranks of the ‘Alpine group’.

Be that as it may, it is reasonably clear that among the source materials of early Indian history, the Brahmanical sources were the first set of literary works to have noticed the presence of Puṇḍra either as land or people or both. The Aitareya Brāhmaṇa was the earliest work to have specifically mentioned Puṇḍra, though in this text the reference to the Puṇḍra was in the sense of a people. Therefore, as Mandira Bhattacharyya observed, Puṇḍra started to emerge very slowly as a distinct identity (both as a country and as a people) by the period of the composition of later Vedic literature.

In the Epics

The Puṇḍras figured more distinctly in the epics — Rāmāyana and Mahābhārata. The Rāmāyana spoke of the Puṇḍras as a people, and of the Vaṅgas as one of the peoples

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36 Ramchandra Jain (ed.), McCrindle’s Ancient India as Described by Megasthenes and Arrian, Today and Tomorrow’s Printers and Publishers, New Delhi, 1972, p.133.
38 Mandira Bhattacharyya, “Religion in Puṇḍravardhana” in B.N. Mukherjee & P.K. Bhattacharyya (eds.), Early Historical Perspective of North Bengal, North Bengal University, Siliguri, 1987, p.64.
having political alliance with the rulers of Ayodhyā. The epic also mentioned some of the royal dynasties of Bengal, and the matrimonial alliances of the royal households in different parts of Bengal. This information about matrimonial alliances, along with the ‘Aryanized’ or Kṣatriyaized ruling families, indicates that Bengal was steadily coming within the pale of Brahmanical culture during the time of the Rāmāyana. According to the story in Book II of the Rāmāyana, King Daśaratha claimed that his pre-eminent position was recognized in several kingdoms of Bhārata (the Indian subcontinent) including Pundra, Vaṅga, Aṅga, Drāviḍa, Sindhu, Śauvira, Śaurāṣṭra, Dakṣinapatha, Matsya, Kāśi and Kośala. P.C. Choudhury opined that ‘the country of the cocoon rearers’ in the east as mentioned in the Rāmāyana in association with Magadha, Anga and Pundra, was with reference to Kāmarūpa. In Choudhury’s opinion, this country of the ‘cocoon rearers’ was no other than Kāmarūpa which lay to the east of Pundra corresponding to modern Assam, which had an ancient tradition of sericulture. Pundra and Kāmarūpa were thus adjacent to one another. Curiously, however, although the Rāmāyana mentioned Pundra as one of several kingdoms in the subcontinent, it did not name the king of Pundra.

The Mahābhārata also mentioned the Pundras as a people living in the east. The Digvijaya section of the Mahābhārata located the Pundras in the east and associated them with a prince who ruled on the banks of the Kośi. The evidence of the Mahābhārata suggested that Bengal was then divided into a number of kingdoms and described the victorious campaigns undertaken by Karna, Kṛṣṇa and Bhīmasena against the rulers. Karna is said to have defeated the Sumhas, Pundras and Vaṅgas, and Kṛṣṇa to have defeated the Vaṅgas and Pundras in different expeditions. Paunḍraka Vāsudeva was
projected as Kṛṣṇa’s main challenger. Finally, Bhīmsena defeated all the local princes of Bengal including Samudrasena, Chandrasena and Paunḍraka Vāsudeva in different battles. Thus the epic named Paunḍraka Vāsudeva ruler of the Puṇḍras at the time of the invasions of Karna, Kṛṣṇa and Bhīmsena. Karna is said to have joined the Kurukṣetra battle with his army recruited from Aṅga, Vaṅga and Paunḍra. The *Mahābhārata* further mentioned that the Vaṅgas and Paunḍras brought tribute to the court of Yudhisthira. As regards ‘Paunḍraka Vāsudeva’, R.C. Majumdar interpreted the data provided by the *Mahābhārata* to conclude that he was the ruler of Paunḍra or Puṇḍra. The *Mahābhārata* also mentioned in considerable details the indigenous tribes or communities of Bengal including the Vaṅgas, Suhmas, Śabaras, Pulindas, Kirātas and Puṇḍras and classed them as Kṣatriyas. In fact, the Puṇḍras and Paunḍrakas were mentioned several times. In the Śabhāparvan, the Puṇḍras were located next to the Vaṅgas and the Kirātas. In the Vanaparvan, Bhīṣmaparvan and Dronaparvan, the Puṇḍras were mentioned along with the Udras, Utkalas, Mekalas, Kaliṅgas and Andhras.

Different scholars have interpreted the information provided by the *Mahābhārata* in different ways. According to Buchanan Hamilton, the Puṇḍras of the *Mahābhārata* occupied the northern portion of Bengal but not necessarily the whole of the region. However, A.K. Sur presumed that the Bāli legend influenced the descriptions of the races occupying the Bengal region in the *Mahābhārata* to a considerable extent. Puṇḍra. Aṅga, Vaṅga, Kaliṅga and Suhma were described in the *Mahābhārata* as the *kṣetrajya* sons of the Brāhmaṇa sage Dirghatamas by Sudesnā, wife of the *asura* king Bāli. Therefore, it seems that Brahmanical culture had already spread to Bengal at the time of the composition or enlargement of the *Mahābhārata*. A statement in the Ādiparvan of the epic further indicated that Arīha, possibly a local chief in about modern northern Bengal, to whose family was born at a later time king Dusyanta, married a girl from Aṅga. Of the

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47 Ibid., p.27.
48 Ibid.
51 Ibid.
52 Supra, 50n.
kings of eastern India mentioned in the *Mahābhārata* as being contemporaneous with the Pāṇḍavas were Karna, king of Anga, Vāsudeva, king of Pundrā, Samudrasena, king of Vaṅga, and an unnamed king of Sumha (*Sumha-rājā*).\(^{54}\) It is also clear from the references that in the time of the *Mahābhārata* the monarchical form of government prevailed among the Pundrās, Vaṅgas, Suhmas and Aṅgas.\(^{55}\) Vāsudeva of Pundrā and Bhagadatta of Prāgjyotiya are mentioned in the *Adiparvan* of the *Mahābhārata* among the vassal kings of Jarāsandha, the king of Magadha. While narrating how Yudhishthira killed Jarāsandha and proclaimed himself as the *samrāt* of the large kingdoms which joined his *samrājya*, the *Mahābhārata* made mention of Prāgjyotiya, Ceḍi, Magadha, Pundrā, Tāmralipti and Sumha.\(^{56}\) It was said that after the death of Jarāsandha, Karna brought about the integration of Kaliṅga, Aṅga, Suhma, Pundrā and Vaṅga into one unified kingdom.\(^{57}\) The epic also mentioned that ‘Pauṇḍraka Vāsudeva’ was the ruler of Vaṅga, Pauṇḍrā and Kirāṭa regions, and that he was a powerful ruler who owed allegiance to Jarāsandha.\(^{58}\) It further narrated that Kṛṣṇa killed ‘Pauṇḍraka Vāsudeva’ and both Vaṅga and Pundrā accepted the suzerainty of the Pāṇḍavas.\(^{59}\)

Based on the information derived from the geographical details and the existence of a territory of the Pundrās ascribed to the period before and after the age of the epics, scholars\(^{60}\) have been inclined to locate the ‘Pauṇḍraka’ (people) of the *Mahābhārata* in the region of north Bengal. They have also noted the distinction between the worshippers of ‘Pauṇḍraka Vāsudeva’ and ‘Kṣatriya Vāsudeva’ mentioned in the *Mahābhārata*. According to a story in the epic, apart from Kṛṣṇa of the Yādava-Sātvata-Vṛṣṇī family, there was another claimant for the status of Vāsudeva. This was Pauṇḍraka Vāsudeva, i.e., Vāsudeva, the ruler of the Pauṇḍrā people. Hence, some scholars are of the opinion that this Pauṇḍraka Vāsudeva could well have been the leader of a rival religious sect.\(^{61}\)

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\(^{55}\) Ibid., p.67.

\(^{56}\) K.I. Barua, *op.cit.*, pp.21-22.

\(^{57}\) Ramesh Chandra Majumdar, *Bāṅglādeskher itihās*, *loc.cit.*, p.18.

\(^{58}\) Ibid.

\(^{59}\) Ibid.


\(^{61}\) Ibid.
All told, the *Mahābhārata* is an important Brahmanical source which noticed the Puṇḍras in some details.

Puṇḍra was also mentioned in some Purānic texts, which followed the story of the *Mahābhārata*. The Purānic texts described Puṇḍra as the son of the ‘dāitya’ king Bāli. Bāli was portrayed as the ancestor of the Puṇḍras. The term ‘Puṇḍra’ was used with reference to both a people and their territory. The story in the *Mahābhārata* also depicted Aṅga, Vaṅga, Kaliṅga, Puṇḍra and Suhma as the kṣetraṇa sons of the ‘asura’ king Bāli by his wife Sudesnā through the Brāhmaṇa sage Dirghatamas thus indicating that these people formed a homogeneous group. According to the *Mahābhārata*, Jarāsandha extended his supremacy over the Aṅgas, Vaṅgas, Kaliṅgas and Puṇḍras. The *Mahābhārata* also informed that the digvijayin monarch Pāṇḍu defeated the rulers of the janapadas of Puṇḍra, Suhma, Dasama, Madhā, Vīdeha and Kāśi. The *Mahābhārata* further identified king Vāsudeva of eastern India as one of the most determined enemies of Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa. The former was presented as the ruler of Vaṅga, Puṇḍra and Kārata. Some scholars believed that this description was perhaps indicative of the ruler’s suzerainty over a large territorial domain corresponding to modern undivided Bengal, including the Himalayan region and also perhaps parts of the territory now corresponding to northeast India. The evidence of the *Mahābhārata* further suggested that Vāsudeva originally belonged to the Cedi race and delineated him as the religious rival of Kṛṣṇa. Like Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa, this Vāsudeva of eastern India had also assumed the title of ‘puruṣottama’. In the *Udyogaparvan*, Drupada is said to have asked the Pāṇḍavas to send an envoy to Puṇḍra Vāsudeva to enlist his support in the Kurukṣetra battle. It appears that this highly resourceful ruler of eastern India chose to remain neutral in that great conflict. The evidence suggested that before the Kuru-Pāṇḍavas rose to prominence, Jarāsandha (described in the *Adiparvan* of the *Mahābhārata*, along with Bhagadatta, as an asura in his previous birth) had established his sway in Madhā, and among his

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62 Supra., 6n.
64 Ibid., pp.59-60.
vassals were Vasudeva of Puṇḍra and Bhagadatta of Prājyotisa. To raise Yudhisthira to the status of a samrāṭ, the Pāṇḍavas are said to have had to deal first of all with Jarāsandha, and when they started their digvijaya, some of the petty chiefs of northern and eastern India are said to have voluntarily submitted to them. Among such chiefs mentioned in the story were those of Ceḍī, Magadha, Oḍra, Tāmralipta, Suhma, Vaṅga, Puṇḍra and Prāgjyotisa. The narration thus makes it clear that Puṇḍra was an immediate neighbour of Vaṅga and Prāgjyotisa. However, both the Puṇḍras and Vaṅgas were called ‘sjata Kṣatriya’ (good-born kṣatriya) in the Digvijaya section of the Mahābhārata. Scholars have interpreted the descriptions in the Mahābhārata to conclude that Puṇḍra was then a country bounded on the west by the Gaṅgā and the Mahānandā and on the east by the Karatoya. It may therefore be concluded that the Puṇḍra region in the ‘epic period’ more or less corresponded to modern north Bengal.

In the Purāṇas

Sir M. Monier-Williams found that some of the Purāṇas mention Puṇḍra or Pundra as the name of a people as well as of a country corresponding to parts of modern Bengal and Bihar, while D.C. Sircar interpreted the evidence of the same sources to suggest that the Puṇḍras mentioned in the Purāṇas were the inhabitants of modern northern Bengal. In fact, a look at the sources indicate that the Viṣṇu Purāṇa and the Matsya Purāṇa categorised all the tribal communities of Bengal, including the Vangas, Suhmas, Sabaras, Pulindas, Kirātás and Puṇḍras, as Kṣatriyas. However, the Bhavisya Purāṇa mentioned that there were seven desas forming the larger desa called Puṇḍra-desa and these seven included Gauḍa, Varendra, Nivitī, Suhma, Jharikhaṇḍa, Varāhabhūmi and Vardhamāṇa. D.C. Sircar suggested that Gauḍa at that time included the localities like Navadvipa

70 Sir M. Monier-Williams, op.cit., p.650
71 Supra, 67n.
72 Viṣṇu Purāṇa, 143, Matsya Purāṇa. 79: Raghuvamsa, IV 36; see R.C. Majumdar, History of Ancient Bengal, loc.cit., p.413.
(Nadia district), Sāntipura (Nadia District), Maulāpattana (Mollar in Hoogly district) and Kāntakapattana (Katwa in Burdwan district). It lay between the river Padmā in the north and Vardhamāna (or Burdwan) in the south, and thereby comprised the present-day Murshidabad district and parts of Nadia, Burdwan and Hoogly districts of present West Bengal. He further suggested that Varendra could be identified with the Malda-Rajshahi-Bagura region, Niviti with Bardhankot in Rangpur district, Suhma with Rāḍha or south Bengal, Jharikhanḍa with the Santal Parganas, Varāhabhūmi with Barābhūmi in the Purulia district, and Vardhamāna with the Burdwan district. Therefore, the Puṇḍra country as described by the Bhavisya Purāṇa, according to D.C. Sircar, included West Bengal, north Bengal and parts of present Bangladesh and also some of the eastern districts of Bihar (Jharkhand). According to the Bhagavata Purāṇa, Paundraka Vāsudeva, the ruler of Vanga, Puṇḍra and the Kirata, sought the help of Kṛṣṇa for his protection from king Jarasandha of Magadha. Some other Purāṇas are also helpful in identifying the territories beyond Puṇḍra towards the east and the northeast. The Kālikā Purāṇa identified the river Karatoya as the western boundary of Pragjyotisa-Kamarupa. Y.K. Mishra observed that a number of Purāṇas repeated the story of the Vedic rṣi Dirghatamas Māmateya who begot five kṣetraja sons from Bāli’s wife, Sudesnā, and these five sons (viz., Ánga, Vaṅga, Kalīṅga, Suhma and Puṇḍra) established five principalities after their own names. Bāli is said to have established the four castes (caturvarna or varnāsrāmadharma) in the region and his sons followed up the work. Dusyanta, Śakuntalā’s husband, was a contemporary of Dirghatamas. In his old age Dirghatamas consecrated Bhārata, the son of Dusyanta. Samvarta, the cousin of Dirghatamas, officiated as the high priest of Marutta, the king of Vaiśāli. Some of the Purāṇas also confirmed Dirghatamas’s status as a Vedic rṣi and one of the authors of the

75 Bhāgavata Purāṇa, IX, 22; R.C. Majumdar, History of Ancient Bengal, loc.cit., p.26.
76 Viz., Mārkendeya Purāṇa, p.328, Kālikā Purāṇa, 78/43; see also Raghuvamsa IV.122. D.C. Sircar made a note of this point in his work, Studies in the Geography Religious Life in Ancient and Medieval India, loc.cit., p.161. His identification of the place-names was based on his reading of the relevant evidence of the Mārkendeya Purāṇa and the Kālikā Purāṇa, 78/43.
77 Kālikā Purāṇa, 78/43; P.C. Choudhury, op cit., p.219.
Dirghatamas lived in his paternal cousin’s hermitage that the Purāṇas apparently called ‘Saradvant’.

According to the Viśnu Purāṇa, Mahāmanas was one of the kings of the dynasty founded by Anu, son of Yayāti. Titiksu was his younger son and the younger brother of Usinara. From Titiksu was born Ruṣadratha and Ruṣadratha’s son was Hemā. Sutāpas, Bāli’s father, was the son of Hemā. The Purāṇas informed that Bāli had the following kṣetraja sons — Anga, Vaṅga, Kaliṅga, Suhma and Paunḍra — who founded the five well-known janapadas of eastern India that inherited their names. The Viśnu Purāṇa and the Bhāgavata Purāṇa provided more details about Paunḍraka Vāsudeva. They informed that Paunḍraka Vāsudeva had his own devotees like Kṛṣṇa. The poets of the Viśnu Purāṇa and the Bhāgavata Purāṇa branded Paunḍraka Vāsudeva a liar and an impostor. The compilers of these Purāṇas were indeed staunch Vaiṣṇavites, who had absolute faith in the divinity of Kṛṣṇa and obviously they looked down on Paunḍraka Vāsudeva, who looked upon himself as another Kṛṣṇa, with contempt. Not surprisingly therefore a devotee of Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa would have regarded the religious rival of his master as an impostor. In any case, all these sources clearly suggest that Paunḍraka Vāsudeva, also called Paunḍraka, had an appreciable number of devotees in eastern India. He was undoubtedly the first historical figure of Bengal with political or religious connections at the subcontinental level. These two Purāṇas also mentioned that Paunḍraka Vāsudeva was killed in the battlefield of Kurukṣetra by Kṛṣṇa, although this information is not recorded in the Mahābhārata. Some of the Purāṇas further informed that the successor of Atithi was one Nisādha and he was succeeded by Nāla or Nābhas who, in turn, was succeeded by one Puruṣā. This Puruṣā was followed in turn by Kṣemadhanvan, Devānika and Ahīnagu. Incidentally, Kālidāsa’s Raghuvamśa (dated fifth century) informed that a king in the same region named Atithi was succeeded by Niṣādha, who was then succeeded by Nāla (or Nābhas), and Nābhas was in turn

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77a Dirghatamas is said to be the author of 25 philosophical sūktas of the Rg Veda, i.e. Book I, 140-164. See Y.K. Misra, op.cit., p.43n.


succeeded by Pundarika. Pundarika was succeeded by Kṣemadhanvan, who was followed by Devasīkṣa and Ahīnagā. It is not known whether Pundarika, named in this source along with his predecessors and successors, was a ruler of Pundra. The later Purāṇas often placed the Pundras, Vaṅgas, Sumhas, Aṅgas and Kaliṅgas in the same ethnic or cultural stock. The description makes it clear that they lived in the neighbouring or contiguous areas. The Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa mentioned Udayāchala along with the Lauhitya and Kāmarūpa as somewhere in the east; and from the descriptions it also emerges that Kāmarūpa was located next to Pundra to the east.

In the Buddhist Sources

The Buddhist sources testified to the rise of the Buddhist centres in the coastal regions of Bengal since the time of Buddha himself. A terracotta tablet found at Tāmluk (West Bengal), probably belonging to the Sunga period, contains a scene from the Chandanta Jātaka. The Vinaya Piṭaka, another Sanskrit Buddhist text, located the eastern boundary of the land of Āryāvarta as the kingdom of Pundravardhana. The Mahāvagga, another text, mentioned that the eastern boundary of Majjhimadesā extended to the town of Kājaṅgala (identified with Ka-chu-won-ki-lo of Hiuen Tsang, near modern Rajmahal). According to the Vinaya Piṭaka, Buddhism made considerable headway in the Pundra region, and Vanga also began to grow as one of the important centres of Buddhism. The Telapatta Jātaka spoke of Buddha's visit to a locality called Desaka or Setaka in the Suhma country (southwest Bengal), while the Bodhisattvavadana Kalpalata stated that Buddha spent six months in the Pundravardhana country for the purpose of preaching his doctrine. A passage in the Ārya-Mānuṣirnimulakalpa told of the defeat of the Gauda (Bengal) king (Ṣaśāṅka) at the battle of Pundra (Pundravardhana). On Ṣaśāṅka's

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82 Raghuvamsa of Kālidāsa XVIII, 5-7 cited in A.K. Chatterjee, op cit , p.171.
83 Amitabha Bhattacharyya, op cit , pp.56-62.
84 Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa, pp.521-20; P.C. Choudhury, op cit , p.12
86 D.C. Sircar, Studies in the Geography in Ancient and Medieval India, loc cit., p.184.
87 B.N. Choudhury, op cit , pp.5-6, 194.
88 Supra, 86n.
89 ibid., p.183
90 A.K. Sur, op cit , pp 82-84.
death, his son Mānava became the ruler of Gauḍa for eight months and five days. The text further informed that during the period immediately after Śaśānka’s demise, several rulers asserted themselves. One of them was a Nāga king, Jaya by name, who became prominent for some time in the northern submontane region.\(^9\)

The emergence of Varendra as a sub-regional identity within the Pundra region can also be inferred on the basis of the Buddhist sources. The *Trikāṇḍaśēsa* referred to Varendra as an integral part of Puṇḍravardhana. According to a passage in this text, the Puṇḍra country was the same as Varendra lying in the realm of Gauḍa.\(^9\) Another Buddhist work, the *Daśakumāraracaritam* described an invasion of the Puṇḍra country by Viśālavarmā’s army.\(^9\) The *Dipavamsa* and *Mahāvamsa* mentioned that Lanka (Sri Lanka) was occupied by one Vijaya from Simhapura in Rādha.\(^9\) The *Digvijaya-Prakāśa* placed Rādha to the north of the river Dāmodar and west of Gauḍa,\(^9\) while the *Divyāvadāna* stated that the eastern boundary of Madhyadeśa extended eastward to include Puṇḍravardhana.\(^9\) The latter text indicated that the city of Puṇḍravardhana was situated beyond Kajāṅgala, which was the eastern border of the land known as Majjhima deśa that was the early domain of Buddhism. The *Divyāvadāna* clearly referred to the land of Buddhism as bounded by Puṇḍravardhana in the east and beyond it was Mount Puṇḍralakṣa; by the town Śāravati in the south and, further beyond it, was the river Śāravati; by the Brāhmaṇa villages of Sthūna and Upasthūna in the west; and by Usiragiri in the north.\(^9\) The *Divyāvadāna* also referred to the boundary of Majjhima deśa to the east of Puṇḍravardhana and located the eastern boundary of the Majjhima deśa immediately beyond Puṇḍravardhana. In other words, it placed Puṇḍravardhana within the Buddhist Madhyadeśa. The composition of this text is generally ascribed to the post-Asokan

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\(^9\) Amitabha Bhattacharyya, *op. cit.* p.49.
\(^9\) Ibid.
period. The descriptions given in the Divyavadāna reveal that the Puṇḍras occupied northern Bengal. The same source located the city of Puṇḍravardhana (Puṇḍranagara) at a long distance from Magadha to the east of Kajaṅgala (a city near Rājmahal in the modern Santal Parganas).

In the Jaina Sources

Like the Buddhist, the Jaina sources also referred to the Puṇḍra region. The Jaina work Kalpasūtra described Tāmralipti, Koṭivarsa and Puṇḍravardhana as very well known places. It mentioned that four sākhās (branches) of the ‘Godasaṅgana’ existed in Bengal and the monks were called ‘Tāmralipthiya’ (of Tāmralipti), ‘Koṭivarsiyya’ (of Koṭivarsa), Puṇḍravardhāniya’ (of Puṇḍravardhana) and ‘Khabbadiya’ (of Karvata). A statement in the Kalpasūtra showed that Godasa, a disciple of Bhadrabāhu, founded a school called ‘Godasa-gana’ (or ‘Godasaṅgana’) named after him. In course of time, it had four sākhās or branches of which three were known as Tāmraliptika, Koṭivarsiyya and Puṇḍravardhāniya, known after three very well known places, viz., Tāmralipti, Koṭivarsa and Puṇḍravardhana. Several other early Jaina texts mentioned about the important places within the Puṇḍra region and its neighbourhood. For example, the Āvaśyaka Niryukti referred to Koṭivarisa (Koṭivarsa) as an important Jaina centre. The Prajināpana, another Jaina work, placed Koṭivarsa in Rādhā. Similarly, the Āyāraṅga Sutta (dated second century BC) referred to Vajjabhūmi and Subbhabhūmi as parts of Rādhā. It also said that by this time Suhma was identifiable with Rādhā. According to the Āyāraṅga Sutta (dated second century BC), Mahāvira had to undergo sufferings and hardships in Vajjabhūmi and Subbhabhūmi in the Rādhā country.

98 B.N. Choudhury, op.cit., pp.5-6, 194-196
99 Divyavadāna, op.cit.; See D.C. Sircar, op.cit., pp.159-160.
101 Amitabha Bhattacharyya, op.cit., pp.41-53.
103 Supra, 90n.
106 R.C. Majumdar, History of Ancient Bengal, loc.cit., p.320.
107 Amitabha Bhattacharyya, op.cit., p.48.
108 Supra, 90n.
neighbours and in the region now identifiable as covering the area from north to southwest Bengal.

**In the Greek Accounts**

The Greek accounts are important for understanding the physical changes that occurred in eastern India since fourth century BC. According to these sources the parts of eastern and southwestern Bengal, including Sylhet, were still under the sea, although the delta was then beginning to form. The estuaries of the Gaṅgā and the Brahmaputra formed the sea, called Lauhitya sāgara, which was dotted with islands called dvīpas. These accounts further made mention of islands in the estuary of the Gaṅgā, and referred to a group of islands that was very likely known as Vanga. However, the country of the Gaṅgāridāe (or Bengal) then possibly formed a part of the dominion of the king of the Prāsii. The Greek accounts also suggest that at the time of Alexander’s invasion, the Gaṅgāridāes were associated with the Prāsii on equal terms, although they were possibly not the most powerful nation in the Gaṅgā Valley. The territory of the Maroundae of Ptolemy’s geographical account, which abutted on that of the Gaṅgāridāe and lay to the east of the Gaṅgā, is identified by scholars with the Pundras of north Bengal. The fact that Ptolemy gave the title of ‘royal’ to the chief town of the Gaṅgāridāes, is taken to indicate that the Gaṅgāridāes continued to enjoy some measures of independence when Prāsii had become the paramount power during the time when Megāsthene was deputed to the court of Sandrakottos (i.e., Candragupta Maurya). The *Periplus Erythras Thalesses* or *Periplus of the Erythraen Sea* (dated first century) mentioned that raw silk and silk-yarn and silk cloth were brought on foot from the land of the ‘This’ through Bactria to Barygaza and were also imported to Damirica by way of the river Gaṅgā.

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name ‘This’ is identified by some scholars with China. Pliny distinguished the wool-bearing trees of Seres from those of the Indians in the context of silk manufactured in Assam and China. This evidence is taken by some writers to suggest that Prāgjyotisa-Kāmarūpa bordered the territory of the Gaṅgārīdāes. Pliny suggested that the ‘Pālibhotri’ (i.e., the rulers of Pāṭaliputra) dominated the whole tract along the Gaṅgā. Arrian recorded the multiplicity of cities in eastern India and the houses built of wood as well as brick and mortar, particularly in deltaic Bengal. Strabo mentioned the land surveys in deltaic Bengal. The Kirātas, Kambojas, Shivas, Ashmakas, Dardas, Kshudrakas, Šauviras, Udumharas, Saraswatyas, Bhuliṅgas, Amsasthas, Kekayas, Mallas, Prachyas, Vaṅgas, Shavaras, Mundās, Puṇḍras, Andhras, Mutibas, Kaliṅgas, Nāgas, Medas and the Magadhas were among the important people whom Megāstheneś listed among the pre-Aryan, pre-Drāvidian and Austric populace of the subcontinent. Megāstheneś stayed in Tāmrālīpti and recorded information about the region. The land corresponding to modern northeast India and the submontane Himalayas were by then possibly inhabited by the Kirātas. The sources, therefore, suggested that the Puṇḍra and the Kirāta areas bordered or even overlapped each other. This perhaps confirms the contention that the larger region was earlier known as Kirāta and a part of that Kirāta territory later on came to be known as Puṇḍra.

In the Chinese Accounts

‘Like the Greek sources, the Chinese accounts also referred to the Puṇḍra region. The more important accounts by the Chinese travellers in India were those left behind by Fa-hien, Hiuen Tsang and I-tsing. These writers also placed the territory of the Puṇḍra (or Puṇḍravardhana) in the northern part of Bengal. According to them, the river Karatoya

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115 Ibid.
116 Ibid.
117 Supra,110n.
118 Ibid., p.244; F.J. Monahan, op.cit., p 207.
119 Ibid., p.207.
123 R.C. Majumdar, History of Ancient Bengal, loc cit., p.1.
formed the boundary between Pundravardhana and Prāgjyotisha-Kāmarūpa. Fa-Hien, who visited India and Sri Lanka between AD 399 and AD 413, stayed in Tāmralipti for two years in the beginning of the fifth century. He found no less than twenty-two Buddhist vihāras and innumerable sculptures and paintings of Buddha in Tāmralipti alone. This proved the flourishing position of Buddhism in Bengal including Pundravardhana which was a neighbouring region of Tāmralipti.

The most important of the Chinese accounts for our period were undoubtedly those left behind by Hiuen Tsang. His Śī-yu-ki and the Tāng-shu (dated the seventh century) contained information on Pundra, Vanga and other neighbouring regions. The Tāng-shu described his journey from Kajaṅgalā to Kāmarūpa. Hiuen Tsang travelled from Kajaṅgalā (modern Rājmahal) eastwards and crossed the Gaṅgā. Thereafter, he travelled six hundred li and arrived at Pun-na-fa-tan-na (i.e., Pundravardhana). From there he travelled nine hundred li towards the east, crossed the Karatoya and finally reached Kāmarūpa. Therefore, it would be reasonable to presume that the Gaṅgā formed the eastern boundary of Pundravardhana, the Karatoya formed the western boundary and the Padma separated Pundravardhana from Karnasuvarna. The Tāng-shu further mentioned that from the Gupta period onwards Pundravardhana formed a bhūti under different imperial authorities and at certain points of time it came to denote practically the whole of Bengal including the territory west of the river Bhagirathi. Hiuen Tsang referred to Śaśāṅka as the ‘fallen’ king of Karnasuvarṇa. The pilgrim also visited Samatata (southeast Bengal or the Tipperah-Noakhali region), Tāmralipti (Tamluk) and Karnasuvarṇa (possibly Chiruti in Murshidabad district). The scholars have no doubt that the Pun-na-fa-tan-na referred to by Hiuen Tsang was to be identified with Pundravardhana and that this large territory more or less corresponded to modern

125 Ibid., p.185; A.K. Sur, op.cit., pp.82-85.
127 Thomas Watters, op.cit., pp.185; Samuel Beal & Shaman Hwui Li, op.cit., pp.133; Amitabha Bhattacharya, op.cit., p.43.
128 Samuel Beal & Shaman Hwui Li, op.cit., pp.135; Amitabha Bhattacharya, op.cit., pp.105-106.
northern Bengal. It is also evident from the pilgrim’s account that Karṇasuvṛṭa was a smaller tract of land and distinct from Puṇḍravardhana (northern Bengal), Samatāta (southeast Bengal) and Tāmrālipti (southwest Bengal). Huien Tsang travelled from Kajahgala in the eastern direction and arrived at Puṇḍravardhana, wherefrom he travelled further eastward and reached Kāmarūpa. The Tāng-shu also informed that the river Karatoya formed the western boundary of Prāgjyotisha-Kāmarūpa.

Hiuen Tsang’s account located Puṇḍravardhana between Kajahgala and the river Karatoya. If Kajahgala is identified with Rājmahal, the area of Puṇḍravardhana extended from Rājmahal-Gaṅgā-Bhāgirathi (Rājmahal) to the river Karatoya and thus covered modern Bankura and Dinajpur districts also. The pilgrim travelled from Puṇḍravardhana towards the east and reached Kāmarūpa after crossing a large river called Ka-lo-tu (Karatoya) between the two regions. The Karatoya, therefore, formed the western boundary of Prāgjyotisha-Kāmarūpa. Hiuen Tsang’s testimony is also suggestive of the fact that the Magadhan kings retained their hold on Bengal as late as the time of Aśoka. He noticed stūpas constructed by Aśoka in Tāmrālipti, Karṇasuvṛṭa, Samatāta and Puṇḍravardhana. When Hiuen Tsang came to Bengal in AD 638, the country was divided into five kingdoms, viz., Kajahgala, Puṇḍravardhana, Samatāta, Karṇasuvṛṭa and Tāmrālipti. However, he made no mention about the rulers of these kingdoms. This suggests that immediately after the death of Śaśāṅka, the kingdom of Gauḍa had fallen to pieces and independent rulers had come to power. As regards the

131 Thomas Watters, op.cit., p.188; D.C. Sircar, Studies in the Geography in Ancient and Medieval India, loc.cit., p.161.
133 Anjali Chatterjee, op.cit., p.9.
135 Supra, 110n.
geographical extent of Puṇḍravardhana, the Śī-ya-ki also suggested that it extended from the Gaṅgā to the Karatojā.\footnote{Thomas Watters, op.cit., p.84; D.C. Sircar, Studies in the Geography in Ancient and Medieval India, loc.cit., p.105.}

I-tsing, who travelled in India during AD 671-695, saw the ruins of the ‘Temple of China’, which is said to have been built near the Mrīgaśikhāyana or Mrīgasthāpana monastery in Varendra (by which name Puṇḍra subsequently came to be known) for some Chinese pilgrims by a mahārāja named Śrīgupta, about five hundred years before the pilgrim’s time, i.e., in the second century. Some scholars have identified this mahārāja with Mahārāja Gupta, the progenitor of the Gupta dynasty of Magadha, who flourished possibly about the end of the third century.\footnote{D.C. Sircar, Studies in the Religious Life in Ancient and Medieval India, loc.cit., pp.184-185.} I-tsing, who arrived in Tamralipti in AD 673, referred to a road running westward from the sea-port. This road was mentioned in certain Buddhist texts also.\footnote{Supra, loc.cit.} Another Chinese traveller, Kia-Tan, who travelled in India between AD 785 and 805, described the route he had taken from Tonkin to Magadha via Kāmarupa, Puṇḍravardhana and Kaṇḍaga, sailing through the Karatojā and the Gaṅgā, which route was used for commercial purposes.\footnote{R.C. Majumdar, History of Ancient Bengal, loc.cit., p.346}

A.K. Sur quoted a Tibetan tradition which suggested that Nagarjuna had built some vihāras in Puṇḍravardhana and Vaṅgāśa.\footnote{A.K. Sur, op.cit., pp.83-84} Tārānātha’s History of Buddhism (AD 1608), which gives the names of successive generations of kings in Vaṅgāśa and Rādhā, referred to Puṇḍravardhana as lying between Magadha and Vaṅgāśa. It also talked about Vaṅgāśa and Varendra and mentioned that Bimalacandra ruled over the three provinces of Vaṅgāśa, Kāmarupa and Tirahuti. Tārānātha further recorded a tradition to the effect that Candragupta Maurya’s son and successor Bindusara was born in the country of Gauḍa.\footnote{Ibid., p.34; R.C. Majumdar, History of Ancient Bengal, loc.cit., pp.166, 196.}

In fact, Kautilya’s Arthashastra referred to Paṇḍra along with Vaṅga and Gauḍa, and this reference gave the impression that the area formed a province of the territory under the Mauryas.\footnote{Amitabha Bhattacharyya, op.cit., p.5; A.K. Sur, op.cit., p.17} It mentioned Paṇḍra, Vaṅga and Gauḍa separately while discussing the
textile products of those places. As regards Paundra, the Arthasastra gave details of its sericulture, textile and other products. The source also made it clear that the Paundra region was within the Mauryan Empire.

In may be mentioned here that a glimpse of the land and the people in the larger region of Bengal and northeast India during the early period is found in the work of K.L. Barua. He cited the interpretations of the information recorded in the Manusmruti, the Puranas and the epics by some of the historians to suggest that in the ‘epic age’, at least three-fourths of modern Bengal (including the whole of the Mymensingh district) was under the sea known as the Lauhitya Sagara. He further mentioned that the sea extended towards the north almost up to the submontane tracts of the Himalayas and the Brahmaputra fell into this sea without having to run a southerly course around the Garo Hills. Barua opined that till about the time of the Mahabharata battle the western portion of Kamarupa and also northern Bengal to the east of Videha and as far south as the Rangpur district (now divided between Bangladesh, West Bengal and Assam) had not risen above water level. Based on his readings of the epics, the Buddhist records and the Greek accounts of the fourth century BC, Barua tried to argue that the evidence confirmed his supposition that at about the same period practically the whole of western Sylhet and the southern part of eastern Bengal as well as parts of south-west Bengal were under the sea, though the delta was then beginning to form. The estuaries of the Ganga and the Brahmaputra formed this sea, which was dotted with islands, called dvipas and the epic accounts gave this sea the name Lauhitya sagara (i.e., estuary of the Lauhitya). In other words, Lauhitya sagara became an important landmark for geographically locating Pun德拉 and Kamarupa on the basis of early Indian literary sources and the Greek accounts.

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144 D.C. Sircar, Studies in the Geography in Ancient and Medieval India, loc.cit., p.122.
147 Ibid.
148 Ibid.
In Other Literary Sources

Several other literary sources also referred to Pañḍra either as a people or as a territory, or both as a people and a territory. The *Harivamśa*\(^{149}\) mentioned the Pañḍras as a people occupying a territory of the same name, which possibly included south Bihar and Bengal.\(^{150}\) As mentioned earlier, the *Kalpaśūra* and the *Divyavadana* also referred to the Pañḍras,\(^{151}\) the latter even indicating that they lived in north Bengal.\(^{152}\) Varāhamihira also knew the region of Pañḍra.\(^{153}\) His *Brhat.samhitā* distinguished Gauḍakā from Pañḍrakā, Tāmralipti, Vaṅga, Samaṭa and Vardhamāna.\(^{154}\) The text referred to Suhma, Samaṭa, Lauhitya, Gauḍa, Pañḍra, Tāmralipti and Vardhamāna in different contexts.\(^{155}\) Harisena’s *Vṛhatkathākosa* informed that Bhadrabāhu, the preceptor of the Mauryan emperor, Candragupta, was the son of a Brāhmaṇa of Deviṣkotā in the Pañḍrāvardhana country.\(^{156}\) Harisena’s work is of a much later date than Candragupta Maurya, and, therefore, the relevance of the information remains doubtful unless corroborated by any other source. However, it is evident from the work of Suṣruta that a distinct variety of sugarcane grown in Pañḍrāvardhana or Varendra was known as ‘Pañḍrakā’. Suṣruta said that this variety was first grown in the Pañḍra country.\(^{157}\) The *Harṣacarita* of Bānabhaṭṭa referred to Śaśāṅka as king of Gauḍa and said that Gauḍa under Śaśāṅka extended beyond its traditional limits.\(^{158}\) Hemendra’s *Abhidhanacintāmani* (dated the eleventh century) mentioned Deviṣkotā, Umāvana, Śonitapura, Bāṇapura as synonyms of Koṭivarsa, which, among other places found mention in some of the epigraphic sources. Kavi Kankana Mukundarāma’s *Candi* referred to Navagrāma and Dāmunyā, which have now been located in Howrah and Hoogly districts respectively.\(^{159}\) Similarly, Kṛṣṇa

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\(^{150}\) Supra, 6n.

\(^{151}\) Supra, 5n.


\(^{154}\) Amitabha Bhattacharyya, *op.cit.*, p.51.

\(^{155}\) D.C. Sircar, *Studies in the Geography in Ancient and Medieval India*, *loc.cit.*, pp.121-123.

\(^{156}\) A.K. Sur, *op.cit.*, pp.82-85.


\(^{159}\) Amitabha Bhattacharyya, *op.cit.*, pp.50, 59.
Misra’s *Prabodhacandradoya* placed Bhūrīśresthika on the river Dāmodar, which belonged to Dāksīṇa Rādhā. Kulluka’s commentary on the *Manusmṛti* described the commentator as originally an inhabitant of a locality in Varendra within Gaṇḍa. Purusottama’s lexicon (eleventh century) informed that Puṇḍra included the Varendra and Gaṇḍa countries. The *Padmā Tantra*, a canonical Bhāgavata work, made a distinction between the *tatvabhavat* and the *Kṣatriya* (Puṇḍraka) Vāsudeva. The *Yoginī Tantra*, which was possibly composed in Assam around eleventh century, stated that the Karatoya formed the western boundary of Prājyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa. This *Tantra* referred to a tradition, which mentioned the Čīnas and Kirātas among the followers of a mythical king of the country of Prājyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa, who flourished between AD 1063 and 1081, and referred to Udayāḍri as the abode of the siddhas, situated to the east of Puṇḍra. This Udayāḍri or Udayāgiri has been identified with Udayācala of the *Mārkandeya Purāṇa* thereby placing it in Kāmarūpa. According to the *Kathāsārītāsāgara*, Puṇḍravardhana had a great market-place and its streets were lined with shops. It referred to merchants travelling from Puṇḍravardhana to Pāṭaliputra. The text also preserved a tradition to the effect that Aṅga at one time extended up to the sea, for one of its cities Vitankapura is said to have been situated on the sea-side (i.e., by the Bay of Bengal).

The *Rāmacaritam* of Sandhyākaranandin (eleventh-twelfth century) is an important source for the history of Bengal, which makes it clear that northern Bengal by the end of the eleventh century was known as Varendra-śaṅkula and the region was more popularly called Varendra, while Puṇḍravardhanapura was the chief city of Varendra. The information provided by this text is very important for understanding the geographical extent of the territory of Puṇḍravardhana. The *Kaviprāśasti* of the text informed that the

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160 Ibid.
162 B.C. Law, op.cit., p.247
164 Ibid., p.161.
native village of the poet Sandhyākaranandin was Brhadvatu, which was the crest-jewel of Varendra-\textit{mandala} and was situated close to the city of Paunḍravardhanapura;\textsuperscript{168} Varendra was the ‘fatherland’ of Rāmapāla;\textsuperscript{169} Rāmapāla recovered Varendra from the rebel Kaivartta chief who had occupied this portion of the Pāla kingdom after having killed the Pāla king Mahāpāla;\textsuperscript{170} Rāmapāla entered Varendra after crossing the Gāṅgā;\textsuperscript{171} in the great monastery of Jagaddala (modern Jagaddalpur) in Varendra there were images of Bodhisattva Lokesa and Tārā;\textsuperscript{172} Varendra was the birth-place of several well known Brāhmaṇas and flourished on account of its urban centers — Skandaṅanagara and Śonaṅtapura; the latter is said to have been crowded by the images of gods installed in temples.\textsuperscript{173} The ‘glorious streams’ of the Gāṅgā and the Karatoya are said to have flowed on either side of Varendra. Varendra was described as the holiest place on account of its having the great place of pilgrimage called Apunarbha.\textsuperscript{174} Besides, Varendra was the source of the rivers Balabhi and Kāli and was surrounded by many well-known trees including the Aśoka groves.\textsuperscript{175} Rāmapāla is said to have built Rāmāvati as a city of rows of palaces and made it appear like the peak of the Meru (pole).\textsuperscript{176} He is also said to have been conciliated by the Varman king of the eastern country for his own safety;\textsuperscript{177} furthermore, he is said to have been honoured by the allies who had come from Kāmarūpa and other countries that had been duly conquered.\textsuperscript{178} The territorial boundary of Varendra is said to have included Kāmarūpa, which had been conquered by the Pālas by war.\textsuperscript{179}

Ānandabhatta’s \textit{Vallālacarita} (twelfth century) stated that Varendra was a province within Vallālasena’s empire and referred to Vyāgrataṭi-\textit{mandala} and Mahantapraṅkaṣa-

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{169} \textit{Ibid.}, Canto I, v.38, p.26.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{170} \textit{Ibid.}, Canto I, v.26-30, pp.18-21.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{171} \textit{Ibid.}, Canto II, v.10, p.40.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{172} \textit{Ibid.}, Canto III, v.7, p.62.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{173} \textit{Ibid.}, Canto III, v.9, p.63.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{174} \textit{Ibid.}, Canto III, v.10, p.64.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{175} \textit{Ibid.}, Canto III, v.11, p.64.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{176} \textit{Ibid.}, Canto III, v.32, p.72.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{177} \textit{Ibid.}, Canto IV, v.44, p.76.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{178} \textit{Ibid.}, Canto IV, v.47, p.77.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{179} \textit{Ibid.}, Canto IV, v.53, p.80.}
\end{footnotes}
viṣaya. With reference to a certain Mahāsthān in the eastern portion of Varendra, the text further mentioned among its relics, a Śiva temple. If this Mahāsthān is identified with Pundrānagara then it has to be concluded that by the twelfth century the name Pundrānagara was already replaced by Mahāsthān. Similarly, in Kalhana's Rājatarangini (twelfth-thirteenth century), Pundravardhananagara was mentioned as the capital of a prince named Jayanta, subordinate to the king of Gauḍa. Jayanta is said to have reigned from AD 782 to 813. The Rājatarangini also mentioned that the Kashmiri king Jayāpiḍā (AD 762-763), the grandson of Lalitāditya, had come to Pundravardhana after his throne was usurped by his brother-in-law, Jajja. Thereafter, he is said to have married the daughter of Jayanta, who ruled in Pundravardhana as a subordinate king of Gauḍa. Jayāpiḍā is said to have defeated five chiefs in the locality and made his father-in-law their overlord. The chronicle further informed that Jayāpiḍā, the grandson of Lalitāditya of Kashmir, arrived at the city of Pundravardhana in the course of wandering.

It is possible that Pundravardhana as the name of a province or territory or region was gradually replaced by that of Varendra in the eleventh-twelfth century, when a city still existed by the name of Pundranagara or Pundravardhananagara. However, the same city was also known as Mahāsthān and can be identified with Mahāsthāngarh in Bogra (Bagura) district of modern times. The Karatoya-māhātyam, a medieval Sanskrit work, while dealing with the topography of the area referred to many sites that can be located in the adjacent areas of the present village of Mahāsthān.

The important places in the region got new names from the medieval Persians writers. Thus, the Tabaqāt-i-Nāṣirī (thirteenth century) mentioned Bārind as a wing of the territory of Lakhnāuti on the eastern side of the Gaṅgā. It did not refer to Pundravardhana, possibly indicating the decline or replacement of the name by

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180 Amitabha Bhattacharyya, op.cit., pp.45, 95.
181 Ibid., p.94.
182 Supra, 153n.
184 R.C. Majumdar, History of Ancient Bengal, loc.cit., p.77; idem, Bānglādesher Itihās, loc.cit., p.35.
185 Amitabha Bhattacharyya, op.cit., pp.94-95.
Mahāsthān.¹⁸⁶ This source also mentioned that Rāl (or Rādha) was situated west of the Gangā and was the left wing of Lakhnāuti.¹⁸⁷ Most likely, Bārind and Varendra were one and the same. According to Minhājuddin-sirāj, author of Tabaqāt-i-Nāsirī, Bārind (Varendra) was the lower wing of the Muslim territory of Lakhnawashī or Lakhnāuti. He also located the city of Devkot in Bārind¹⁸⁸. Moreover, neither Pundravardhana nor Pundranagara found mention among the revenue mahals in Todarmal’s rent-roll (Band-0-bast, dated AD 1566).¹⁸⁹ The Tabaqāt-i-Nāsirī informed that Malik Husam-ud-din Iwaz Khalji, who joined Muhammad-i-Bakhtiyār in the campaign of Lakhnawashī, was appointed the Sultan and styled himself as Sultan Ghiyas-ud-din who made the city of Lakhnawashī the seat of government, founded the fortress of Basan-kot and the people from all directions turned their faces towards him.¹⁹⁰

The Āin-i-Ākbari (a sixteenth century supplement to Ākbar Nāmah) also did not refer to Pundravardhana thus suggesting that it had already declined as a regional identity, and had been replaced by new identity or identities. Only the city of Devkot was mentioned in the Āin-i-Ākbari.¹⁹¹ Ibn Batūtā (the fourteenth century Moroccan traveller) referred only to the regional identities like Lakhnāuti and Bengala.¹⁹² Minhājuddin-sirāj further spoke of the occupation of the territory of Laksmaṇasena and the renovation and reorientation of Lakhnāuti (Gaud) as the new capital at the time of Muhammad-i-Bakhtiyār.¹⁹³ The medieval sources thus make it clear that in the thirteenth century the name Puṇḍra had already been replaced by that of Varendra or Bārind.

Physiography

It follows from the foregoing discussion that the Puṇḍras in early times lived in the northern geographical division of Bengal. According to the evidence of the epigraphic

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., p.94; R.C. Majumdar, History of Ancient Bengal, loc. cit., p.13.
¹⁸⁷ Ibid., p.491.
¹⁸⁸ D.C. Sircar, Studies in the Geography in Ancient and Medieval India, loc. cit., p.158.
¹⁸⁹ Amitabha Bhattacharyya, op. cit., p.94.
¹⁹¹ Amitabha Bhattacharyya, op. cit., p.95.
¹⁹² D.C. Sircar, Studies in the Geography in Ancient and Medieval India, loc. cit., p.131.
¹⁹³ H.G. Raverty (tr.), op. cit., p.581.
records discussed in the next chapter, it becomes clear that the geographical extent of Purñdravardhana as a province or a political division expanded from time to time under various imperial authorities to cover parts of other regions of Bengal, but northern Bengal continued to be identified as Purñdravardhana during the period of our study. Towards the end of the period, the same division became popularly known as Varendra (or Bārind).^*

On the basis of the data provided by the geologists,^194 Barrie M. Morrison divided deltaic Bengal into five distinct major geographical regions, viz., (i) the deltaic plain, (ii) the Tippera surface, (iii) the Sylhet basin, (iv) the Madhupur jungle, and (v) the Varendra uplands. He described the Delta (measuring 80,000 square miles) as “an immense saucer of alluvial deposit” which lies between the Tippera hills on the east, the Shillong plateau and Nepal Terai on the north and the highlands of the Rājmahal and Chota Nagpur on the west. He found that the southern lip of the saucer, which is an immensely fertile plain of some fifty thousand square miles and composed of the recent deltaic deposits and flood plains of the Gaṅgā, Brahmaputra and Meghnā rivers, is alluvium and may be divided into three geographically distinguishable sub-regions, i.e., the deltaic plain, the Sylhet basin and the Tippera surface. The remaining two geographically distinguishable areas are the Madhupur jungle and Varendra, which are large tracts of Pleistocene alluvium. Morrison also found that these ancient alluvium deposits are readily distinguishable (a) by the deep red colour of their oxidized ferruginous soils, (b) by their drainage pattern, and (c) by the types of vegetation cover. He found Varendra (or Pundra), with which we are mainly concerned here, as an area that measured three thousand six hundred square miles stretching from the northern reach of the flood plains of the Gaṅgā to the alluvial fan of the Nepal foothills; the Brahmaputra marked its eastern boundary and separated Varendra from Madhupur, the western side of Varendra merged into the lands lying across the Garo-Rājmahal gap which lay between the western edge of the Shillong plateau and the northeastern limit of

^ For details, Infra, Chapter III.
^195 Barrie M. Morrison, op.cit., p.9. Also see Map 1: Physical Divisions of Ancient Bengal.
^196 Ibid., p.8.
^197 Ibid.
the Chota Nagpur and Rājmahal highlands. Morrison also made an analysis of the distribution of population of undivided Bengal as per 1941 census and found that the Madhupur jungle and Varendra are more thinly populated than other parts of Bengal. He then concluded that the population densities of the modern delta might be taken as an index to the fertility of the Delta and the capacity of the land to support an extremely dense agricultural population, and that these figures may also suggest the historic concentrations of agricultural population and the location of the principal market towns and political centres in the earlier periods.

Therefore, the Varendra or Puṇḍra region is an upland territory. It was thinly populated as its capacity to support a dense agricultural population was less, but it is more ancient (barring only Madhupur) than other parts of Bengal. Hence, according to Morrison, the principal market towns or political centres of Bengal might not have been located there. However, as we shall see later, the important political-cum-urban centres of ancient and early medieval Bengal like Puṇḍranagara (Mahāsthāngarh), Bāngarh, Pāhārpur and Gaud-Paṇḍua were located within the Puṇḍra (or Varendra) region. The Mahāsthāṅ Inscription and the archaeological remains in Mahāsthāṅgarh, as well as the literary references to Puṇḍranagara, are enough evidence to prove the existence of urban units as early as the Mauryan period. While discussing the rise of urban centres in the region R.C. Majumdar observed that Pāṇini had mentioned the city of Gauḍapura, that Kautilya’s *Arthaśāstra* had referred to the country called Gauḍa, the Haraha inscription (sixth century) had recorded that the Maukhari king Isnavarman had forced the Gauḍas to take refuge in the sea, and in the early medieval period the name Gauḍa (Gaud-Paṇḍua) came to be applied to Lakṣmanavaṭi in the modern Malda district in northern Bengal. Similarly, the Talcher Grant of Gayadatungadeva and the *Kavipraśasti* of Rāmacaritam of Sandhyakaranandin, the Silimpur Inscription, and Tarpaṇḍighi and Mādhāinagar

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198 Ibid.
199 Ibid.
200 Ibid.
201 Ibid.
202 Infra, Chapter VI.
204 Ibid., pp.6-7.

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inscriptions located Varendra / Varendra within Puňdravardhana. Historically, the growth of these important urban centres would not have been possible without the support of the rural hinterlands.

The main difficulty in spatially locating the settlements in the Puňdra region in early times arises from the fact that, although the ancient literary and epigraphic sources mentioned the names of the rivers in the Puňdra region, some of the important rivers in northern Bengal (i.e., those flowing through Puňdra-Varendra region) have significantly changed their courses during the last four or five hundred years; hence, the possibility of similar changes in the remoter past is still stronger. The rivers in the region flowed into the Gangā or the Brahmaputra. The river Tīstā ran southwards in three channels, i.e., the Karatoyā to the right, the Punarbhavā to the left and the Ātrāi in the centre. Popularly called ‘Triśrotā’ (meaning three streams, corrupted to ‘Tīstā’), the united stream ultimately emptied itself into the Padmā in eastern Bengal, while Padmā confluenced into the Bay of Bengal. The city of Puňdranagara stood on the banks of this river. R.C. Majumdar observed that the dwindling Karatoyā, which still flows by the ruins of the ancient city at Mahāsthāṅgarh in the Bagura district, formed a fixed landmark in the shifting sands of the fluvial history of the province of Puňdravardhana. The rapidity with which the course of the rivers in the region changes can be observed from the fact that the Tistā abandoned the Gaṅgā to flow directly into the Brahmaputra in the eighteenth century, while the Brahmaputra abandoned the great eastward curve of its main bed and now runs almost due south to join the Gaṅgā.

The physiographic structure of the present Indian portion of geographic northern Bengal reveal that the north-west Malda and West Dinajpur tract (locally still called Bārind) was the post-pleistocene southern limit of the Himalayas, separated from it by a swamp or shallow lake from east to west. The left bank tributaries of the Gaṅgā used to flow from

205 Ibid., p.13.
206 Ibid., pp.4-5.
the area now known as Bihar with alluvium towards this lacustrine area while Himalayan glacial action was also deposited in the north of it. The significant traverse was made by the Himalayan rivers which after tectonic upliftment of the basin, coincidental to Himalayan tectonic changes, have cut through it to meander and interface north of the Gaṅgā itself. Only after the westward shift of the Kosī and the eastward shift of the Trisrotā (Tista) and the drying of the swampy land the region came to be dominated by the Mahānandā with the attendant rivers like the Punarbhāvā and the Tangan. In the further north, one finds the following spatial pattern:

- a. the slow eastward rise of the ferallitic Bārind from which the old territorial name given to this region, Barendrabhumi, comes;
- b. the clayey flats of the Tal;
- c. the sandy undulations up towards the north-eastern Duars (passes / gates) along the rivers flowing south from Bhutan into Jalpaiguri and Coach Bihar;
- d. the north-westward boulder-strewn plains of the Tarāī.

As will be shown subsequently, the available source materials give the impression that the geographical location (bounded by the fertile Gangetic plains of which it is an extension, the sub-Himalayan region and the Assam plains and the Garo Hills of the northeast) and climatic condition of the heartland of Puṇḍravardhana (or the Puṇḍra proper in the early period) favoured the material prosperity of the region on account of its agricultural productivity, agro-based industries and cross-country trade, besides casting a deep impact on the material culture and the way of life of the people of the region. As explained already, Puṇḍravardhana in the ancient period by and large corresponded to the northern geographical division of Bengal (approximately between 87° 45' 50" and 89° 53' E longitudes and 26° 38' and 23° 49' N latitudes), and encompassed the districts of Malda, North Dinajpur, South Dinajpur, and a part of Murshidabad of present West Bengal and those of Dinajpur, Bagura, Rajshahi, Pabna and a part of Rangpur to the east of Karatoya in present-day Bangladesh, at various points of time. The earliest known

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208 Ibid., p.4.
209 Supra, 202n.
210 Ranjushri Ghosh, "The River Karatoya in the Perspective of the Evolution of Settlements in Puṇḍravardhana/Varendra – third century BC to mid-twelfth century: An Archaeological Study", in
seat of political authority of the Puṇḍravardhana region, currently known as Mahāsthāngarh, was located between 89° 15’ and 89° 35’ E longitudes and 24° 50’ and 25°10’ N latitudes. A recent project report on the paleoenvironment and present environment shows that Mahāsthān has become today a small village in the Bagura district of Bangladesh without any specific administrative or political function. Its main economic activity is agriculture, a varied and productive one that makes up the entire landscape, away from the major traditional routes and from all trade networks except for the local one. The ancient boundary of Puṇḍravardhana as a bhukti, however, expanded from time to time to cover modern Kashghar (South Bihar), almost the whole of northern Bengal, parts of lower Assam, Barak-Surma Valley (northeast Bengal), Meghnā Valley, and parts of eastern and southeastern Bengal, and the area is today dotted with some of the major towns and cities of the subcontinent, although the site of the most important ancient city of the region, i.e. Mahasthan, might have relapsed to a small village.

Geologically, the Puṇḍra / Varendra region, which is made of alluvial of the Quaternary period, falls within the Pleistocene age of older alluvium (the area popularly known as bārind). Physiographically and in soil type, the land shows variations in its different parts. The bārind consists of some characteristics of the lateritic variety and contains some quantity of nodular limestone deposits (kankar) and pisolithic ferruginous concretions (Madhupur clay). The region is characterized by varying colours of soil from grey to yellowish to red and the whole is strongly acidic in nature. The recent alluvium found in juxtaposition to the bārind is made of soil type of ash-coloured sandy loam which is sometimes permeated by a whitish variety. It is friable and extremely fertile.

However, a part of the present Malda district (precisely the Pāṇḍua area) of West Bengal is said to have been known to the local people as bārind and that the area was relatively high and it was composed of red clay. The recent researches, which ascribed this land mass to the Pleistocene period, could not gather any lithic or any other material remains.

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211 C. Jacqueminet, C. Allemand & K. Pedoja, Paleoenvironment and Present Environment of Mahasthan, Bangladesh, French Environment and Development Research Centre (CRENAM), Jean Monnet University, France, 2001, p.20.

212 *Infra*, Chapter III.

213 *Supra*, 210n.
to prove that there was any human habitation in that period. A stone implement belonging technically to the New Stone Age was unearthed, but its date could not be determined.\(^{214}\)

Topographically, the heartland of Puṇḍravardhana is placed within the Tīstā-Gangā basin. Its major part in the north is covered by the Tīstā-fan surface which is drained by the Tīstā and its tributaries. Its southern border is dotted with numerous water bodies of varied types such as channels, swamps, etc. The lower part of the region, which is much smaller than the Tīstā-fan, is drained by the Gaṅgā. The rivers which demarcate the land below the Himalayan piedmont include the Mahānanda in the west, the Karatoyā in the east and the Gangā in the north-west / south-east direction. The Punarbhavā and the Ātrā ē are also among the important rivers of the region. The drainage is in north-south direction. The Padmā formed the southern border limit. Its eastern boundary stretched up to the Bay of Bengal and the estuary of the Meghnā. The Gaṅgā runs through the northern part of Rājmahal and crossing Malda, Rajshahi, Dinajpur and Rangpur districts, it passes the Brahmaputra, then spreads into its two tributaries — the Bhāgirathi and Padmā, and ultimately touches the hill range of Assam before entering Bangladesh and mingling with the waters of the Bay of Bengal. The Dāmodar and the Meghnā in the south, the KoŚi and the Mahānanda in the west, the Tīstā-Ātrā ē and the Karatoyā in the east also wash the Puṇḍra land.\(^{215}\)

The locational, geographical and physiographical character of the region of Puṇḍravardhana must have profusely influenced the historical processes in the territory since early times. It provided the basis for its economic prosperity in the fields of agriculture, industry, trade and commerce. In fact, Puṇḍravardhana was endowed with vast tracts of fertile land and favourable climatic conditions for agricultural growth. The numerous river systems seasonally washed the land to reinforce its fertility and augment its productivity. Varendra, the centrally located segment of Puṇḍravardhanā, was the most fertile portion of the entire region. It extended over a vast territory to cover almost the entire area now corresponding to north Bengal in the Indian State of West Bengal,

\(^{214}\) Supra, 38n.

\(^{215}\) Supra, 210n.
parts of the old Rangpur districts in present-day Bangladesh and Assam, and its boundary touched Bagura, the northern part of Rajshahi, eastern Dinajpur and western Rangpur. Thus, Varendra covered the major part of Puṇḍravardhana. The Taṅgan-Āṭraī, Mahānanda-Kośi and the Padma-Karatoya flowed through Varendra and their waters and fertile soil formed its plains. As early as the seventh century, Hiuen Tsang described the climate of Puṇḍravardhana as congenial for agriculture. The land was low and moist. According to the Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsang, a considerable portion of Bengal was built up by the silt carried down by the Gaṅgā. Due to regular heavy rainfall in the foothills of the Himalayas, the numerous river systems that washed the vast tract of land of north Bengal would also periodically rise in spate every year, and the top dressing of alluvium increased the fertility of the soil and made it conducive for extensive agricultural activities. Such conditions seem to have attracted streams of immigrants from all directions, particularly from the Indo-Gangetic plains, for permanent settlement in the region. Puṇḍravardhana also served as the highway between midland India and Tibet-China and the region now corresponding to northeast India and vice versa for human migrations and exchange of goods and ideas.

216 Ibid.
217 Thomas Watters, op.cit., p.184.